

# Battleground 73 Civility

*GEORGETOWN*  
*UNIVERSITY*  
McCourt School

**INSTITUTE OF  
POLITICS AND  
PUBLIC SERVICE**

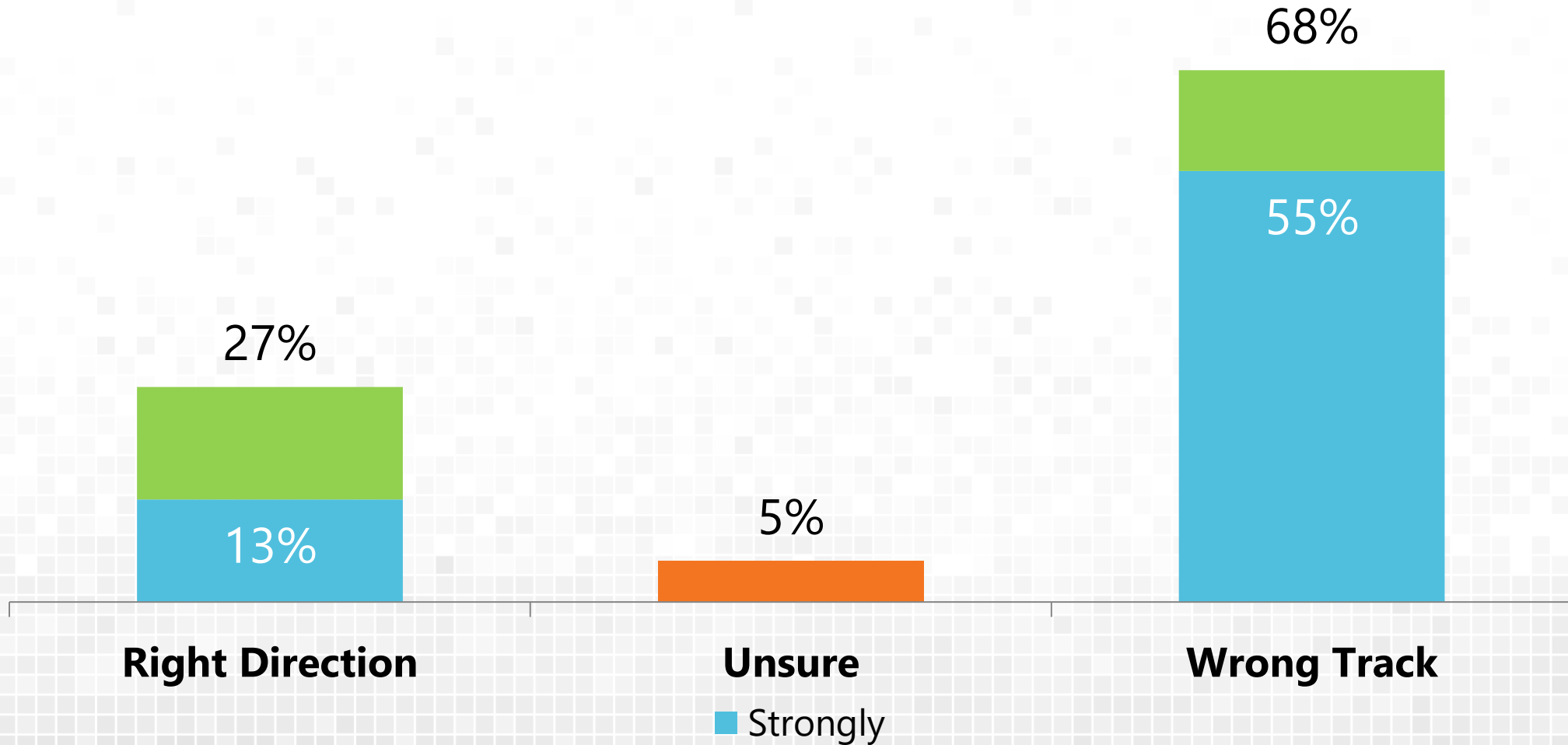


## BATTLEGROUND POLL

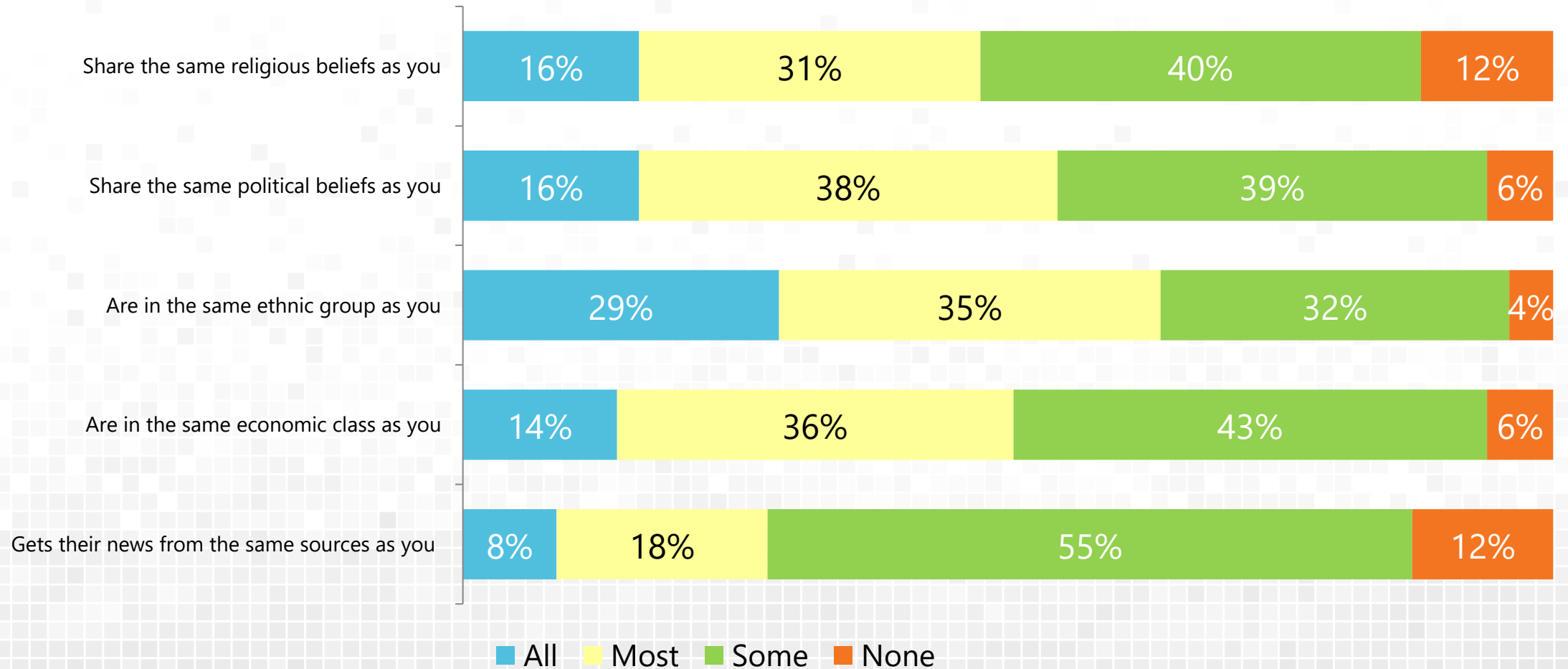
LAKE RESEARCH PARTNERS | THE TARRANCE GROUP

Field Dates: September 10-14, 2023

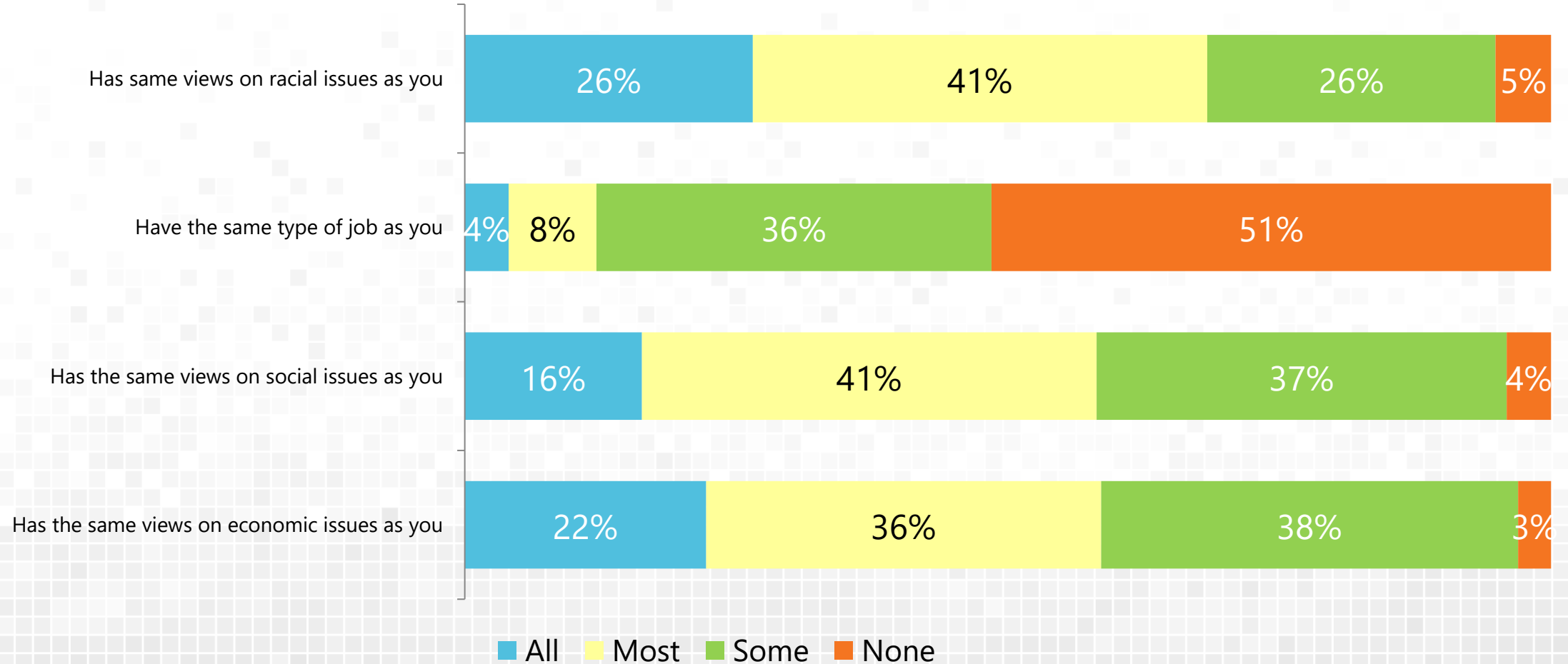
**Do you feel things in the country are going in the right direction, or do you feel things have gotten off on the wrong track?**



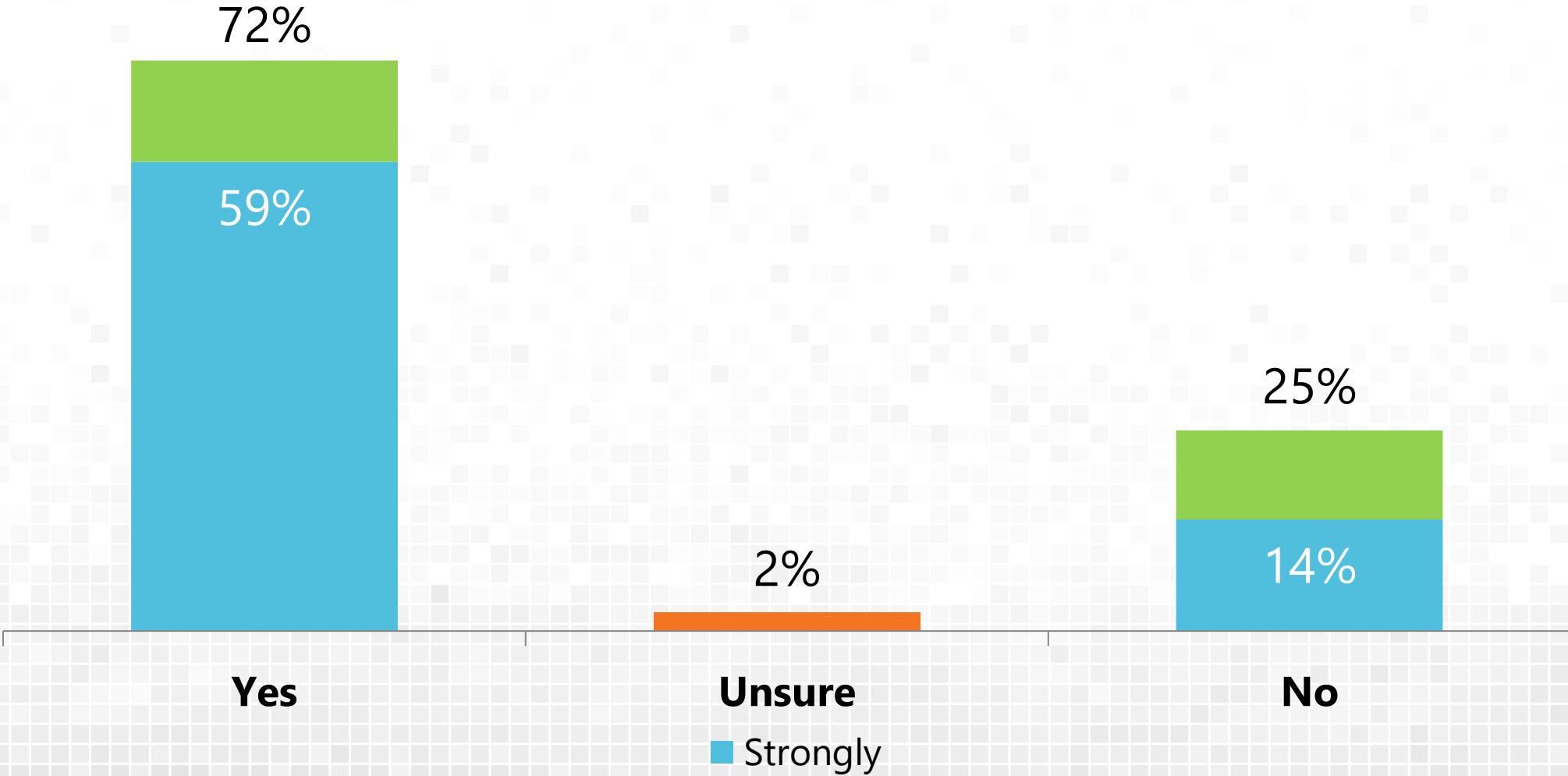
