

GSG Compass

Re-Branding Compromise

“Compromise” is a favorite Beltway buzzword, and with a new round of budget battles looming, it is likely to once again be a prevalent piece of political lexicon. Though the “Grand Bargain” may be dead, for many, the notion of achieving something similar lives on.

Electoral speaking, however, there’s a problem with using the word “compromise” to describe this notion: **voters do not respond well to it, nor do they side with a candidate who is defined by it.** Maybe it is too vague; maybe it conveys weakness. Whatever the reason, the word “compromise” fails to win a winnable argument.

So what can win the argument against rigid ideologues on the right who defiantly block progress? A recent GSG survey of voters nationwide provides the answer.

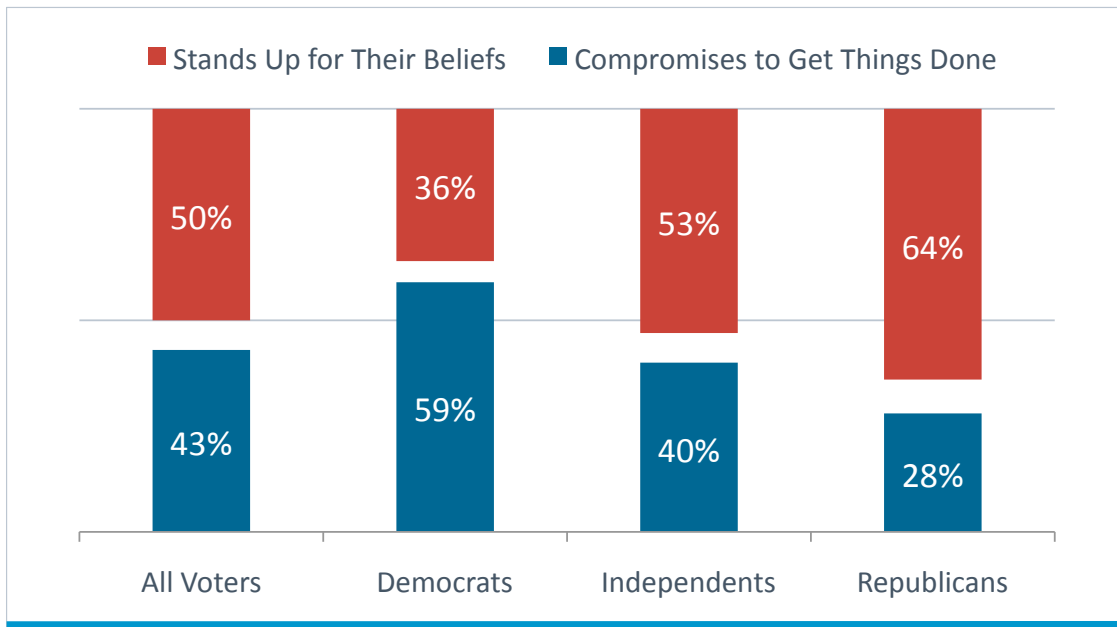
“Compromise” is a partisan, losing message

Forced to choose between a candidate who “stands up for what he or she believes” and a candidate who “compromises to get things done,” a majority of voters nationwide (50%) sides with the one who stands on principle, while just 43% side with the compromiser.

A seven-point gap may not seem like much, but its significance is underscored by the fact that the candidate standing up for beliefs wins that contest among every demographic group regardless of gender, age, or region.

The one demographic trait that does reveal a split in opinion is partisanship. Self-identified Democrats favor the candidate who compromises to get things done by a 23-point margin, 59% to 36%. Republicans, on the other hand, favor the candidate who stands up for beliefs by a 36-point margin, 64% to 28%. And Independents, though more divided, also favor the candidate standing on principle by 13-points, 53% to 40%.

These results – from a survey of 1,002 registered voters nationwide with a margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$ conducted August 19-22, 2013 via telephone – show that partisan connotations of the word “compromise” lessen its impact and limit its appeal. If compromise is to be achieved, those who champion it must do so with more effective language.



