

# **Battleground Civility Poll** **Concerned Voters, But Solutions Are Abundant**

*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 November 12-17, 2022, finds an electorate with significant concerns about the country, but also finds near universal support for an embrace of respect, civility, and compromise by our leaders.

## **2022 Election nearly over, but its impact lingers**

In the closing days of the 2022 campaign, President Biden attempted to aid Democratic candidates across the country by making the case that this election was a referendum on the state of the American system of government. Other Democratic candidates used similarly apocalyptic language regarding the stakes of this election.

These efforts, in combination with concerns about stolen elections among the far right, clearly had an impact. Seventy-five percent (75%) of voters say they think democracy is currently under attack. This concern has strong majority agreement among Republicans (72%) and Democrats (80%). A majority but less emphatic majority of Independents (64%) agree with this assertion. In a key indicator of how well this message resonated with base Democratic voters, it has overwhelming agreement among partisan Democrats (82%) and among very liberal Democrats (82%).

Looking instead by economic class, there is broad agreement among middle class voters (76%) that democracy is under attack with differences only in intensity between middle class white voters (76%), middle class African American voters (84%), and middle class Hispanic voters (73%).

There are similar trends when voters are asked about the level of division in the country. Eighty-three percent (83%) of voters agree with the statement that political division in the country today is worse than it has ever been. This includes agreement among strong majorities of Republicans (89%), Independents (76%), and Democrats (79%) as well as near universal agreement among very conservative Republicans (91%).

There a similar trend by economic class with eighty-four percent (84%) of middle class voters agreeing that this division is worse than ever. There are only differences in intensity of agreement between middle class white voters (85%), middle class African American voters (76%), and middle class Hispanic voters (89%).

On a similar measure, 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. The mean score on this measure is 71.00. While this score is certainly a cause for concern, it is actually modestly lower than when this question was asked in July 2022 when it was 71.4. The limited change in this number is a clear illustration that the spirited mid-term elections reinforced voter concerns about the level of political division in the country.

However, when voters are asked to rate on this same scale where they expect the level of political division to be in one year, the mean score on this measure is 68.4. Democrats (-4.1 points) expect the level of political division to decline over the next year. Independents (-2.8 points) and Republicans (-1 point) are a little less optimistic about the division declining. After a year in which a lot of political divisions were exposed and magnified, voters expect things to get at least a little better over the next year.

There is a similar trend by class with middle class voters going from 71.5 now to 68.7 in one year. As with the other trends, this optimism is only different by degrees between middle class white voters (70.8 to 68.1), middle class African American voters (74.6 to 68.7) and middle class Hispanic voters (72.9 to 70.4).

### **Voters see many threats to democracy**

Voters were offered eight (8) potential threats to democracy and asked to rate if it was an extremely, very, somewhat, or not at all serious threat to democracy. As seen below, significant numbers of voters rate all of these issues are extremely or very serious threats to democracy.

<b>Item</b>	<b>Extremely Serious</b>	<b>Very Serious</b>	<b>Extremely + Very Serious</b>
The increasing amount of violent behavior in our society	52%	22%	74%
News coverage that favors one political party	46%	21%	67%
Voter suppression and intimidation efforts that stop people from voting	49%	16%	65%
The decreasing amount of respect and civility in our political system	40%	23%	64%
Political candidates who refuse to accept valid election results.	45%	18%	63%
Social media that only reinforces what the user already believes	39%	23%	62%
Voter fraud causing stolen elections.	37%	12%	49%
Woke culture imposing out of touch liberal values on all of us.	31%	13%	44%

While all of these proposed items are seen as extremely or very serious threats by at least two in five voters, there are some notable divides in the amount of concern among voters. Strong majorities of Republicans, Democrats, and Independents all rate the increase in violent behavior and biased news coverage as extremely or very serious threats. In addition, biased news coverage is also seen as an extremely or very serious threat by majorities of voters who watch CNN (64%), Fox News (79%), or MSNBC (67%) on a daily basis. Even those who are most likely to be impacted by biased news can identify its corrosive impact.

There is a sharp partisan divide regarding voter suppression and intimidation. More than eight-in-ten Democrats (81%), daily CNN viewers (85%), and daily MSNBC viewers (86%) see this issue as an extremely or very serious threat. This item is of comparatively less concern as an extremely or very serious threat to Republicans (44%) and daily Fox News viewers (53%).

In contrast, there is broad agreement across with the political spectrum that the decreasing amount of respect and civility in our political system is an extremely or very serious threat. Strong majorities of Republicans (60%), Independents (59%), and Democrats (67%) identify this item as an extremely or very serious threat.