**Now, I want you to think about your close friends and family. Here is a list of items. For each item, please indicate if all, most, some or none of your close friends and family share this item.**



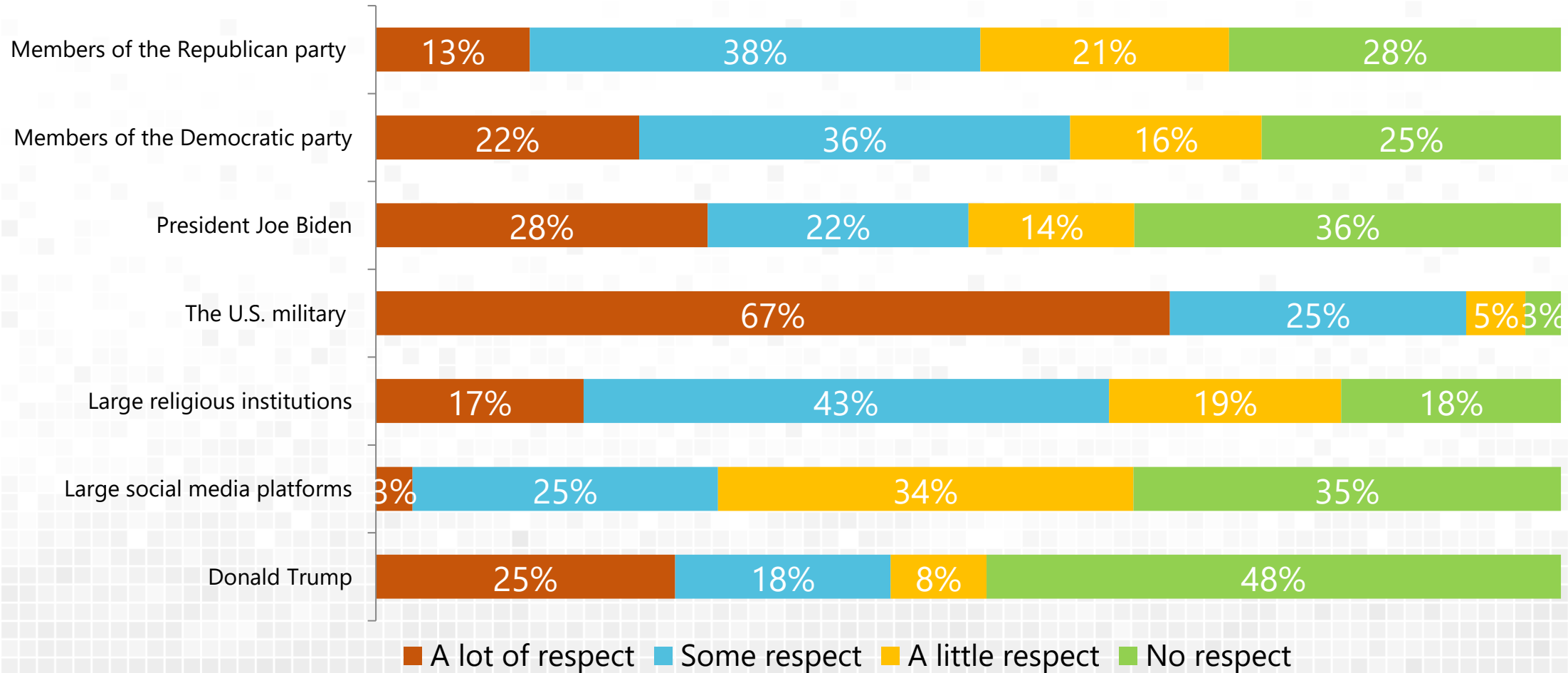
**Now, I want you to think about your close friends and family. Here is a list of items. For each item, please indicate if all, most, some or none of your close friends and family share this item.**



