

Battleground Civility Poll **A Frustrated Electorate Is Cautiously Optimistic about the Future**

Republican Analysis

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Introduction and Overview

This latest edition of the Georgetown University Institute of Politics and Public Service national poll on political civility, which fielded July 16-20, 2022, finds a surprisingly self-segregated electorate that is frustrated about the present, but is also cautiously optimistic about the future. This cautious optimism provides hope that political leaders across the country will be inspired to reward this optimism with genuine efforts at political civility.

Voters Select Their Own Circles

There has been a significant amount of research into the self-segregation trend in politics. From finding those now bowling alone to the surprisingly predictive powers of Whole Foods and Cracker Barrel locations to the political divide created the type of airport serving your community, political scientists and journalists have found considerable evidence that voters are segregating to live with those who match their political beliefs. This data provides fascinating insight that many voters are not being pushed by demographic trends into these enclaves but rather are creating a social bubble that matches their own view of the world.

As seen on the next page, voters were asked if all, some, most, or none of their close friends and family share this item. Four in five voters (60%) indicate that all or most of their close and family members share their same political beliefs. A similar number of voters (57%) indicate they belong to the same political party as all or most close friends and family. A strong majority of voters (55%) say that all or most of their close friends and family vote for the same candidates.

Shared quality	All	Most	All + Most	Some	None	Unsure/ Refused
Are in the same ethnic group as you	28%	39%	67%	29%	3%	1%
Share the same political beliefs as you	18%	41%	60%	35%	3%	2%
Are in same political party as you	20%	38%	57%	36%	4%	3%
Vote for the same candidates as you	17%	38%	55%	35%	3%	7%
Share the same religious beliefs as you	20%	33%	53%	38%	7%	2%
Are in the same economic class as you	15%	37%	51%	41%	5%	2%
Have the same type of job as you	4%	10%	14%	37%	46%	3%

So, the familial and friend circle for most likely voters is a group that mirrors their political beliefs all the way down to voting for the same candidates. This is a pleasant development for political operatives, especially those focused on voter turnout, but certainly creates a larger challenge for those trying to promote a culture of greater political civility. Having a shared enemy is a powerful motivational and organizational tool. Advocating for common ground and collaboration is a more challenging task.

Self-Selected Circles, but Near Universal Frustration

Despite this level of self-division, there is a broad attitude of frustration and dissatisfaction across the electorate. Overall, just sixty-five percent (65%) of voters indicate they are extremely likely to vote. This would be a normal level of voter enthusiasm at this stage of a mid-term election cycle. However, voter enthusiasm has been so consistently high in past surveys, this lower level of interest is notable. There is virtually no difference in enthusiasm among Republicans (65%), Independents (66%) or Democrats (63%). Even in the aftermath of the Dobbs decision and a national debate about abortion, there is not a higher level of enthusiasm about voting among voters who think all abortions should be illegal (63%) or voters who think abortion should be permitted at all times (64%).

This frustration is further illustrated by the direction of the country question. Fully seventy-seven percent (77%) of voters think the country is on the wrong track, including two-thirds of voters (67%) who strongly believe the country is on the wrong track. Even a majority of Democrats (62%) think the country is on the wrong track. This dissatisfaction is driven both by Republican

frustration (93%) and by frustration among the progressive wing of the Democratic party as seventy-three percent (73%) of very liberal Democrats also think the country is on the wrong track. The 2022 electorate will have both GOP voters understandably frustrated with being out of power, but also progressive Democratic voters frustrated that not enough is being done.

Our other work suggests that economic anxiety is another key driver of this frustration about the direction of the country. Our experience is that it takes six months of positive economic news to change voter attitudes, so the positive economic news of the past few weeks will not make an impact on the pessimistic economic views of much of the electorate.

