



PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC CONSULTATION
SCHOOL OF PUBLIC POLICY, UNIVERSITY OF MARYLAND

Government Reform:

Ranked Choice Voting, Redistricting by Citizen Commission and Multi-Member Districts

A Survey of American Voters

Methodology

Fielded by: Nielsen Scarborough

Method: Administered online to probability-based sample selected from larger panel recruited by telephone and mail

Sample: 2,482 registered voters

Margin of Error: 2.0%

Fielding Dates: September 7 - October 3, 2017

Ranked Choice Voting

A current bill in Congress proposes a new way of electing Members of Congress when there are more than two candidates. Proponents say this method addresses the following two issues with the current system:

It is now difficult for independent and third-party candidates to get traction. While some voters might favor them, those voters often select other candidates from a major party out of concern they'd be throwing away their vote.

In an election with three or more candidates, the winner may not have anywhere near a majority of votes and might even be opposed by the majority of voters.

Opponents of the bill say these issues are not significant enough to warrant overhauling the way that Members of Congress are elected.

Ranked Choice Voting

So, here is the proposal. It is called ranked choice voting or instant runoff voting.

In this proposed system, voters select not only their most preferred candidate, but also their second choice, third-choice and so on. Here is how the winner is then selected.

Voters select not only their most preferred candidate, but also their second choice, third-choice and so on. The winner is then selected as follows:

All the first-choice voters are counted and if any candidate gets the majority he or she is the winner.

If no candidate gets a majority based on voters' first choice, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is removed from the race. Those who gave that candidate their first-choice vote, then have their votes redirected to their second choice. This may result in a candidate getting a majority and being declared the winner.

If there is still not a majority, the process of eliminating the lowest candidate and redirecting their votes is repeated until a candidate has a majority and is declared the winner.