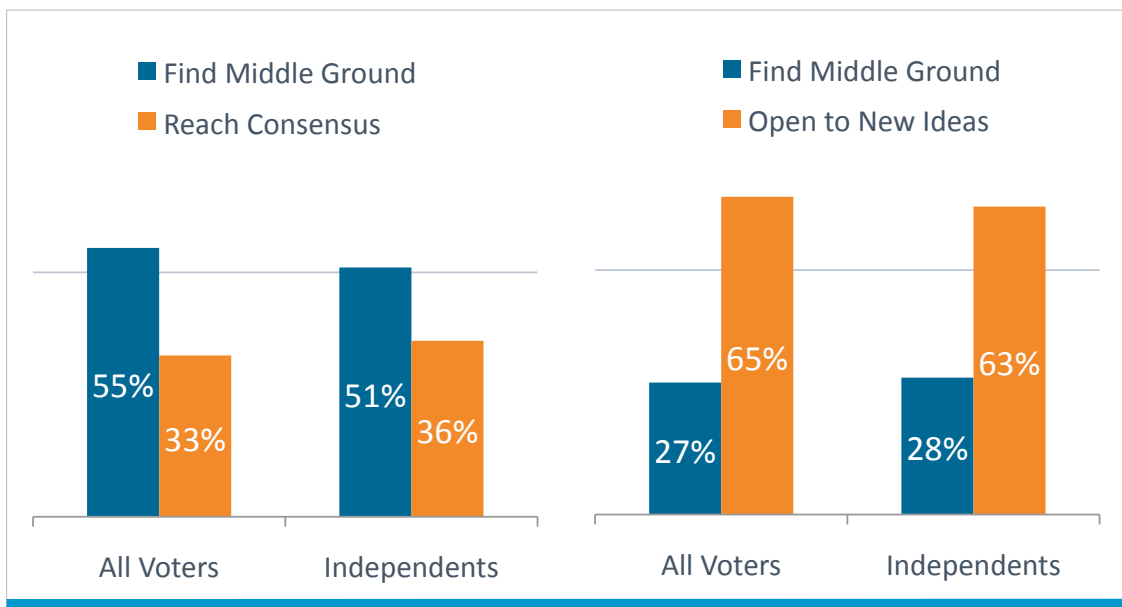
Voters reject both intransigence and “consensus”

The failure of the word “compromise” owes more to its weakness than to the strength of “standing up for beliefs.” Put another way, the fact that most voters consider “standing up for beliefs” preferable to compromising does not mean they prize intransigence.

In fact, two thirds of voters (66%) choose a candidate who “is willing to listen to and work with those who disagree with them ” over a candidate who “stands up for what he or she believes” (29%). Even 52% of those who initially say they favor standing up for beliefs over compromise when given this choice side with a candidate who listens and works with others.

If not for “compromise,” then for what end do voters want their leaders to work together? By a wide margin, voters side with a candidate who “finds middle ground” (55%) over one who “reaches consensus” (33%). But by an even wider margin, voters favor a candidate who is “open to new ideas” (65%) over one who “finds middle ground” (27%).

Voters clearly want leaders who listen and work together, but reaching consensus somewhere in the middle ground between right and left is not good enough. They want candidates with new ideas that go beyond the stale and stalled partisan agendas of both sides.



Ideas are good, but voters really crave solutions that are “reasonable” or “common sense”

An openness to new ideas is attractive to voters, but what good is an idea if it fails to fix the problem or address the issue? What voters really want are “solutions.” Out of all of the different phrases tested in the survey, the ones that unite the greatest number of voters are “reasonable solutions” and “common sense solutions,” attracting broad support among all demographic groups.

Overall, three-fourths of voters (75%) choose a candidate who “creates common sense solutions” over one who “compromises to get things done” (16%). And three-fourths of voters (75%) also choose a candidate who “looks for reasonable solutions” over one who “compromises to get things done” (21%).

RATHER THAN...	MORE EFFECTIVE TO SAY...
Compromise	Common sense solutions
Consensus	Reasonable solutions
Middle ground	Open to new ideas
Balanced approach	Work with others who disagree