Indeed, President Biden has a majority disapprove on his job approval rating (42% approve/55% disapprove). While this rating is driven in part by the expected low ratings from Republicans (93% disapprove), President Biden also has notably low ratings among less partisan driven demographic groups like Independents (62% disapprove) and Hispanic voters (53% disapprove). However, the President does maintain the support of Democrats (77% approve), particularly partisan Democrats (80% approve).

In addition, the group of voters who disapprove strongly of President Biden's job performance (46%) is considerably larger than those voters who approve strongly (18%). Mid-term elections are often about intensity and the intensity is very clearly with those frustrated and disappointed in the current political environment.

This dynamic will create a challenging situation for Democratic candidates. They will need to suggest they can change the direction of the country, which is now in a frustrating situation for their base voters but criticizing the work of President Biden cannot be part of that effort given his remaining popularity with base voters. Changing direction without changing leaders is a difficult theme for even the most skilled politician.

For as frustrated and dissatisfied as the electorate is, there is evidence that it could be worse. Voters were asked how closely they have been following news about the work of the special House committee investigating the events of January 6th. Almost two-thirds of the likely electorate (66%)

state that they are only somewhat closely (29%) or not at all closely (37%) following the work of this committee. Indeed, this committee is getting the most attention from its choir. A majority of Democrats (53%) say they are following the work of the committee extremely (27%) or very (26%) closely. In contrast, a majority of Republicans (60%) and over one-third of Independents (35%) say they are following the work of the committee not at all. This committee may be doing important work about extraordinary events, but it appears that the most attentive voters to their presentations about the bad behavior of President Trump and his allies are partisan Democrats who likely already have a dim view of President Trump.

Indeed, this dissatisfaction and frustration among voters has driven the Congressional generic ballot into a statistical tie (46% Republican/48% Democratic). Anytime the generic ballot is less than a five point deficit for Republicans, the GOP usually picks up Congressional seats. This measure also illustrates both the political and geographic self-selection seen across this data. As one might expect, Republicans are overwhelmingly in support of the GOP candidate (93%) and Democrats are overwhelmingly in support of the Democratic candidate (92%). However, the generic GOP candidate also has majority support in the GOP friendly states of Florida (54%) and Texas (56%), in states where Trump received 55% or more of the vote in 2020 (58%), and in states with a Republican governor (52%). In contrast, the generic Democratic candidate has majority support in California (59%) and New York (57%), in states where Biden got 55%+ of the vote in 2020 (57%), and in urban areas (58%). Some historians will tell you that geography is destiny, but this data indicates that increasingly geography is determinative of your political preferences.

Frustration Now, but Optimism Remains

Despite all these negative emotions in the electorate, there remains considerable optimism among voters. First, voters express a strong preference for politicians willing to work together to get things done over one who consistently fights. Given these two choices:

- A politician who consistently fights for my values, even if this means not finding a solution very often, OR
- A politician who is willing to work together to get things done, even if it means compromising on my values sometimes

A majority of likely voters select the political leader willing to get things done and compromise (66%) over the political leader who consistently fights (30%). Over two years of asking this question, the leader willing to work together has always scored over sixty-five percent and has always had a better than two-to-one advantage over the fighter.

This is a noteworthy finding since so much earned media time and attention is focused on the fighters. This approach might garner media attention, but it is not meeting the interest of most voters. In fact, majorities of demographic groups across the political spectrum select the deal maker including men (67%), women (65%), 18-34 year olds (72%), seniors (72%), Republicans (52%), Independents (65%), and Democrats (79%).

In addition, for all the concerns raised about the 2020 elections, this survey finds voters are optimistic about the 2022 elections. In a series of agree/disagree statements, a majority of likely voters (66%) think the 2022 elections will be fair. A majority of likely voters (58%) think that despite the problems in 2020, the elections in 2022 will be peaceful.

This series also makes clear that the self-selected bubble that many voters have created is sometimes consciously created. Forty-nine percent (49%) of voters say they often avoid bringing up politics with my friends and family to avoid conflicts.