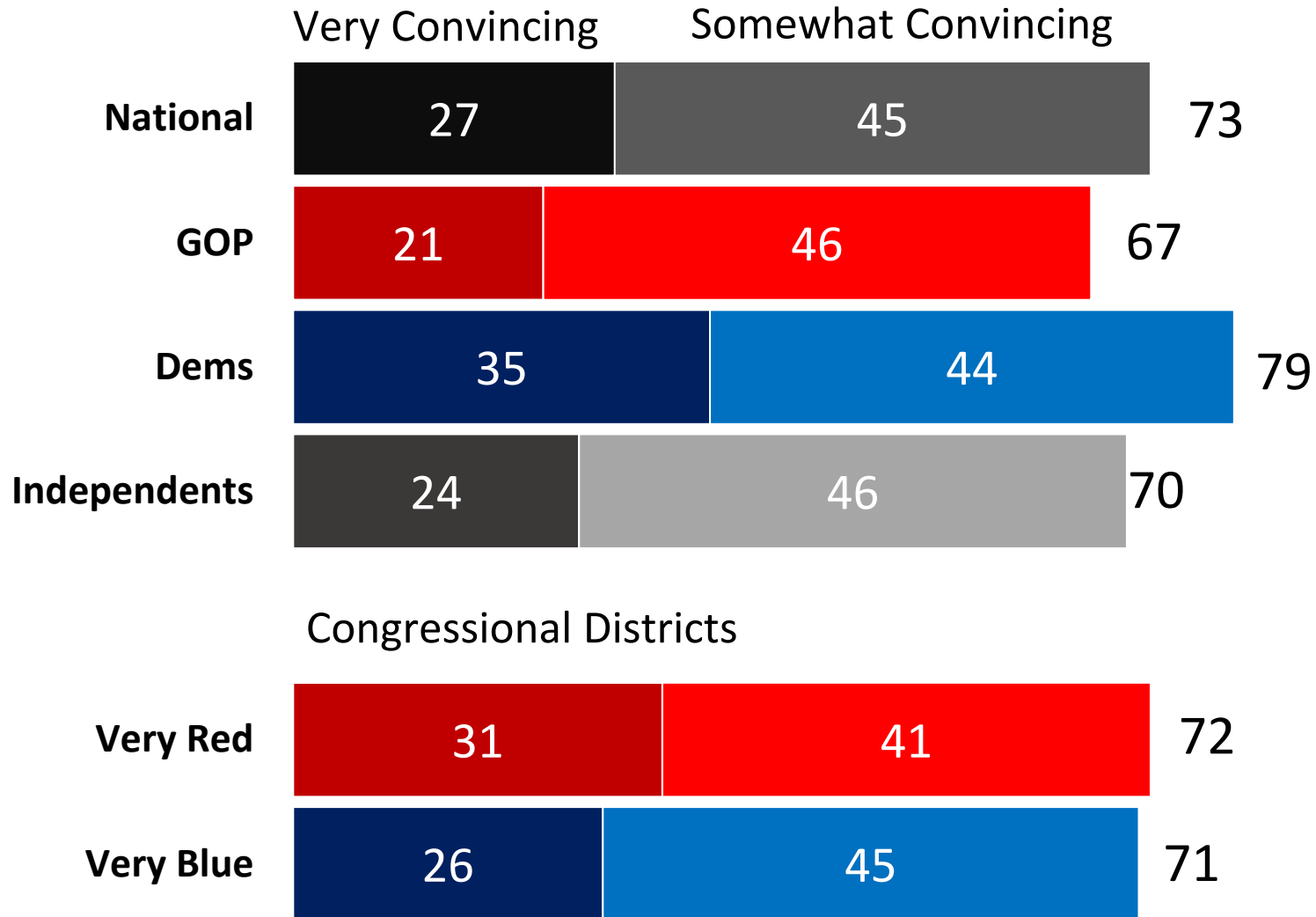
Ranked Choice Voting

PRO ARGUMENT:

In the current system, a candidate can win even without a majority of votes – in fact a majority might actually oppose that candidate. Candidates with a small following can become a spoiler, taking votes away from a popular candidate, and enabling a less popular candidate to win. Ranked choice voting would ensure that the candidate elected is, in fact, the most popular candidate.

Ranked Choice Voting

PRO ARGUMENT:



Ranked Choice Voting

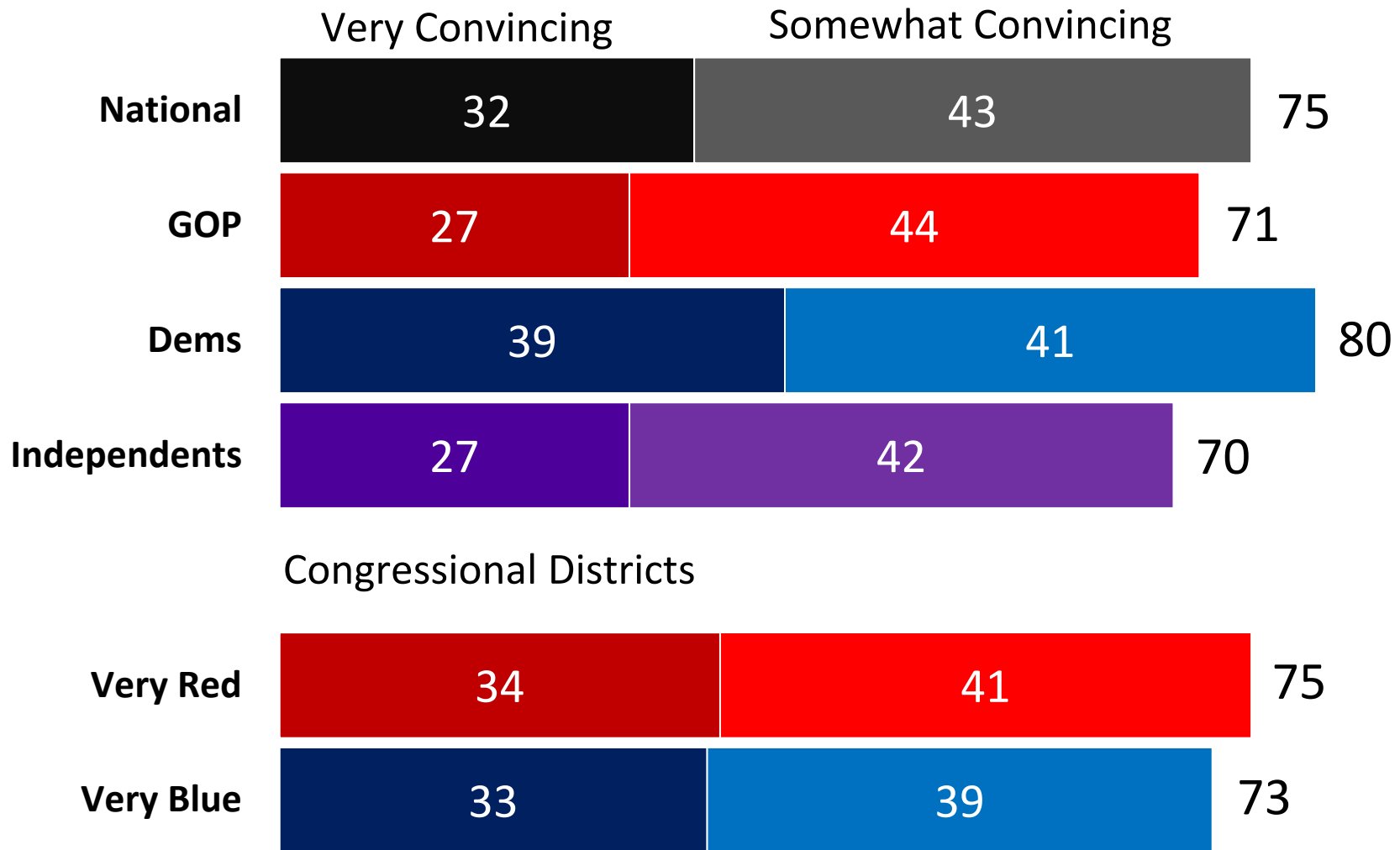
PRO ARGUMENT:

This system makes it possible for voters to vote for the candidate they most support, including an independent or third-party candidate, without worrying they'll be throwing away their vote.

They'll know that their second preference will be counted if their first choice is not popular enough to win.

Ranked Choice Voting

PRO ARGUMENT:

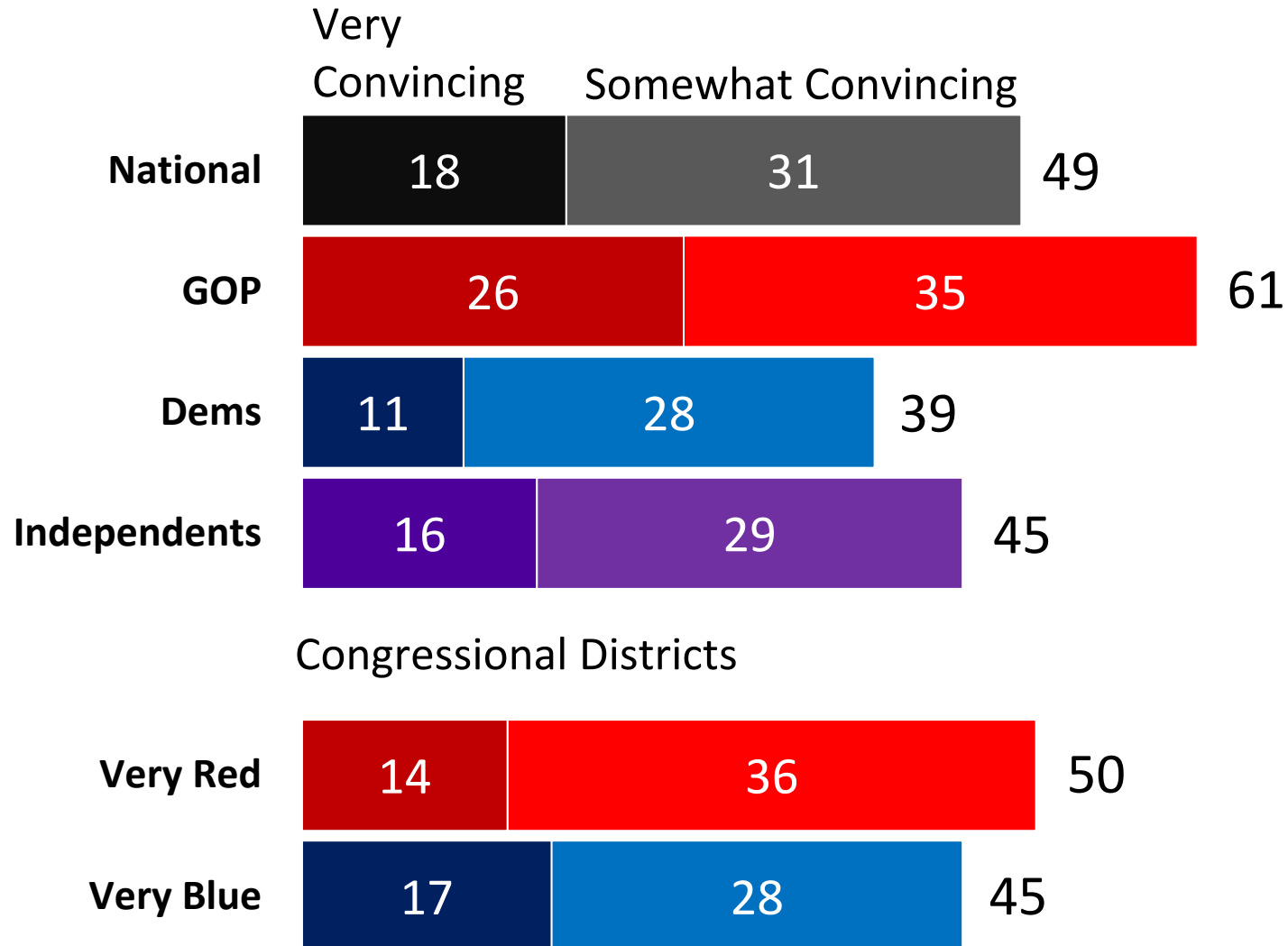


Ranked Choice Voting

CON ARGUMENT:

Our system of elections had worked for more than two centuries. This new method is too complicated, will cost the taxpayers a lot of money, strain our vote counting system, and dramatically delay the final announcement of the winners. While in principle this system could help a third party or independent candidate, it is so unlikely that they could actually win that it is really not worth all the trouble.

Ranked Choice Voting CON ARGUMENT:

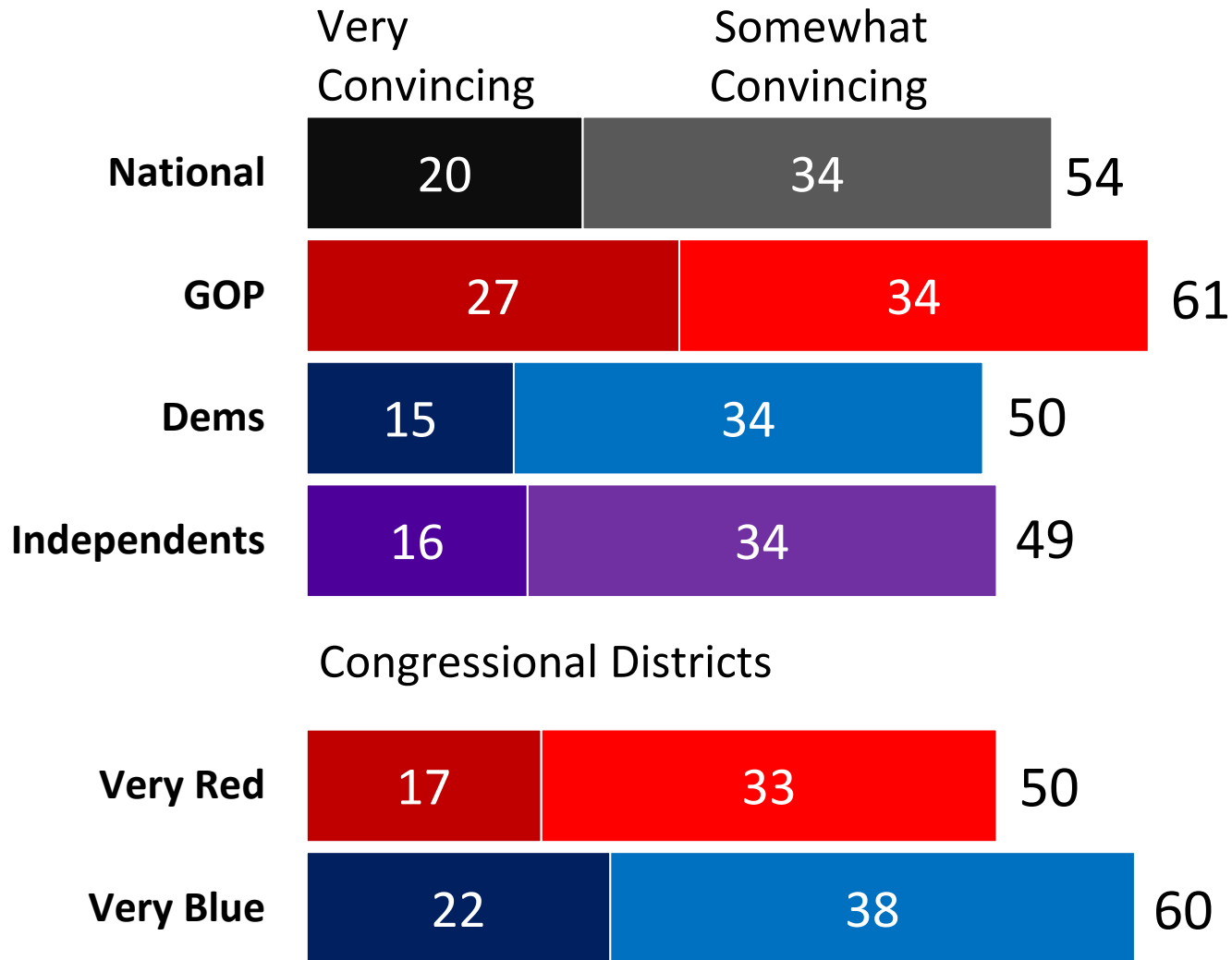


Ranked Choice Voting

CON ARGUMENT:

Explaining this new method to voters will be very challenging. People may get confused and this might discourage them from voting. There will be more doubts about the accuracy of the outcomes, leading to more demands for recounts. People will end up having less confidence in the final results weakening the legitimacy of our democratic system.