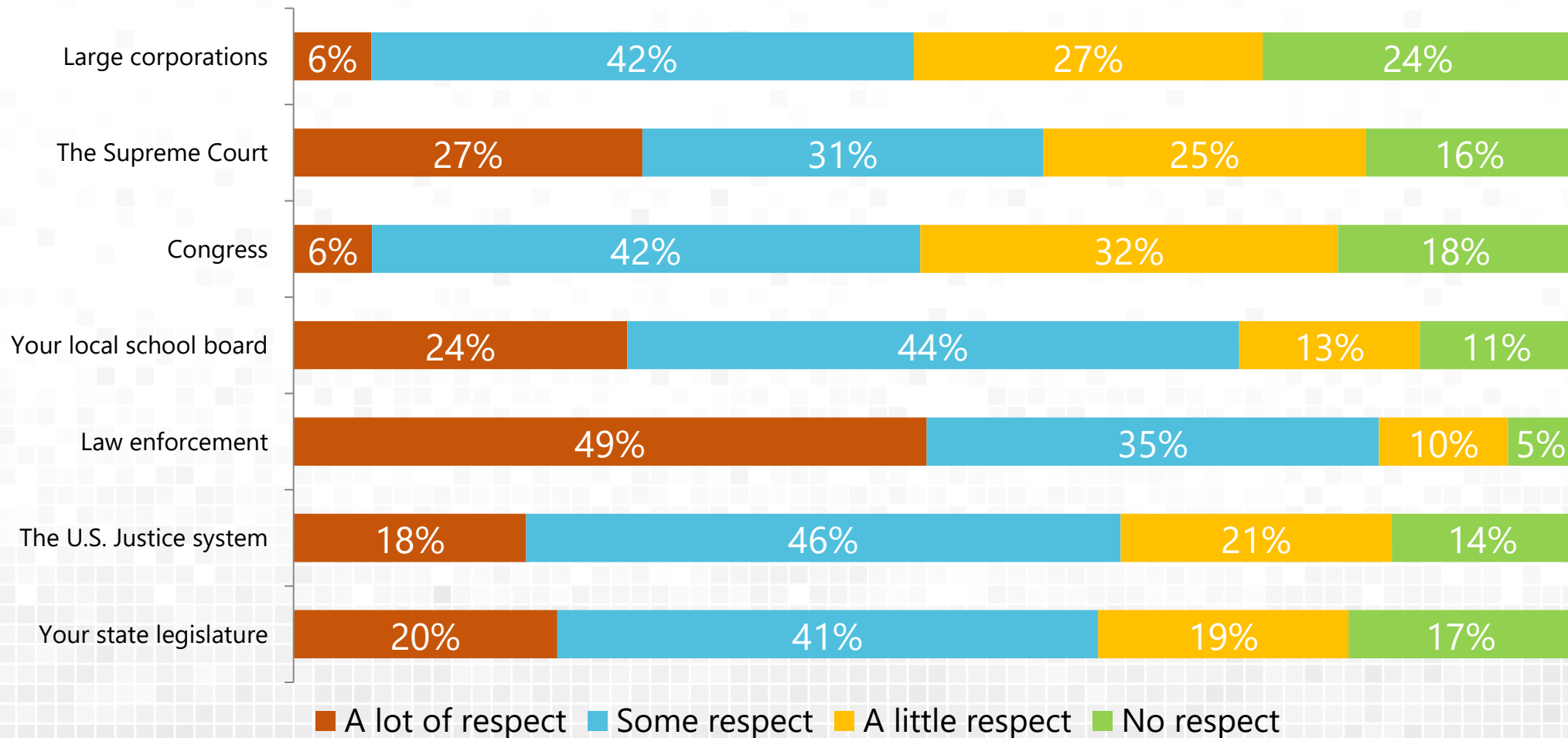
**Do you think your personal values are under attack in our current culture?**



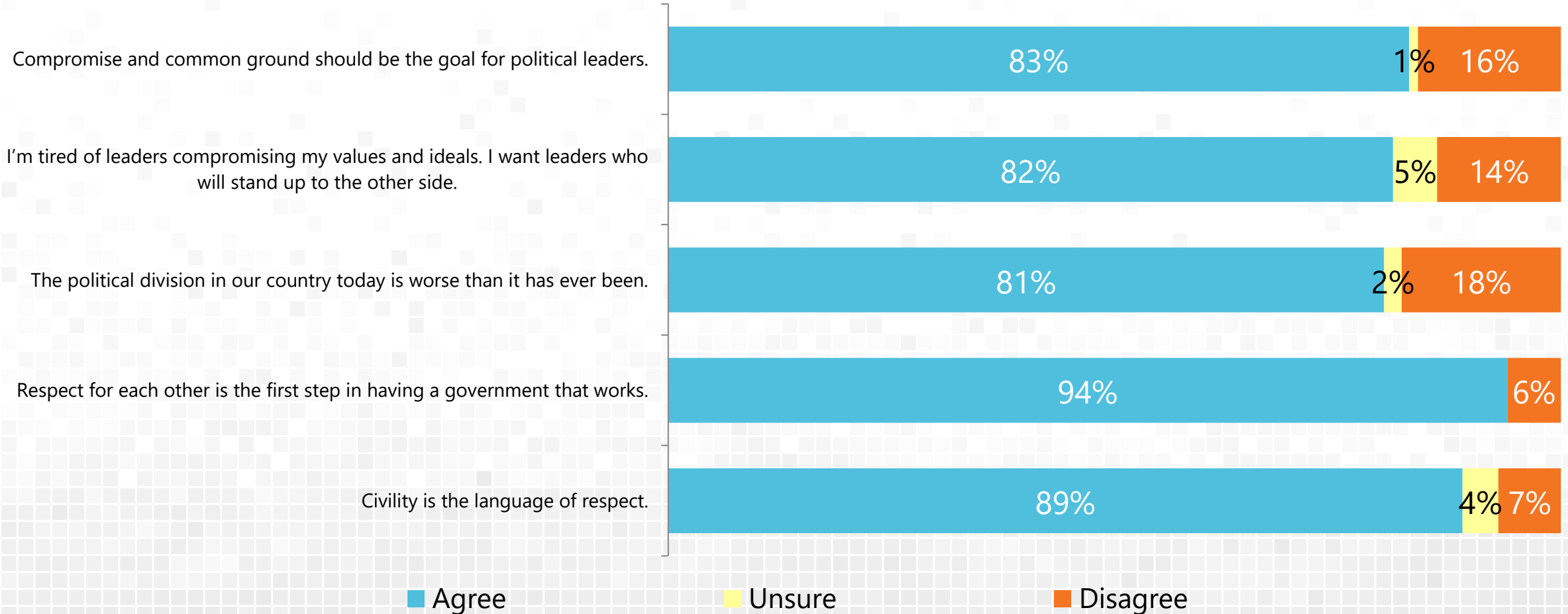
**Now, here are several people or organizations. For each one, please indicate if you have a lot, some, a little, or no respect for that particular person or organization.**