This survey also asked voters to rate the level of political division in the country on a scale from 0 to 100 where 0 is no division and 100 is division on the edge of a civil war. Despite the political whirlwind of the past few months, the mean score for the level of division today is 71.40, a five point decline since January 2021. Asked where they think division will be in one year, the mean score is 68.90, lower than now and a five point decline since January 2021. Views about the present and the future improving is an encouraging development.

18-34 Year Old Voters – Youth Movement for Optimism

Political changes are often led by younger voters. This data finds that younger voters are ready to lead and ready to be led by deal making politicians. A strong majority (55%) of votes aged 18-34 agree with the statement: “I am optimistic about the future because young people are committed to making this country a better place to live for everyone.”.

These younger voters also select the dealmaker politician at a notably high level (72%) on the choice question. In addition, they have a high level of agreement that the 2022 elections will be fair (66%) and a majority level of agreement that the 2022 elections will be peaceful (51%).

These voters are a key voting bloc and contain many of those who will become significant political leaders. It is very encouraging to see that so many of these voters have the self-confidence to lead, a willingness to see our political system succeed, and faith that the system will work in 2022.

Centrists – Another Key Group for the Fall

This cause for optimism is further increased by looking at a demographic group that contains the vast majority of the electorate. We call this group centrists and define it by all those voters who do not self-identify as either very conservative Republicans or very liberal Democrats. This centrist group is the majority of the electorate. Fully sixty-seven percent (67%) of voters fall into this centrist group in this survey. Cable news programming and too many primary campaigns focus on the one-third of the electorate on the margins, but this data shows that this is not where most voters reside.

Targeting these voters for turnout will require dedicated effort. Just sixty percent (60%) of them say they are extremely likely to vote which stands in notable contrast to the seventy percent plus level of interest among very conservative Republicans (72%) and very liberal Democrats (77%).

However, as seen below, these centrist voters are easy enough to target. They indicate that a majority of all or most of their family and close friends are in the same ethnic group, share their political beliefs, and share their religious beliefs. In addition, more than two-in-five of them say that all or most of their close friends and family are in their same political party, vote for the same candidates, and are in the same economic class. These voters need a nudge, but they are certainly easy enough to target and achieve a multiplying effect via their social network.

Shared quality	All + Most (Centrists)
Are in the same ethnic group as you	67%
Share the same political beliefs as you	53%
Share the same religious beliefs as you	51%
Are in same political party as you	49%
Votes for the same candidates as you	48%
Are in the same economic class as you	48%
Have the same type of job as you	13%

While these centrist voters might be slightly less enthusiastic about voting right now, they do have positive attitudes about the 2022 elections. Strong majorities of these centrists believe that the 2022 election will be peaceful (61%) and that the 2022 election will be fair (70%).

These centrists are also even more enthusiastic than the overall electorate about supporting deal maker politicians. Seventy-three percent (73%) of these centrists select the deal maker politician when given the choice, a full seven points higher than where the overall electorate is on this choice.

Campaigns might need to spend a little effort contacting and motivating these centrist voters, but these voters are easy to find, optimistic about the 2022 elections being peaceful and fair, and are ready to support politicians committed to finding common ground. This centrist group is one that should play an important role in these fall elections.

Conclusion

Voters might be frustrated now, but the optimistic spirit of the country remains. There is a clear opening for politicians able to talk effectively about change and willing to embrace deal making. While voters might be increasingly retreating to comfortable cocoons of similarity, political leaders willing to take bold steps to preach and practice civility could be historic leaders.

Indeed, among two notable groups – younger voters and centrists, there is the real potential to build a majority coalition in support of civility and deal making. Younger voters are self-confident, optimistic, and ready to embrace political leaders who are willing to get things done. Centrists share these same views and comprise two-thirds of the electorate.

It is easy to get earned media by appealing to base voters. However, for leaders willing to embrace pursuing legislative accomplishments, it will be surprisingly easy to lead a strong majority coalition in support of this type of leadership.