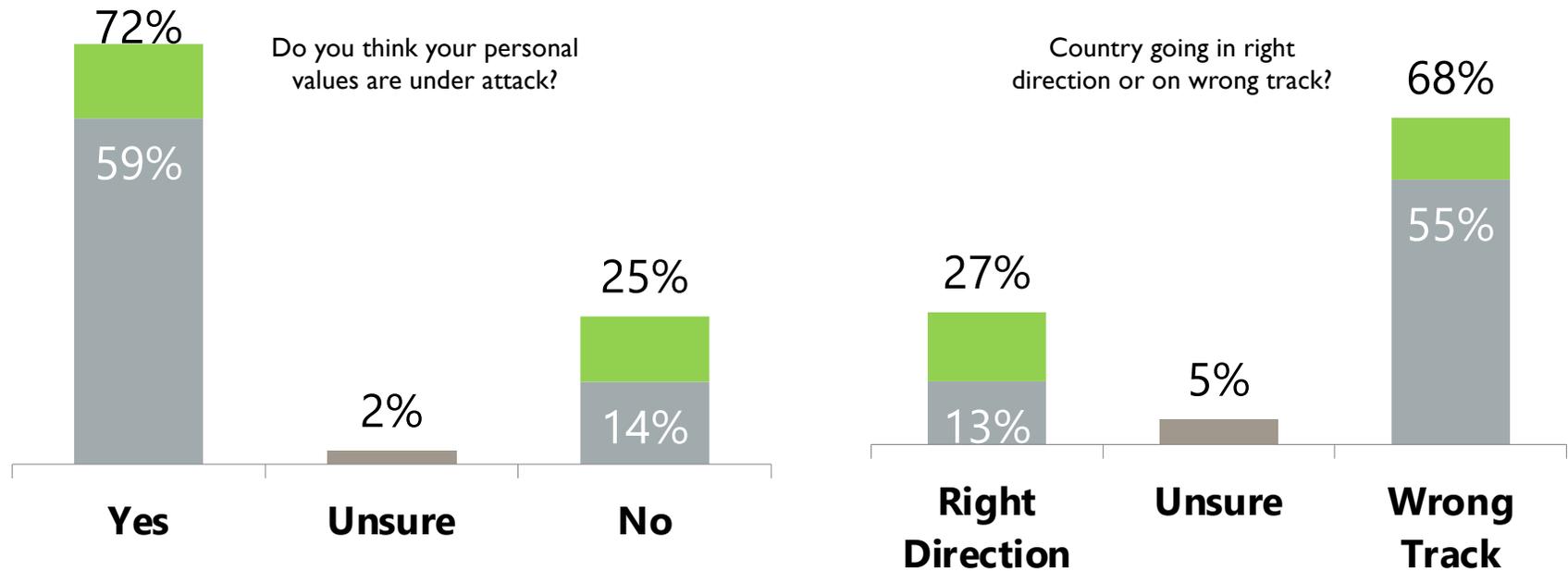
An aerial photograph of a city, likely Phoenix, Arizona, featuring a large, vibrant blue lake in the foreground. A tall, powerful fountain sprays water into the air from the center of the lake. The city is densely packed with buildings and residential areas, extending towards the base of several large, brown, rocky mountains under a clear blue sky. A black rectangular box is superimposed over the upper middle part of the image, containing white text.

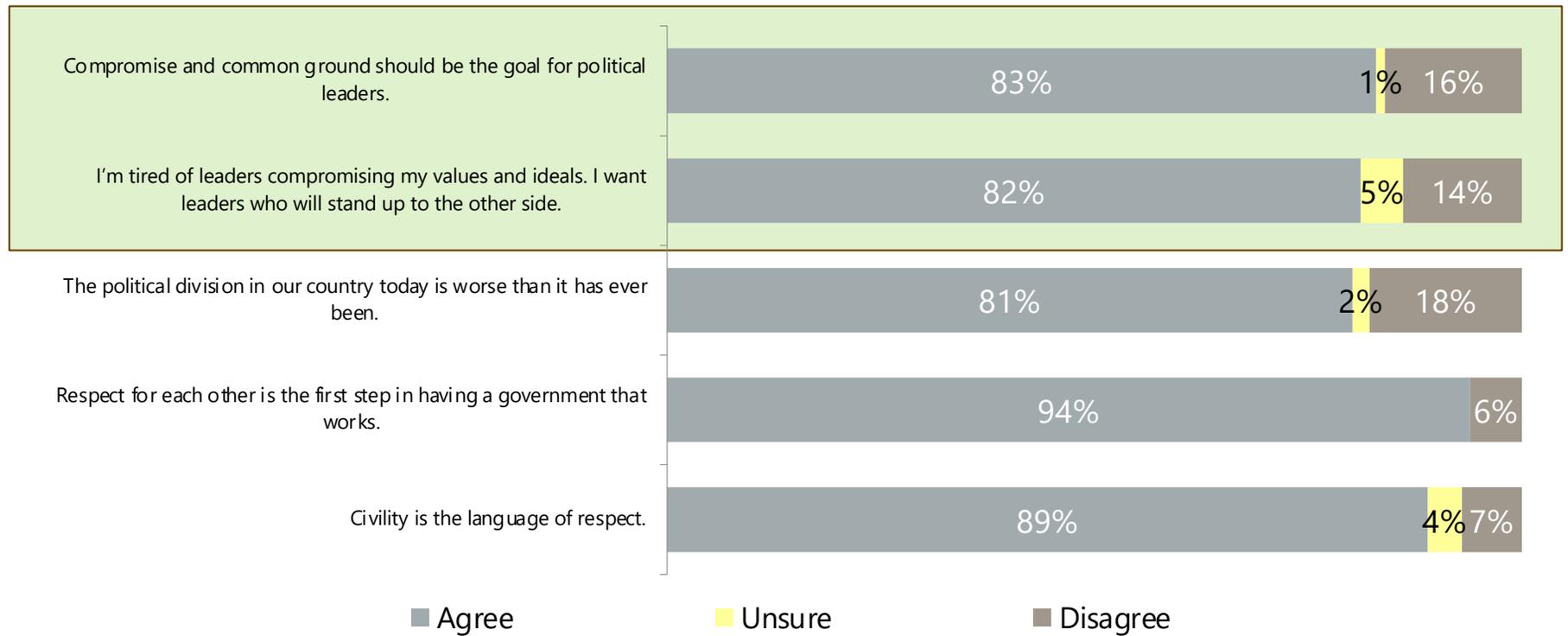
**PUBLIC DISCOURSE:  
CIVILITY AND MODERATION**