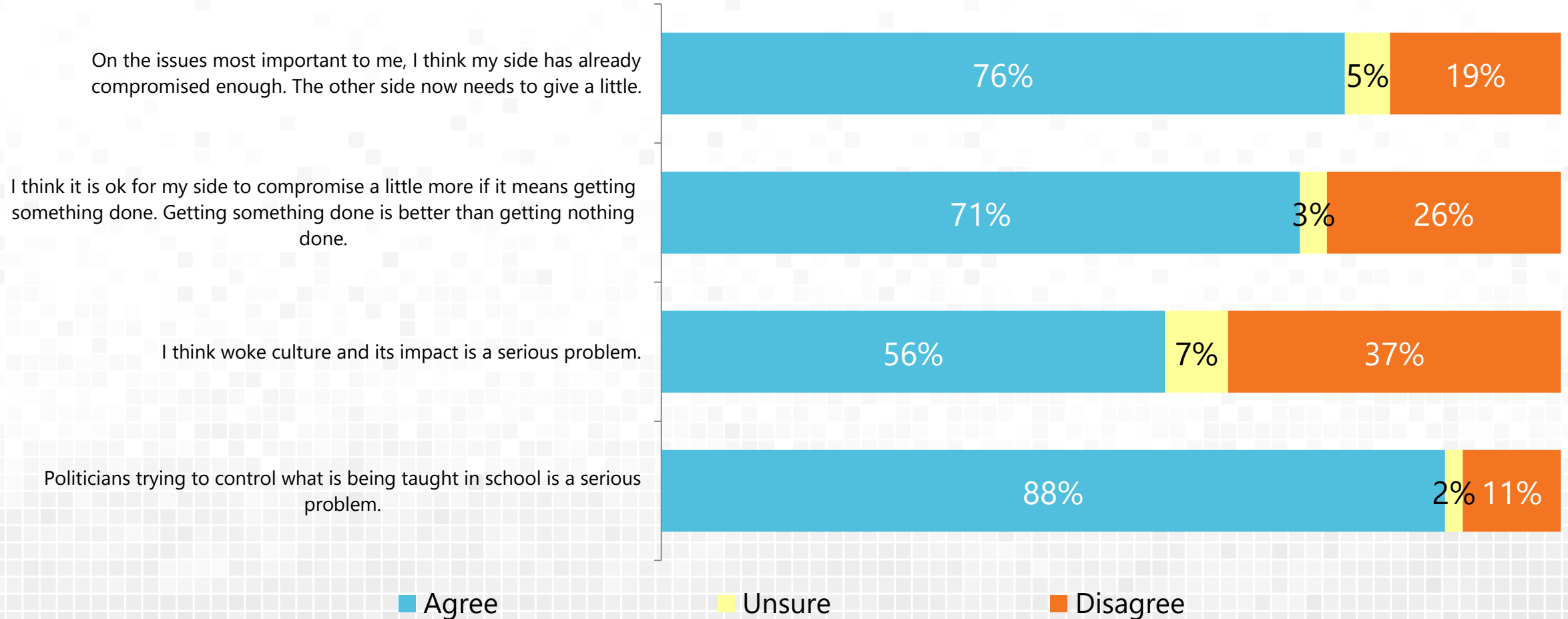
**Now, here are several people or organizations. For each one, please indicate if you have a lot, some, a little, or no respect for that particular person or organization.**



**Now, here is a list of statements that some people have said about American politics today. Please indicate if you would agree or disagree with that particular statement.**



**Now, here is a list of statements that some people have said about American politics today. Please indicate if you would agree or disagree with that particular statement.**



## No matter what you think about political civility, which of these would you prefer:

A politician who consistently fights for my values, even if this means not finding a solution very often

31%

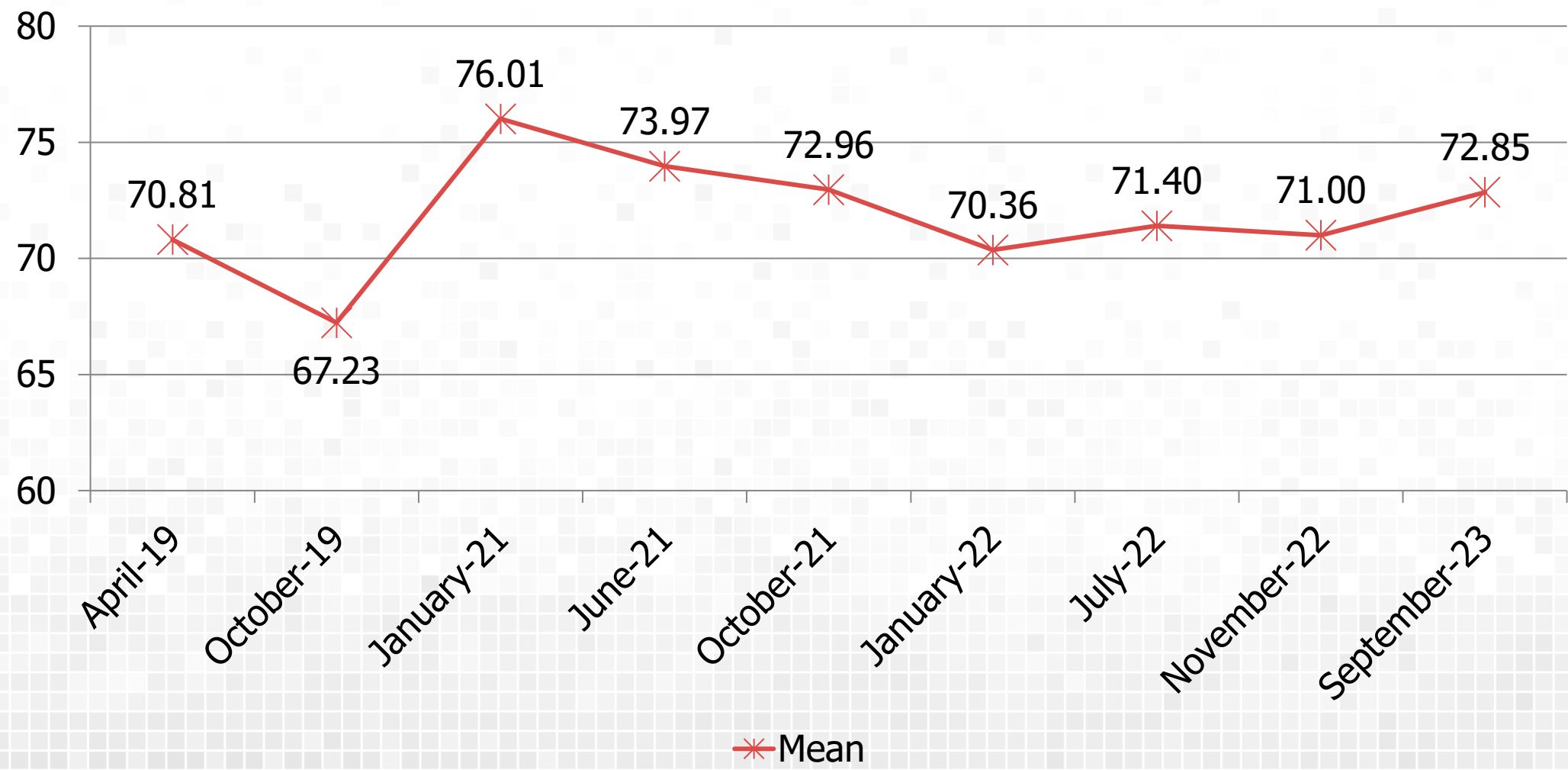
**Politician consistent/few solutions**

A politician who is willing to work together to get things done, even if it means compromising on my values sometimes

