The Lugar Center and Georgetown University’s McCourt School Release Bipartisan Index Rankings for Congress in 2021

Bipartisanship Falls in Congress; House Sets Record Lows; Democrats Outscore Republicans in Both Senate and House; Hassan Most Bipartisan Senator; Fitzpatrick Tops House Again
May 2, 2022

For immediate release
For more information contact:

The Lugar Center
Dan Diller dillerdan@yahoo.com
Jay Branegan braneganj@gmail.com
Phone: 703-509-1493

The McCourt School
Jason Shevrin jason.shevrin@georgetown.edu

WASHINGTON, DC — The Lugar Center and the McCourt School of Public Policy at Georgetown University today jointly released their new Bipartisan Index (BPI) rankings for 2021 – the first year of the current 117th Congress. The nonpartisan tool measures the degree to which Senators and Representatives work across party lines on legislation. The results showed a sharp drop in bipartisanship in both the House and the Senate — especially among Republicans. Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) was ranked as the most bipartisan Senator, edging out Sen. Susan Collins (R-ME), who has long topped the annual Senate rankings. Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) ranked first in the House for the third straight year.

The Bipartisan Index measures how often a member of Congress introduces bills that attract co-sponsors from the other party, and how often they in turn co-sponsor a bill introduced from across the aisle. The rankings and scores issued today cover legislative activity for 2021, the first year of the Biden presidency, and the first time since 2010 that Democrats controlled both houses of Congress.
“Many observers speculated how well members of Congress would work together in the aftermath of the January 6, 2021, attack on the Capitol,” said Lugar Center Policy Director Dan Diller. “Regrettably, the new 2021 Bipartisan Index scores offer strong quantitative evidence that bipartisanship at the individual member level plummeted last year.”

Despite some high-profile bipartisan successes in 2021, including the $1.9 trillion stimulus package and the infrastructure bill, scores in the House fell to their lowest levels in the nine-year history of the Bipartisan Index. Only 106 House members scored above the historical average, while 328 scored below it. Previously, the lowest number of House members exceeding the historical average was 137 in 2015. Although House Democrats scored below the historical average as a group, they ranked much higher than their Republican colleagues.

On the Senate side, scores also dropped sharply, almost entirely because of Republicans. During the four years of the Trump administration (2017-2020) Republican Senators scored well above the historical average. Senate Democrats ranked lower, though they also maintained scores above the historical average. But in 2021, while the scores of Senate Democrats held firm, Republican scores dropped sharply into negative territory. Only 40 Senators scored above the historical average in 2021 compared to 59 in the first year of the previous Congress (2019).

Despite the overall drop in scores, 2021 still produced some outstanding individual performances. Sen. Hassan topped the Senate with the highest score ever recorded by a Democratic senator and the third highest score in the history of the index. She achieved that score in part by securing a Republican co-sponsor on all 48 of the substantive bills she introduced in 2021.

Although Sen. Collins lost the top spot in the BPI after a remarkable eight consecutive years, she finished second overall and remained the top scoring Republican Senator. Her 2021 score ranked as one of the top 15 Senate scores in the history of the BPI. Sen. Collins’ raw total of 179 co-sponsorships of bills introduced by the other party was the highest in the Senate last year.

“The Bipartisan Index provides an important indicator of the state of congressional collaboration. While it is disappointing that collaboration has declined over the last year, I am encouraged by the lawmakers who are steadfastly committed to working across differences to advance the common good,” said Maria Cancian, dean of the McCourt School of Public Policy.

In the House, Rep. Fitzpatrick once again topped the Bipartisan Index by a wide margin. No other House member in the history of the BPI has exceeded the scores he posted in each of the last three years. He co-sponsored more bipartisan bills in 2021 than the combined total of the next three highest House members. For the third year in a row, Rep. Josh Gottheimer (D-NJ) had the best score among House Democrats. He ranked second only to Rep. Fitzpatrick in 2021.
The Bipartisan Index is based on a formula applied uniformly to all members that considers both the absolute numbers of bipartisan bills sponsored and co-sponsored and the percentage of such bills in a member’s portfolio. It excludes non-binding resolutions and ceremonial bills. It also includes a metric that gives members credit for the number of bipartisan co-sponsors on their sponsored bills. The Index uses a historical standard based on 29 years of data to compare current members to historical averages. No subjective judgments are made about individual members or bills.

Scores in the two chambers of Congress are based on separate data, so the scores of House members are not comparable to those of senators.

In the Senate, two moderate Democrats who last year sometimes thwarted President Biden’s plans in the evenly-divided chamber continued their record of bipartisanship: Kyrsten Sinema of Arizona ranked fourth and Joe Manchin of West Virginia ranked seventh. Two freshmen Democratic senators elected in 2020, who are being challenged for re-election this fall, also had strong bipartisan scores: Raphael Warnock of Georgia ranked 18th and Mark Kelly of Arizona ranked 22nd. Republican Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, who faces another re-election battle this fall, ranked 14th.

Potential Republican presidential candidates in the Senate generally ranked near the bottom. An exception was Marco Rubio of Florida, who ranked 23rd. Oft-mentioned possible contenders Tom Cotton (R-AR), Josh Hawley (R-MO), Ted Cruz (R-TX), and Rick Scott (R-FL) all ranked 90th or below. Former Democratic presidential candidate Bernie Sanders (I-VT), was the lowest ranking member of the Democratic caucus at 87th.

In the House, the 30 lowest-scoring House members were all Republicans. Mary Miller (R-IL) sat at the very bottom in 435th place. Other Republicans near the bottom of the rankings included Marjorie Taylor Greene (R-GA), Lauren Boebert (R-CO), Andy Biggs (R-AZ), Mo Brooks (R-AL), Jim Jordan (R-OH) and Madison Cawthorn (R-NC).

Rep. Elise Stefanik (R-NY), who became a vocal Trump defender during the former president’s first impeachment, fell from 13th in the previous Congress to 100th last year. Rep. Liz Cheney (R-WY), a strong conservative who was drummed out of GOP House leadership for supporting President Trump’s impeachment and rejecting his false charges of massive election fraud, continued to have a negative BPI score, but her ranking rose from 421st in the 116th Congress to 368th in 2021.

To see current and previous Bipartisan Index rankings, click here.

About the Lugar Center:

Founded by former U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, the non-profit Lugar Center is a platform for informed debate and analysis of global issues, including nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction, global food security, foreign assistance effectiveness and global development, energy security, and enhancing bipartisan governance. http://www.thelugarcenter.org
About the McCourt School of Public Policy:

As a top-ranked public policy school located in Washington, D.C., the Georgetown University McCourt School of Public Policy teaches students to design, analyze, and put effective policies into practice in the public, private, and nonprofit sectors. From the center of the policy world, the McCourt School connects with other leading institutions and organizations to tackle society’s most complex challenges — finding solutions that turn policy into impact. https://mccourt.georgetown.edu/

###