# BATTLEGROUND CIVILITY POLL | SEPT. 2023

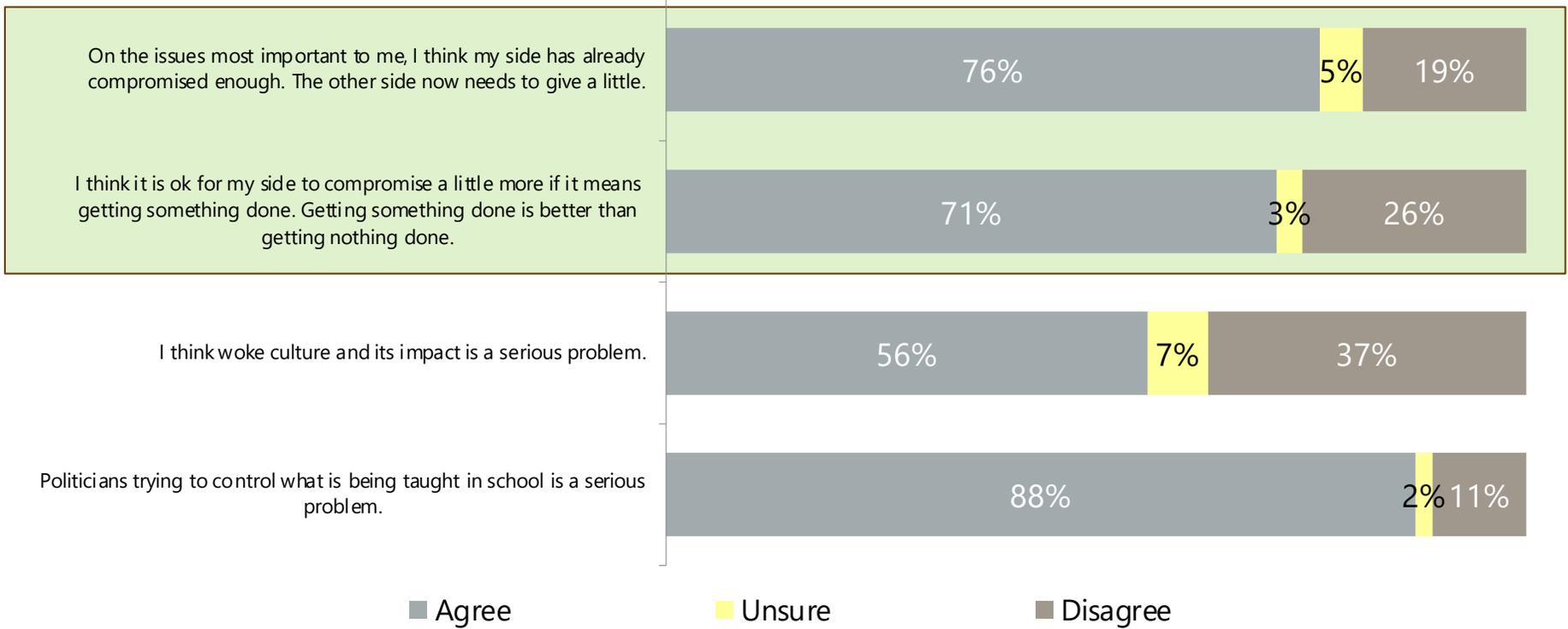
(GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, INSTITUTE OF POLITICS AND PUBLIC SERVICE)



Conclusion: Americans *feel* their values are under attack (72%) and that the country is headed the wrong direction (68%)