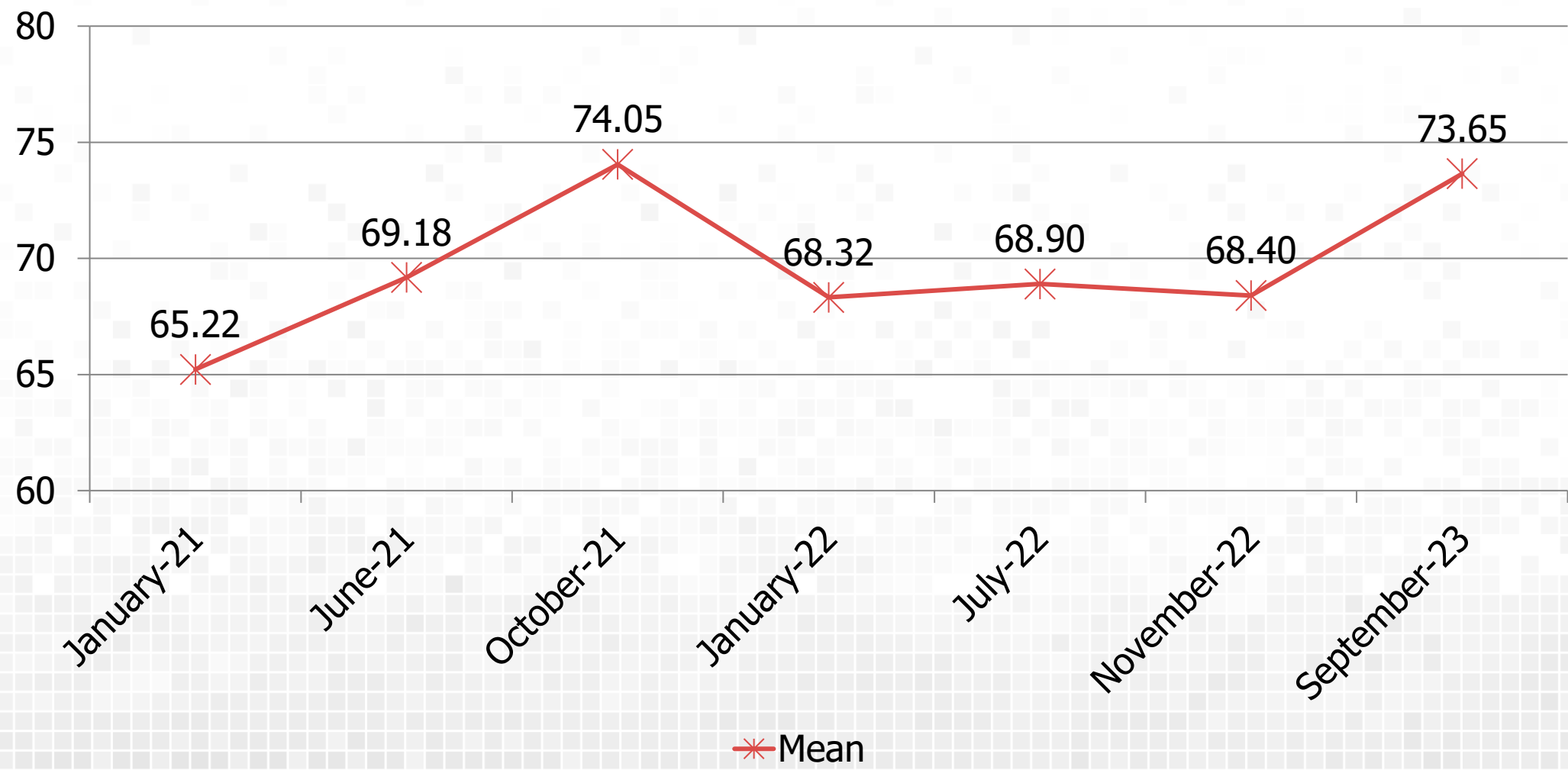
67%

**Politician work together/compromising**

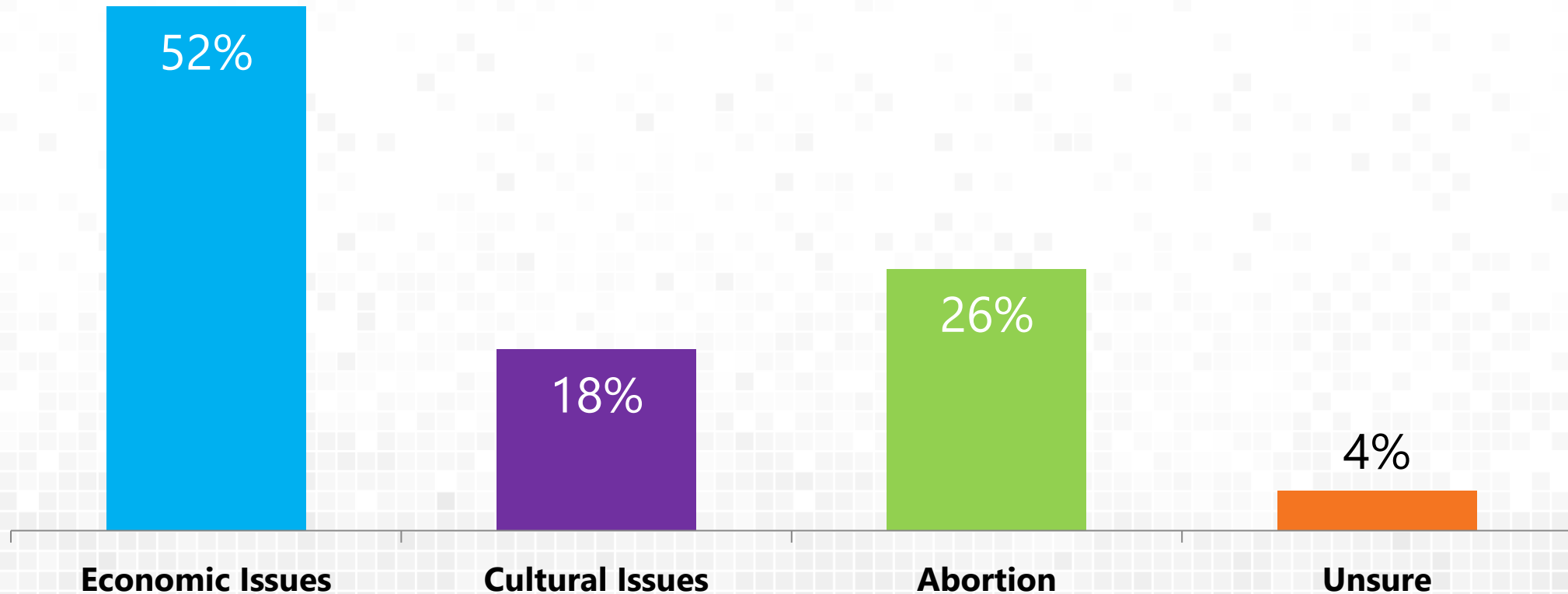
And, thinking about the issue of political divisions as a whole... On a scale of 0 to 100, where “0” is there is no political division in the country and where “100” is political division on the edge of a civil war, where would you rank the level of political division in the country?



Now, please think ahead to one year from now... On a scale of 0 to 100, where “0” is there is no political division in the country and where “100” is political division on the edge of a civil war, where would did you think the level of political division will be one year from now?



**Thinking about these three categories: Economic issues like jobs and inflation,  
Cultural issues like critical race theory or gender issues, OR Abortion.  
Which of these issues would you say are most important to your vote?**



# The Battleground: Division at the Core of American Politics, a Democratic Perspective

*September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023*

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## Democratic Strategic Analysis:

By Celinda Lake, Daniel Gotoff, Sandra Markowitz, McCauley Pugh, Ronan Ferrentino, and Lina Tate

### Introduction

This memo reflects the key takeaways from the most recent Georgetown University Institute of Politics and Public Service Battleground Poll, conducted among 800 registered, likely voters nationwide between September 10<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup>, 2023. This latest survey finds voters highly concerned about the direction of the country, focused chiefly on economic insecurity and precarity, and alienated from the country's political leaders and major institutions. Voters are concerned about division, lack of respect, and the need to see results and get things done.

Voters are becoming increasingly more anxious and frustrated with Washington, D.C. However, these data also reveal a deep desire among voters, across partisan lines, to see elected leaders forge common ground, and even compromise, in order to make tangible progress on the challenges facing the country. While calls for compromise can certainly go too far—especially for some partisans worried about conceding too much—and the upcoming elections will almost certainly do more to accentuate the differences between the parties rather than their common ground, successful candidates in 2024 may find that they are best served speaking not only to voters' appetite for far greater action and results but also to the voters' desire for greater respect and civility in our politics.

### Voters' Mood

For decades now, with very few exceptions, solid majorities of voters have come to the conclusion that the U.S. is pretty seriously off on the wrong track. Moreover, this perception has only worsened since the last Battleground survey conducted in November of 2022. In the current survey, just 27% of voters say things are heading in the right direction, including only 13% who feel that way strongly. This represents a noticeable decline since our last survey, when 33% of voters said the country was heading in the right direction. Currently, 68% of voters believe that the U.S. is on the wrong track, including a 55% majority who feel this way strongly. This pessimism has increased by 4 points since November 2022, when 64% of voters said the country was on the wrong track. Yet, it should be noted that while optimism is remarkably low, it has not dropped to the depth we saw in July 2022, when just 17% of voters believed that the country was going in the right direction and 77% said things were on the wrong track.

Republicans feel especially dissatisfied, with 91% believing the country is on the wrong track compared to 7% who say it is headed in the right direction. Independents are closely aligned with the majority of voters in this survey with 68% saying the country is on the wrong track and only 20% saying we are going in the

right direction, which is 7 points lower than the poll. Even Democrats are split in their assessments, with less than half (48%) saying the country is going in the right direction and 45% stating we are off on the wrong track. These numbers also represent a decline among Democrats from last November, when 59% said the country was moving in the right direction and 37% believed it was on the wrong track.

Overall, on a scale of 0 to 100, where “0” means there is no political division in the country and where “100” means there is political division on the edge of a civil war, Americans give a mean score of 72.85 which is slightly higher than the 71.74 they gave last year. In the current survey, the mean score of division is similar among Republicans (Now: 74.92 vs. July: 72.59), independents (Now: 71.81 vs. July: 66.13), and Democrats (Now: 71.10 vs. July: 72.06).

When asked how bad division in the country will be a year from now, Americans overall think that the division will be slightly higher, with an average mean on the same scale of 73.65 compared to 72.85 for the perceived mean on division today. When we asked last year, Americans said that in a year, it would be at a level of 68.38. Republicans believe that the division in the country will be higher one year from now than it is currently (77.30 mean, compared to the current division mean level of 74.92) compared to independents (71.23 mean on the same scale, compared to the current division mean level of 71.81) and Democrats who are the most hopeful for calming division in the next year (70.77 mean on the same scale, compared to the current division mean level of 71.10). Since last year, these predictions of future division have become more pessimistic among Republicans (71.85 last year), independents (67.09 last year) and Democrats (65.36 last year).

### **Views of Government Institutions/Political Leaders and Attitudes**

It should come as no surprise that with the increase in pessimism surrounding the trajectory of the country, levels of respect for political leaders and most major institutions, including government, are quite low. One exception to this rule is the military (67% a lot of respect/ 25% some/ 5% a little/ 3% none), and this remains true across partisan lines: Democrats (56%), independents (63%), and Republicans (78%). Voters also have relatively higher levels of respect for law enforcement (49% a lot/ 35% some/ 10% a little/ 5% none), though this sentiment is less uniform. In particular, younger voters between the ages of 18-34 and 35-44 don’t offer as much respect for law enforcement (29% a lot, 38% a lot) as older generations of voters.

