

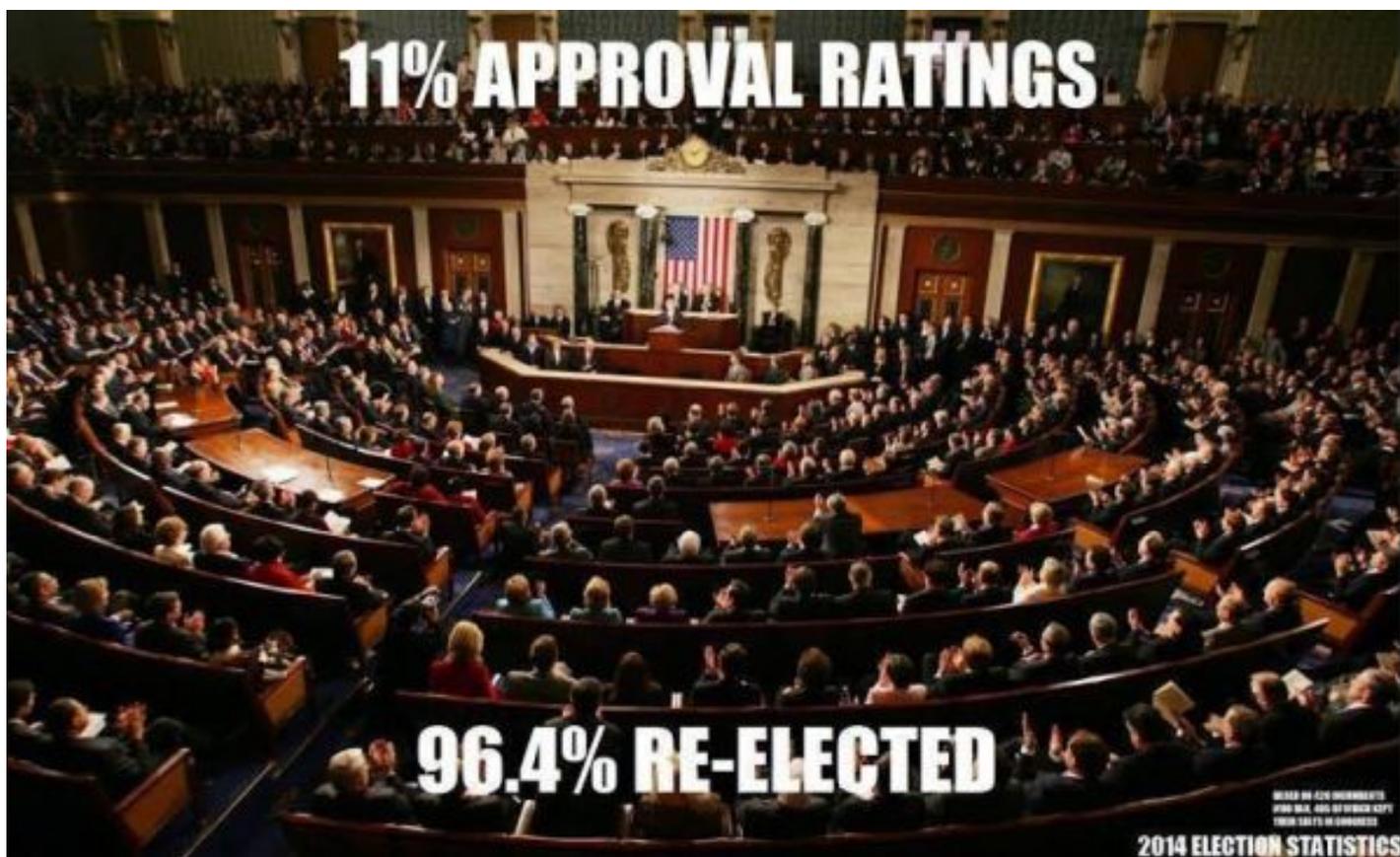


Congress has 11 percent approval ratings, yet 96.4 percent of incumbent lawmakers were re-elected in 2014.

— Facebook posts on Monday, November 10th, 2014 in a meme on social media

Congress has 11% approval ratings but 96% incumbent reelection rate, meme says

By Nai Issa, Louis Jacobson on Tuesday, November 11th, 2014 at 4:56 p.m.



A reader sent us this social media meme. We looked at whether its numbers check out.

It would be an understatement to say that voters in the recently completed midterm elections didn't exactly feel warm and fuzzy about incumbents on the ballot this year

-- even about the ones they voted for. According to the 2014 [exit poll](#) of voters, 59 percent of those who voted said they weren't happy with Republican leadership in Congress, even as they were handing control of the Senate to the GOP.

A meme making its way around social media, sent to PolitiFact by a reader, captured the frustration many Americans felt. The meme said, "11% approval ratings. 96.4% re-elected" -- in other words, Congress has 11 percent approval ratings, yet 96.4 percent of incumbent lawmakers were re-elected in 2014. The text was superimposed over a photograph of the House chamber in the Capitol.

We wondered whether that was true, so we took a look.

Does Congress have 11 percent approval ratings?

While the meme features a picture of the House chamber, the most common polling question refers to Congress generally, rather than the House specifically, so we looked at Congress' approval ratings overall. We found congressional approval scores from October 2014 from five different pollsters on the poll-archive website [PollingReport.com](#):

- Fox News: "Do you approve or disapprove of the job Congress is doing?" 13 percent said "approve."
- CBS News: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?" 14 percent said "approve."
- CNN/ORC: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Congress is handling its job?" 13 percent said "approve."
- ABC News/*Washington Post*: "Do you approve or disapprove of the way the U.S. Congress is doing its job?" 20 percent said "approve."
- NBC News/*Wall Street Journal*: "In general, do you approve or disapprove of the job that Congress is doing?" 12 percent said "approve."

That averages out to 14 percent -- slightly higher than 11 percent, but in the same, miserable ballpark.

Were 96.4 percent of congressional incumbents re-elected?

To be consistent with the polling, which covers Congress broadly, we'll lump together the incumbent winning percentages in both the House and Senate. There are a few contests still to be decided, but there are enough settled that we can make a pretty close count.

In the House, we counted 390 incumbents who ran on Election Day. Of those, four haven't had their races called as of Nov. 10, so we'll set them aside. Of the remaining 386 incumbents, 373 won, for a winning percentage of 96.6 percent.

If you add in three incumbents who ran but lost in primaries, the incumbent winning percentage drops to 95.9 percent.

Meanwhile, in the Senate, 23 out of 26 incumbents won, with one more (Alaska's Mark Begich, a Democrat) trailing in a race that has not yet been called, and another (Louisiana's Mary Landrieu, also a Democrat) heading into a runoff.

If you don't include Begich and Landrieu, the combined House-Senate incumbent winning percentage is 95.4 percent. If you do include them, it falls slightly to 95 percent.

All of these percentages are exceedingly close to the meme's stated 96.4 percent, and they're a moving target due to late-called races. So we won't quibble.

Our ruling

The meme said that Congress has 11 percent approval ratings, yet 96.4 percent of incumbent lawmakers were re-elected.

We found small differences in the actual percentages -- Congress had roughly a 14 percent approval rate, and the incumbent re-election rate may be as low as 95

percent -- but the point of the meme is solid. Voters hold Congress in low regard, yet they re-elect almost everyone. So we rate the claim True.



A D V E R T I S E M E N T

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