## AGREEMENT ON NEED FOR CIVILITY?



**COMPROMISE IS GOOD! ...FOR "THEM"?**

## CIVILITY AND MODERATION

### Is NOT...

- Being “polite” or “nice”
- “Go along to get along”
- Compromise
- Shallow behavioral modification
- A *feeling*
- Presupposed by American Founders

### Is...

- Meaningful conversation
- Persuasive
- Patient and open
- Change in outlook based on understanding
- Firmly rooted in *argument*
- Necessary for healthy America — a *civic virtue*

# AMERICAN FOUNDING

- At Founding, US already more diverse than elsewhere — race, ethnicity, religion, *interests*
- Diversity leads to conflict?
  - Outcome of conflict makes winners and losers
  - Is diversity, then, a strength or a weakness? Both? Neither?
- Necessity of change with continuity
  - Vagueness of Constitution: “The Congress shall have the power to... make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper” for carrying out the powers enumerated in the Constitution (Art. I, sect. 8)
  - Changes in technology and society: Does the use of a thermal imaging device without having obtained a warrant constitute a violation of the 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment protection against unreasonable searches and seizures? (*Kyllo v. United States*, 2001)
- *SOMEHOW* they thought we would be able to remain faithful to the Constitution while still responding to changes in an increasingly diverse society. How?

# THOUGHTS ON REPUBLICAN GOVERNMENT

## FEDERALISTS

- Properly considered: large and diverse
- Ambition and jealous protection of one's own is essential
  - Fragment social groups
- Institutions may be trusted to counteract negative communal effects of individual freedom
- Stronger central power with reserved powers for states
  - Necessary to preserve rights

## ANTIFEDERALISTS

- *ALL* historical republics have been small and homogenous
- Closeness of community tempers vice and promotes moral virtue
  - “Soft” social checks on use of freedom
- Homogenous communities enable checks on abuse of power by familiarity with leadership – “accountability”
- Weak central power and strong states
  - Necessary to preserve rights



## RESOLVING CONFLICT

- All policy choices involve conflict
- Resolved through institutionalized means
  - Engagement *within* political institutions
  - The trick? Build coalition of interests equal to majority or more
- Process over outcome
  - Today's losers, tomorrow's winners
  - Current policy *always* contingent on present majorities
- Politics as a *tamed* warfare?

*Where, in all of this, is the bond that ties communities together and supports decency and civility?*

- Knowing *why* we're uncivil with one another helps
- Some reasons:
  1. Information – too much, too little, misinformation
  2. Selfishness – **not** inherently a vice
  3. Vulnerability – emotional trigger (esp. anger, fear)
  4. Centrality of “identity” – individual v. collective
  5. Diversity of interest & opinion
  6. Democratic government
- Overarching: we all care about justice, but understand it differently
  - The problem, put differently: everyone has their reasons



## LACK OF CIVILITY: CAUSES

# INFORMATION

- Misinformation – correctable ourselves
  - Want to be right, not merely to think we're right
- Too little information
  - Unaware of processes, implications, interconnectedness of preference
- Too much information
  - Deeply attached to particular issue
  - Resistant to correction or alternative
  - Unconcerned with interconnectedness of preference

# SELFISHNESS

- Assumption of Founders: private vice is public virtue
  - Each advocates for himself
  - Institutional arrangements obstruct our will
  - Popular or common preferences make it through
- General difficulty: knowing how one's own interest and the interest of the community interact
  - Consider K-12 school funding
    - Same effect for young parents as retirees? Both are affected by collective policy

# VULNERABILITY

- Survey research shows Americans feel vulnerable or under attack
  - The nature of “party”
  - Who is one’s neighbor and who is one’s enemy?
- Emotional response: fear, anger
  - Emotions connected to justice & injustice
  - Fight to preserve what we love
  - Affects reasoning

# IDENTITY

- Individual identity always partial. Communal identity always collective.
- Assumption: good communities are representative of individuals
  - Communal values shared by individual members
  - Alternatively, individual values imposed on community
- Effect of increasingly narrow identities
- Lack of affirmation/representation as oppression or loss of freedom?
- A “battle” for collective identity?

## DEMOCRACY & DIVERSITY

- Tone and character of government related to tone and character of individuals
- Incorrectly assume that democracy avoids dissatisfaction with government outcomes because individual is empowered. Opposite is more likely.
- Tendency toward fear and protection of one's own & resistance to all imposition
- How is it even possible to agree when doing so requires grouping dissimilar groups to obtain a majority?
  - Do we need to agree to be civil? No.
- “Everyone has their reasons” – a problem and a way forward

## WHAT IS THERE TO BE DONE?

- Recognize interdependence — however thin, we *do* have a collective interest
- Those with differing opinions may also be well-intentioned, if wrong
  - Genuine argument — reasoned thought and attentive listening
  - Honesty about ourselves
  - Confidence in self but openness to alternatives if they prove better
- Reasoned argument tames emotion and improves judgment
- Recognition that opinion and knowledge differ
- Understand and accept realities of institutionalized processes
  - Dissatisfied? *Persuade* others