Voters tend to say they respect large religious institutions overall (17% a lot of respect/ 43% some/ 19% a little/ 18% none). Republicans (78% a lot/some respect) are more likely than independents (51%) and Democrats (45%) to say they respect large religious institutions. White voters (61% a lot/some respect) and Black voters (63%) are slightly more likely to say they respect large religious institutions than Latinos (58%).

	None	A little/None	A lot	A lot/ Some	Unsure
U.S. Military	3%	8%	67%	92%	1%
Law Enforcement	5%	15%	49%	84%	-
Local School Board	11%	24%	24%	68%	9%
U.S. Justice System	14%	35%	18%	64%	1%
Your State Legislature	17%	36%	20%	61%	3%
Large Religious Institutions	18%	37%	17%	60%	3%

Members of the Democratic Party	25%	41%	22%	58%	1%
The Supreme Court	16%	41%	27%	58%	1%
Members of the Republican Party	28%	49%	13%	51%	1%
President Joe Biden	36%	50%	28%	50%	1%
Large Corporations	24%	51%	6%	48%	1%
Congress	18%	50%	6%	48%	2%
Donald Trump	48%	56%	25%	43%	1%
Large Social Media Platforms	35%	69%	3%	28%	3%

Voters have special disdain towards large social media platforms, with only 28% of voters respecting them. Sixty-nine percent of voters give only a little or no respect to large social media platforms. While this is true across parties, Democrats (38% a lot/some respect) are more likely than independents (22%) and Republicans (21%) to say they respect large social media platforms. Seniors (42% a lot/some respect) are more likely to say they respect large social media platforms than 45-to-64-year-olds (25%), 35-to-44-year-olds (25%), and voters under 35 (25%).

Congress and large corporations round out the bottom with 50% and 51% little or no respect from voters, respectively. Voters have a good deal of respect for their State Legislatures (61% some/a lot of respect; 36% little/no respect) and even more so for local entities like school boards (68% some/a lot of respect; to 24% little/no respect).

Younger voters aged 18-34 are especially dismissive of large corporations (70% little/no respect), followed by 35-44-year-olds (58% little/no respect). A majority of rural/small town voters also has little to no respect (52%) for large corporations. Across partisan lines, Democrats (62% a little/none) and independents (55% a little/none) express little respect for corporations, while Republicans are much more deferential (38% a little/none).

A number of entities are very polarizing by party identification, including Biden, Trump, Republicans, Democrats, Congress, and SCOTUS. Biden is more respected than Trump (+7) and Democrats are more respected than Republicans (+8).

A lot/some Respect towards Institutions by Partisanship				
	Overall	Democrats	Independents	Republicans
U.S. Military	92%	86%	88%	97%
Law Enforcement	84%	73%	80%	96%
Local School Board	68%	51%	60%	67%
U.S. Justice System	64%	70%	59%	58%
Your State Legislature	61%	62%	52%	60%
Large Religious Institutions	60%	45%	51%	78%
Members of the Democratic Party	58%	87%	58%	27%
The Supreme Court	58%	37%	57%	81%
Members of the Republican Party	51%	18%	46%	85%

President Joe Biden	50%	84%	46%	13%
Large Corporations	48%	38%	42%	60%
Congress	48%	50%	40%	46%
Donald Trump	43%	5%	35%	85%
Large Social Media Platforms	28%	38%	22%	21%

### **Donald Trump**

Donald Trump is viewed pejoratively among most voters and is the least respected figure tested in this study, with 48% of voters saying they have “no respect” for him. It should not come as a shock that Democrats have little to no respect for Trump (87% none). A 56% majority of women also has no respect for Trump. In contrast, 52% of Republicans have a lot of respect for Trump, with 33% saying they have some respect for him. This is even higher among very conservative Republicans, 67% of whom have a lot of respect for Trump (94% a lot/some). Independents feel similarly to voters overall in this poll with almost half (49%) of independents having no respect at all for Trump. Fully 72% of Black voters don’t respect Trump, along with 44% of white voters and 49% of Hispanic/Latino voters. Furthermore, senior citizens also have low levels of respect for Trump, with only 20% stating they have a lot of respect and 59% saying they have no respect. This enduring disdain for Trump cannot be helped by the ongoing investigations and indictments of the former president surrounding his efforts to overturn the will of the people following the 2020 election.

### **President Joe Biden**

President Biden’s respect ratings track closely with his approval ratings, which remain underwater. In our July 2022 survey, 42% of voters approved of Biden’s job performance. Democrats have higher levels of respect for the President, but that does not extend beyond his political base. A 53% majority of Democrats has a lot of respect for Biden, 31% some, 13% a little, and 2% none. Just 14% of independents have a lot of respect for Biden, however, 32% some, 16% a little, 36% none. Unsurprisingly, the majority of Republicans have no respect of Biden (72%) and only 14% have a little, 9% have some, and 4% have a lot. However, when looking at a lot/some respect combined, these groups of voters regard Biden with high respect: women (56%), urban voters (60%), suburban voters (51%), voters 65 and over (61%), Black voters (76%), those with less than high school education (59%), college graduates (54%), middle-class voters (53%), and low-income voters (56%).

### **Supreme Court and U.S. Justice System**

When it comes to the Supreme Court, voters’ level of respect is relatively low. The groups most critical of the Supreme Court tend to be voters 18-34 (54% little/no respect), Black voters (57%), and Democrats (62%). Thirty-five percent of men have little or no respect for the Supreme Court, while 45% of women do. This lack of respect could be fueled by the fairly recent and growing ethics scandals Justice Clarence Thomas has been facing. Beyond the spate of unpopular decisions on the part of this court, this

unprecedented, alleged corruption at the highest court in the land and the Chief Justice's inability to investigate these issues has further diminished the respect the American public has for the court.

The U.S. Justice System is more respected than the Supreme Court among these voters. Sixty-four percent have some or a lot of respect, while only 35% have little or no respect for the U.S. Justice System. This is highest among Democrats (70% a lot/some respect, 29% a little/no respect), while Republicans (58% a lot/some respect, 40% a little/no respect) and independents (59% a lot/some respect, 40% a little/no respect) are quite likely to say they respect the justice system but not as likely as Democrats.

### **Congress**

Fifty percent of voters have little or no respect for Congress, whilst 47% have a lot or some respect. Seniors hold the most respect for Congress with 54% having a lot or some respect, followed by 35–44-year-olds, (49% a lot/some), 18–34 year-olds (47% a lot/some), and finally 45–64 year olds (42% a lot/some). Voters aged 35–64 are most likely to say they have no respect for Congress with 21%, while the same is true for only 15% of seniors and 13% of 18–34-year-olds. By partisanship, Democrats hold the most respect for Congress (50% a lot/some), followed by Republicans 46% (a lot/some), and independents (40% a lot/some). Twenty-seven percent of independents hold no respect for Congress.

### **Importance of Issues on Vote Choice**

When voters are asked whether the economy, cultural issues, or abortion are most important to their vote choice, the majority of voters say the economy, though there is some interesting nuance at play. The economy, which includes concerns about jobs and inflation, is the most important issue for a person's vote with 52% stating such. This holds true for two-thirds of Republicans, 60% of independents, 61% of men, particularly men under 45 (65%). Following the economy, 26% of voters find abortion to be the most important issue for their vote. This is of higher importance to groups such as women (31%) particularly white (31%), Latina women (34%), and college-educated women (37%), as well as Democrats (37%), especially Democrats over age 45 (39%), and liberal voters (40%). Only 18% of voters think cultural issues like critical race theory or gender issues are most important for their vote. Interestingly enough, while the description of these cultural issues invokes the topic of critical race theory, which is often decried in conservative discourse as a target for censorship in schools, conservatives and Republicans are less likely to see this as a voting issue than Democrats and liberals. Many Democratic-leaning voters may have grouped abortion with cultural issues so they could think that by choosing cultural issues they mean abortion plus other things. This necessarily dilutes the importance of abortion as a voting issue.

A majority of voters may say that they think that economic issues are more important than abortion. However, even if they say the economy is a more important issue than abortion, some Republicans have disqualified themselves in the eyes of many voters because of their views and actions on abortion.

This nuance in the vote importance question including a standoff between the economy and abortion was also visibly true in 2022, when polls consistently said that voters believed that the economy was a more important issue than abortion, but as our Republican counterparts would likely agree, abortion was a huge liability for many Republicans.

### **Core Values and Division**

	Strongly Agree	Total Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total Disagree
Respect for each other is the first step in having a government that works	72%	93%	3%	6%
The political division in our country today is worse than it has ever been.	66%	81%	7%	18%
Civility is the language of respect	59%	89%	2%	7%

While voters are grappling with the conflict between maintaining strong values and progress through compromise, there is hope for healing a divided nation through a return to respect and civility. Voters are tired of politicians on both sides of the aisle fighting and the lack of respect the parties have for one another. Voters overwhelmingly agree (93%) that respect for each other is the first step in having a government that works with 72% of voters strongly agreeing to this statement. This is equally true across party lines and virtually all demographic groups agree with over 90%. We cannot begin to see eye to eye if we don't extend respect to people on the other aisle.