A partisan divide returns regarding candidates who refuse to accept valid election results. This item is highly rated as extremely or very serious by Democrats (83%), daily CNN viewers (85%) and daily MSNBC viewers (89%), but of lesser concern to Republicans (42% extremely or very concerned).

Social media reinforcing existing beliefs is a broad concern with majorities of Republicans (56%), Independents (60%), and Democrats (68%) saying this item is extremely or very serious.

The final two items have the starkest partisan divides. Voter fraud causing stolen elections is rated as extremely or very serious by seventy-one percent (71%) of Republicans while just twenty-nine percent (29%) of Democrats do the same. For woke culture imposing out of touch liberal values, fully seventy-one (71%) of Republicans rate this an extremely or very serious threat while just nineteen percent (19%) of Democrats do the same.

**Voters concerns are many...**

Voters are read four (4) potential concerns about the country and asked if that item is extremely, very, somewhat, or not at all concerning to them. As seen below, there is a high level of concern about all of these issues.

<b>How concerning to you?</b>	<b>Extremely</b>	<b>Very</b>	<b>Extremely + Very</b>	<b>Ex + very (GOP)</b>	<b>Ex+ Very (IND)</b>	<b>Ex + Very (DEM)</b>
Threats to our system of government like leaders who abuse their powers	49%	27%	76%	77%	77%	74%
Election integrity and not being able to trust that elections are fair	38%	17%	55%	72%	52%	39%
Violence against political leaders and their families	37%	25%	62%	54%	55%	71%
Political speech that inspires people to take violent actions	45%	23%	68%	53%	61%	84%

However, as seen above, there are some notable partisan divisions on these problems. Republicans are notably more concerned about election integrity while Democrats are notably more concerned about violence against political leaders and political speech that inspires violence.

However, the bipartisan majority agreement on both violence against political leaders and political rhetoric that inspires violence is notable. While cable news focuses on high profile attacks, it should be noted that nearly every Member of Congress and Senator has dealt with violent threats from deranged citizens, and many have seen these threats be sufficiently credible to lead to these individuals being imprisoned. Extremism and threatening behavior know no ideology or party affiliation.

**...but voters also embrace solutions**

A solution to much of the strife in American politics today is an increase in political civility and a willingness to find common ground. Despite all the concerns expressed by voters throughout this survey, more than eight-in-ten voters agree about the value of compromise, respect, and civility.

<b>Statement</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b><i>Strongly Agree</i></b>
Respect for each other is the first step in having a government that works.	95%	77%
Civility is the language of respect.	92%	63%
Compromise and common ground should be the goal for political leaders.	86%	65%

In addition to this broad agreement on the value of respect, civility, and seeking common ground, the vast majority of voters reject the use of violence to advance to political or policy goals. Fully ninety percent (90%) of voters say it is never justified to use violence to advance a political or public policy goal. Voters may be concerned about the increasing level of violence in our politics, but very few of them are ready to embrace it as a solution even for the most vexing problems.

In addition, while a majority of voters agree that they are tired of leaders compromising and want leaders who will stand up to the other side (84%), on a forced choice question where voters are given the options of: “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 strong majority (68%) of voters select the politician who is willing to work to get things done. The politician willing to work together to get things done has been selected by more than sixty-five of voters on three previous surveys.

Even after a hotly contested mid-term election in which many candidates sought to paint their opponents as an unacceptable alternative, voters still embrace the values like civility and deal making and have a strong preference for politicians do the same.

## **Conclusion**

There are a lot of forces trying to divide voters and feed their darker impulses. This survey finds that voters are concerned about these divisive forces. While voters might be frustrated and concerned about these divisions, they are quite ready to embrace and reward political leaders willing to engage in the increasing civility, respect, and collaboration.

This data does not suggest that political leaders should abandon their convictions. It does indicate that political leaders negotiating from a place of principle but being willing to accept compromise solutions will be seen as responsive and effective leaders by voters.

We recognize that it can be immensely challenging and unsettling to the first actor in a political or policy battle to embrace civility and respect without knowing if your opponent will reciprocate. However, this data makes clear that voters are ready and quite willing to embrace candidates and leaders who embrace these values. Much of politics is finding effective ways to communicate with voters to win their support and embracing civility and respect will be met warmly by voters across the political, ideological, and economic spectrum.

Civility is the language of respect and respect is the most important value for beginning meaningful work to find policy solutions to the many problems facing our country.