As is consistent with the last few battleground surveys, large proportions of voters see the political division in our country today as the worst it's ever been. Eighty-one percent of voters feel this way (66% strongly). However, this is a slight improvement from last November's survey when 83% of voters agreed (67% strongly).

Voters are also in agreement that civility is the language of respect with 89% of voters feeling this way, including 59% who strongly agree. This is true of about 90% of voters across party, 91% of very liberal Democrats, and 84% of very conservative Republicans. In comparison to our survey in November, these numbers have slightly decreased since then when 92% agreed. Even with this slight decrease, this poll continues to show that voters see civility and respect as a core value they can support, and that civility is the language necessary to reinforce that value of respect.

### **Compromise**

	Strongly Agree	Total Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total Disagree
Compromise and common ground should be the goal for political leaders.	54%	83%	7%	15%
I'm tired of leaders compromising my values and ideals. I want leaders who will stand up to the other side.	54%	82%	4%	13%
On the issues most important to me, I think my side has already compromised enough. The other side now needs to give a little.	48%	76%	6%	19%
I think it is ok for my side to compromise a little more if it means getting something done. Getting something done is better than getting nothing done	31%	71%	14%	26%

Voters are in agreement that compromising and finding a common ground should be a goal for leaders (83% total agree, 54% strongly agree). Voters across parties feel this way with 85% of Democrats and independents and 81% of Republicans on board. Even across ideology and religion, 79% of very liberal Democrats, 78% of very conservative Republicans, and 79% of born-again evangelicals are in agreement that common groups should be the goal for elected leaders. Yet voters are also tired of leaders compromising their values and ideals (82% total agree, 54% strongly agree). Looking at this by partisan breaks, there's a more significant difference. The poll shows that a majority of voters hold these apparently contradictory values simultaneously. While 76% of Democrats and independents agree, Republicans are 13-points more likely to be tired of leaders compromising their values with 89% in agreement.

These numbers are similar to the ones from our November survey. In November, 86% of voters agreed that compromise and common ground should be a goal for leaders, with 65% of voters believing this strongly. When it comes to voters being tired of leaders compromising their values in November, we found that 57% of voters strongly agreed, 84% total agree. So while voters are slightly less willing to strongly agree that leaders should find common ground, they're also slightly less likely to be tired of leaders compromising their values than they were in November.

This complex seeming contradiction may be due to the fact that voters want things to change for the better but feel that their values have already been attacked. Seventy-two percent of voters feel their personal values are under attack with 59% feeling their way strongly. Only 25% of voters don't feel as though their values are under attack with 14% feeling this way strongly. Alongside being most likely to be tired of politicians compromising their values, Republicans are also extremely more likely than Democrats and independents to feel that their values are under attack in our current culture. Nine out of ten Republicans feel this way compared to 58% of Democrats and 60% of independents. Fifty-six percent of voters 18-34 feel like their values are under attack and 39% of them feel this way strongly. Seventy-four percent of voters 35-44 feel their values are under attack with 61% who feel this way strongly. This sentiment is even more prominent among voters 45-64, where 81% say that their values are under attack and 69% feel this way strongly. For voters 65 and over, we see a decrease from the previous two age brackets with 57% feeling strongly that their personal values are under attack and 68% agreeing in total.

Another explanation for these contradictory feelings is the fact that when asked, 76% of voters believe their side has already compromised enough and the other side now needs to give a little and 48% of voters strongly agree. Again, this is especially true for Republicans, 81% of whom agree, but almost three-quarters of Democrats and 65% of independents are there as well. This is also true for both liberal Democrats and Evangelicals, where 84% of very liberal Democrats believe their side has compromised enough and similarly 80% of evangelicals feel this way as well. Very conservative Republicans feel this way the most among ideological groups with 89% of conservative Republicans believing their side has compromised enough and the other side needs to give a little.

Yet, another sign of slight hope for both parties is that voters also agree that it is okay for their side to compromise a little more to get something done (31% strongly agree/71% total agree; 14% strongly disagree/26% disagree). However, once again, there are sizable partisan differences that are obfuscating this progress. Eighty-three percent of Democrats agree that it's okay to compromise a little to get things done, whilst we see a drop to independents who are at 67% and even more so to Republicans at 59%.

Voters were also asked if they prefer a politician who consistently fights for their values, even if it means not finding solutions very often, or a politician who is willing to work together to get things done, even if it means compromising on their values sometimes. Overwhelmingly, voters prefer a politician who is willing to compromise on their values sometimes to get things done with 66% in agreement, while 31% want the alternative. There are large partisan differences, however, with 82% of Democrats and 67% of independents in agreement compared to 49% of Republicans and only 37% of voters who identify as very conservative Republicans. Still, at the core of this issue, most voters want to see progress in the country and if that means they have to compromise sometimes, they prefer that over politicians who offer no solutions at all for the sake of maintaining their values.

### **“Woke” Culture and Government in Education**

	Strongly Agree	Total Agree	Strongly Disagree	Total Disagree
Politicians trying to control what is being taught in school is a serious problem.	76%	88%	6%	11%
I think woke culture and its impact is a serious problem.	41%	56%	25%	37%

A majority of voters in the survey perceive “woke culture” to be a problem, but politicians controlling what is being taught in schools is seen as a far more serious issue. Fifty-six percent of voters agree that woke culture is a problem with 41% viewing it as a serious problem, while 37% of voters disagree that woke culture is problem and 25% of voters disagree strongly. Republicans are primarily driving this question with 86% in agreement compared to only 28% of Democrats who agree while 63% disagree. Independents are more split than either party with 54% in agreement, 38% disagreeing, and 8% who are unsure. Black voters are most likely to disagree (53%), particularly Black men (56%), while white voters are most likely to agree (61%), especially white men (66%). The use of “woke” culture is a fairly undefined basket of issues and it’s clear that Republicans have the cue to see this range as a serious problem based on the conservative media’s war on “woke” over the last year. Our focus groups have shown many voters think this is a made-up concept.

A far more bipartisan point of agreement is that an overwhelming majority of voters see politicians controlling what is being taught in schools as a serious problem. Eighty-eight percent of voters agree politicians inserting themselves in schooling topics is an issue with more than three-quarters strongly agreeing. Agreement extends through all major subgroups hovering between 80-90%, with especially little variance by party. Parents are also in agreement, with 92% of parents believing that politicians controlling what is being taught in school is a serious problem.

It’s clear that “woke” culture or anti-“woke” rhetoric is not felt nearly as strongly by voters as their overwhelming disapproval of politicians controlling what is being taught in schools.

### **Conclusion:**

While voters may believe that the country is going in the wrong direction, the vast majority of Americans want to see their elected officials compromise to get things done, believe respect is the first step to achieve this, and are mostly willing to sacrifice some of their personal values sometimes to achieve this goal. Democrats are more likely to extend the olive branch on these issues today, but there are enough Republicans and independents on board to make a difference in bringing our nation together. We need politicians to show the same willingness to restore the values of respect and civility and figure out what we can agree on. As we approach the 2024 presidential election, politicians have a choice to better work together to avoid the intense division of the past.

# **Battleground Civility Poll** **Voters Remain Frustrated, but Solutions Are Available**

*Republican Analysis*  
*By: Ed Goeas and Brian Nienaber*

## **Introduction and Overview**

This latest edition of the Georgetown University Institute of Politics and Public Service national poll on political civility, which fielded September 10-14, 2023, continues to find an electorate frustrated by the status quo, but willing to embrace politicians committed to finding solutions.

While there will always be challenges for elected leaders who work for solutions instead of agitating for paid media attention, this data makes clear that voters are ready embrace these efforts to find common ground and solutions.

Much of this analysis will highlight the views of voters we have labelled as centrists. These are voters who do not identify as very conservative Republicans and do not identify as very liberal Democrats. These voters in the wide ideological and political middle compromise sixty-five percent (65%) of the electorate. These voters who are not rigidly committed to one end or the other of the ideological spectrum make a broad and useful target for political leaders looking to find voters who will support their efforts to find common ground solutions.

## **Voters remain frustrated and pessimistic**

Voters continue to be frustrated and pessimistic about the current political environment. A majority of voters (68%) think the country is off on the wrong track, including a majority (55%) of voters who strongly believe this. There are political and ideological divides on this view. Those centrists discussed in the introduction are decidedly negative (63% wrong track), but majorities of Republicans (91%), Independents (68%), and conservatives (87%) think the country is on the wrong track. In contrast, a plurality of Democrats (48%) and a majority of liberals (51%) think the country is headed in the right direction. The power of holding the White House provides comfort to liberal Democrats.

Fully 72% of voters believe their personal values are under attack in our current culture, including a majority (59%) of voters who strongly believe this. A strong majority of centrists (68%) think their personal values are under attack as does an overwhelming majority of Republicans (90%). In addition, majorities of Independents (60%) and even Democrats (58%) share this view. When you believe that your values are under attack, previously unthinkable responses become reasonable. A key goal for our political discourse should be to emphasize the importance of solutions in which all voters can see victory and not emphasize seeking the defeat of those holding opposing views.

Asked to rate the level of political division in the country on a 0-100 scale where 100 means edge of a civil war, the mean response is 72.9 and six-in-ten (60%) voters give a rating of 75 or above. Asked to rate where they think the level of political division in the country will be in one year, the mean response is 73.6 and fifty-eight percent (58%) of voters give a rating of 75 or above. Having majorities of voters thinking the country is now and will be closer to civil war than peaceful tranquility has a corrosive impact on the political climate. If you think your opponents might be ready to secede, it becomes that much harder to meet them in middle ground for solutions.

A majority of voters (56%) agree that woke culture and its impact are a serious problem. While a majority of voters do hold this view, this concern is very much driven by conservatives. Among voters in the centrist segmentation, a majority of centrists (54%) do agree that this is an issue. However, on the ideological poles, fully 91% of very conservative Republicans think this is serious problem while fully 81% of very liberal Democrats do not think this a problem.

More than eight-in-ten voters (88%) agree that politicians trying to control what is being taught in school is a serious problem. This is clearly an issue where voters on both sides of the political spectrum think the other side is trying to influence educational policy. Groups ranging from Republicans (89%), Independents (88%), Democrats (86%), conservatives (88%), moderates (89%), liberals (87%), and even parents (92%) and non-parents (87%) think this is a serious problem. No one wants politicians in the classroom, but almost all voters think this is occurring.

Fully 81% of voters agree that the political division in our country today is worse than it has ever been. This pessimistic assertion has the agreement of strong majorities of Republicans (89%), Independents (80%), and Democrats (73%). This is a bold assertion considering all the strife and struggles our country has endured, but clearly more needs to be done to assure voters that while things can be heated now, we have endured through some pretty fractious times.

### **Voter anxiety is fueling voter discontent**

The issues of concern to voters are also fueling this discontent. Voters are offered three choices for their top area of issue concern – economic issues like jobs and inflation, cultural issues like critical race theory or gender issues, or abortion. A majority of voters (52%) select economic issues while another 26% of voters select abortion and 18% of voters select cultural issues.

It is very challenging to enact policies that alleviate economic anxiety. Voters who are fearful of being unemployed or being hurt by inflation are not likely to have their concerns assuaged by a law designed to encourage more hiring or by the efforts of the Federal Reserve to control inflation through monetary policy. A voter's perception of their economic situation is a deeply personal attitude driven by their unique situation. It is hard to shift this perception through either policy or persuasion.

In a similar way, the Dobbs decision and the state laws which have followed have led a significant number of voters to believe that access to abortion will or may soon be severely restricted. Absent a federal law that has been affirmed to be constitutional by the Supreme Court, it is hard to conceive of what could be done to dampen this concern.

Looking at some key political demographics, a majority of centrist voters (55%) select economic issues followed by abortion (24%) and social issues (17%). The real challenge will be for Democratic politicians. While majorities of Republicans (66%) and Independents (60%) select economic issues, Democrats divide evenly between economic issues (37%) and abortion (37%). Many Democratic partisans will expect action on abortion, but Democrats will be challenged to find Republicans willing to work with them on this issue, particularly at the expense of focusing on economic issues.

### **Frustration but at least others share your concerns**

Voters were asked if all, most, some, or none of their close friends and family share this item. As seen in the chart below, majorities of voters indicate that all or most of their close friends and family share quite a few qualities.

<b>Close friends/family share this item?</b>	<b>All</b>	<b>Most</b>	<b>All + Most</b>
Has the same views on racial issues as you	26%	41%	67%
Are in the same ethnic group as you	29%	35%	64%
Has the same views on economic issues as you	22%	36%	58%
Has the same views on social issues as you	16%	41%	57%
Share the same political beliefs as you	16%	38%	54%
Are in the same economic class as you	14%	36%	50%
Share same religious views as you	16%	31%	47%
Gets their news from the same sources as you	8%	18%	26%
Have the same type of job as you	4%	8%	12%

Indeed, among the qualities that do not have a majority score for all plus most, there are two institutions – religion and employment – at which Americans have formed lasting bonds for many years.

One can easily see how this level of insularity can fuel negative voter sentiment. When most of your close friends and family share your views on race, economic issues, social issues, political issues as well as are of the same race and economic status as you, the likelihood of hearing dissenting arguments about your frustrations with the national economy or political seem quite dim. On all the issues or perspectives on which one might benefit from hearing other points of view, most voters are not getting different perspectives.

### **No heroes on the horizon to solve this problem**

From Frank Capra to Aaron Sorkin, the Hollywood view of DC sells the illusion that brave, articulate, and persistent political leaders are waiting in the wings to unite the country with their heroic and selfless leadership.

This data finds that voters do not see a Mr. Smith or Jeb Bartlett waiting to inspire us. Voters were asked to rate a variety of leaders and institutions by level of respect. As seen below, just one institution, the U.S. military, had a majority score for a lot of respect.

<b>Level of respect</b>	<b>A lot</b>	<b>Some</b>	<b>A little</b>	<b>None</b>	<b>UND</b>
The U.S. military	67%	25%	5%	3%	1%
Law enforcement	49%	35%	10%	5%	0%
President Joe Biden	28%	22%	14%	36%	1%
The Supreme Court	27%	31%	25%	16%	1%
Donald Trump	25%	18%	8%	48%	1%
Your local school board	24%	44%	13%	11%	9%
Members of the Democratic Party	22%	36%	16%	25%	1%
Your state legislature	20%	41%	19%	17%	3%
The U.S. justice system	18%	46%	21%	14%	1%
Large religious institutions	17%	43%	19%	18%	3%
Members of the Republican Party	13%	38%	21%	28%	1%
Large corporations	6%	42%	27%	25%	1%
Congress	6%	42%	32%	18%	2%
Large social media platforms	3%	25%	34%	35%	3%

On these questions of respect, voter enthusiasm was quite limited. Both President Biden and Donald Trump have a lot scores under thirty percent as do storied institutions like the Supreme Court, members of both the Democratic and Republican parties, the U.S. justice system, and Congress.

Indeed, the ratings among subgroups for some of these figures are striking. Just 13% of Republicans indicate they have a lot (4%) or some (9%) respect for President Biden though he is at 57% combined a lot (31%) or some (26%) respect among centrists. For Donald Trump, just 5% of Democrats indicate they have a lot (1%) or some (4%) respect for him though he is at 36% combined a lot (17%) or some (19%) respect among centrists.

In addition, large social media platforms, a key source of news and entertainment for millions of voters, have a strong majority of voters (69%) who say they have a little (34%) or no respect (35%) for these platforms.

### **Salvation by Action**

Voter attitudes about the political environment seem unlikely to improve via legislative action on issues or by hearing differing perspectives in their familial or social circle or by inspirational political leadership. What this survey does find is that there is broad support for a restoration of political civility. There is no doubt this course of action is challenging, but voters are ready to reward politicians who seek compromise, solutions, and civility.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b><i>Agree strongly</i></b>
Respect for each other is the first step in having a government that works.	94%	72%
Civility is the language of respect.	89%	59%
Compromise and common ground should be the goal for political leaders.	83%	54%
I'm tired of leaders compromising my values and ideals. I want leaders who will stand up to the other side.	82%	54%
On the issues most important to me, I think my side has already compromised enough. The other side now needs to give a little.	76%	48%
I think it is ok for my side to compromise a little more if it means getting something done. Getting something done is better than getting nothing done.	71%	31%

As seen above, there is broad and intense agreement on the need for respect and civility. Also of note, is the challenging course for any politician attempting to uphold these ideals as eight-two percent (82%) of voters agree they are tired of leaders compromising their values and seventy-six percent (76%) of voters think their side has already compromised enough while seventy-one percent (71%) of voters are ok with additional compromise in service of getting something done.

This is a challenging situation for even the most skilled politician. What are the values on which their constituents do not want to compromise and where they have already conceded enough and what the values on which a little compromise to get to a solution is acceptable.

These split views indicate that politicians need to have signature issues for which they are known and for which they hold fast to their views. If the electorate sees this commitment to these signature issues, they will be willing to give their elected representatives latitude to find common ground solutions on the remaining issues.

## **Conclusion**

The hit musical Hamilton features a poignant moment when President George Washington urges Alexander Hamilton to work with his political opponents to find a solution on a significant policy issue. Washington offers the maxim that “winning was easy...governing is harder”. What follows is Hamilton negotiating the real life compromise that among other things brought Washington, DC into existence. Hamilton gets much of what he wants and indeed much of the strength of our modern economy is due to his foresight.

Political leaders in this city created by this compromise and leaders across the country would do well to follow Hamilton’s example. It can be frustrating and challenging to be civil and respectful and to seek compromise with one’s adversaries, but the good policy outcomes and the electoral goodwill created by these actions will be more than worth the initial struggle.