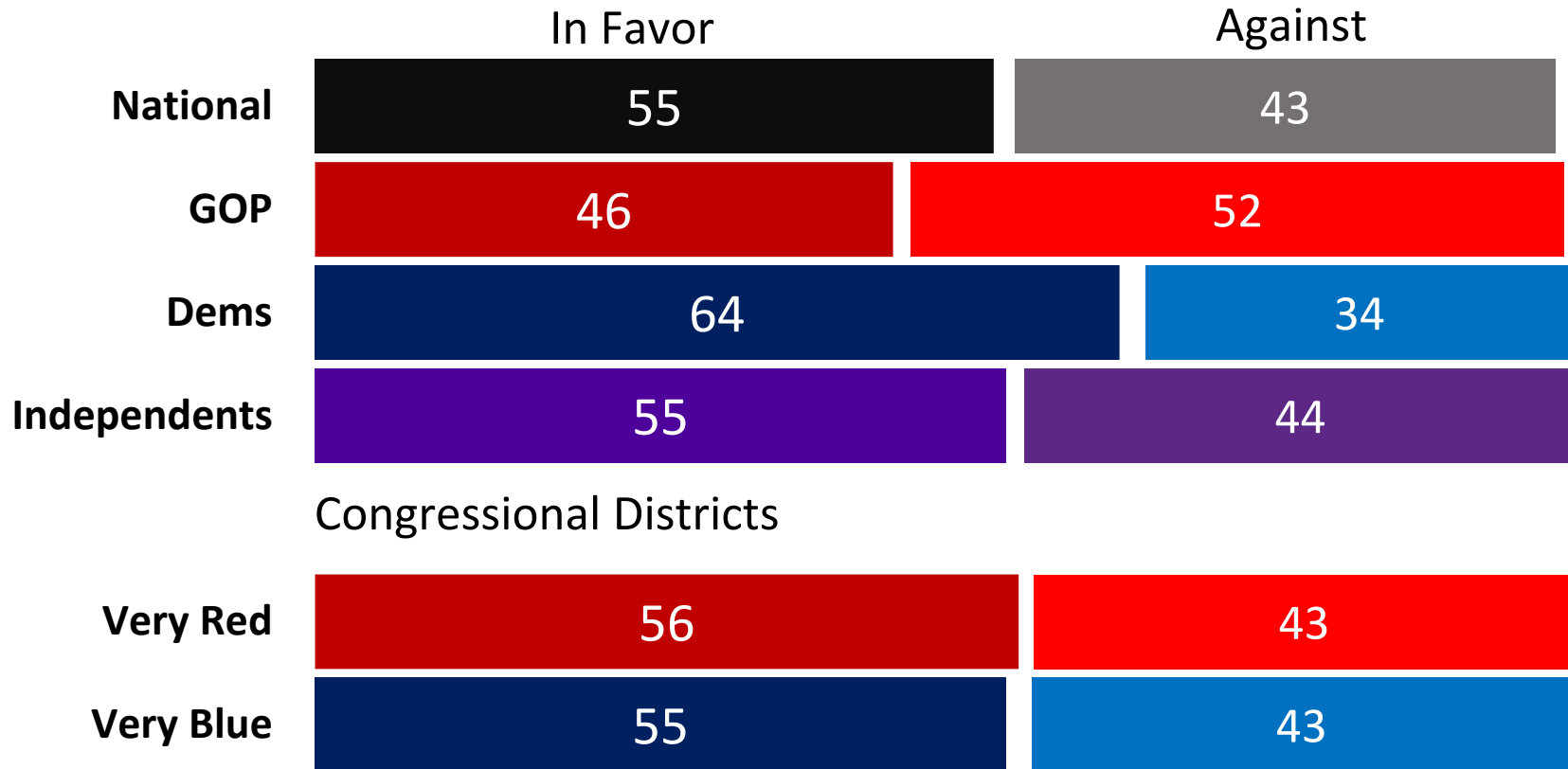
Ranked Choice Voting CON ARGUMENT:



Ranked Choice Voting

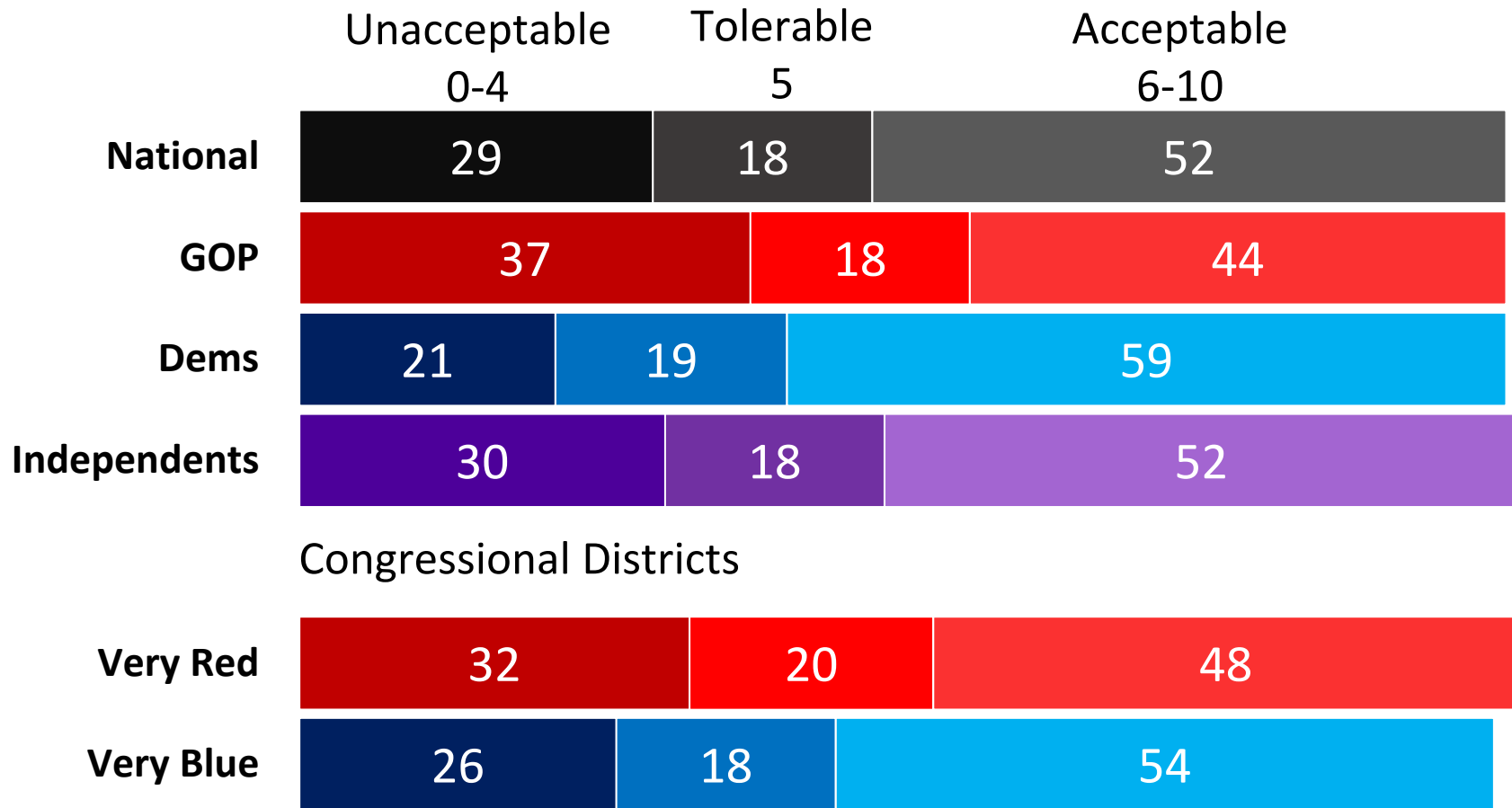
FINAL RECOMMENDATION:

Would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of or against this proposal for ranked choice voting in federal elections?



Ranked Choice Voting ASSESSMENT:

Please select how acceptable this proposal for ranked choice voting in federal elections would be to you.



Congressional Redistricting by Citizen Commission

Another debate in Congress is about how the districts for the House of Representatives of the US Congress are designed. As you may know, every 10 years, with the new US Census, these districts are redesigned by state governments to adjust for population shifts. Usually this is done by state legislatures.

Some Members of Congress are concerned that state legislatures, which are often dominated by one party or the other, try to design districts that favor their party. When legislatures do this, it is called gerrymandering.

There is a bill that sets federal regulations for redistricting that proponents say will reduce gerrymandering. Opponents say that the federal government should not step in and that it should be left to the states.

Congressional Redistricting by Citizen Commission

In Congress, there is a proposal to have the shape of Congressional districts set by a commission of citizens within each state. Such citizen commissions are already being used in a few states.

The proposal specifies that the commission of citizens would:

- be committed to designing districts in a way that is geographically natural and compact without creating a favorable distribution for either party
- be one third Republicans, one third Democrats, and one third independents,
- reflect the balance of the state according to gender, race, ethnicity and the geographic areas of the state.

Decisions on the shape of districts would be made by a majority of the commission members that includes at least one member from both parties and an independent.

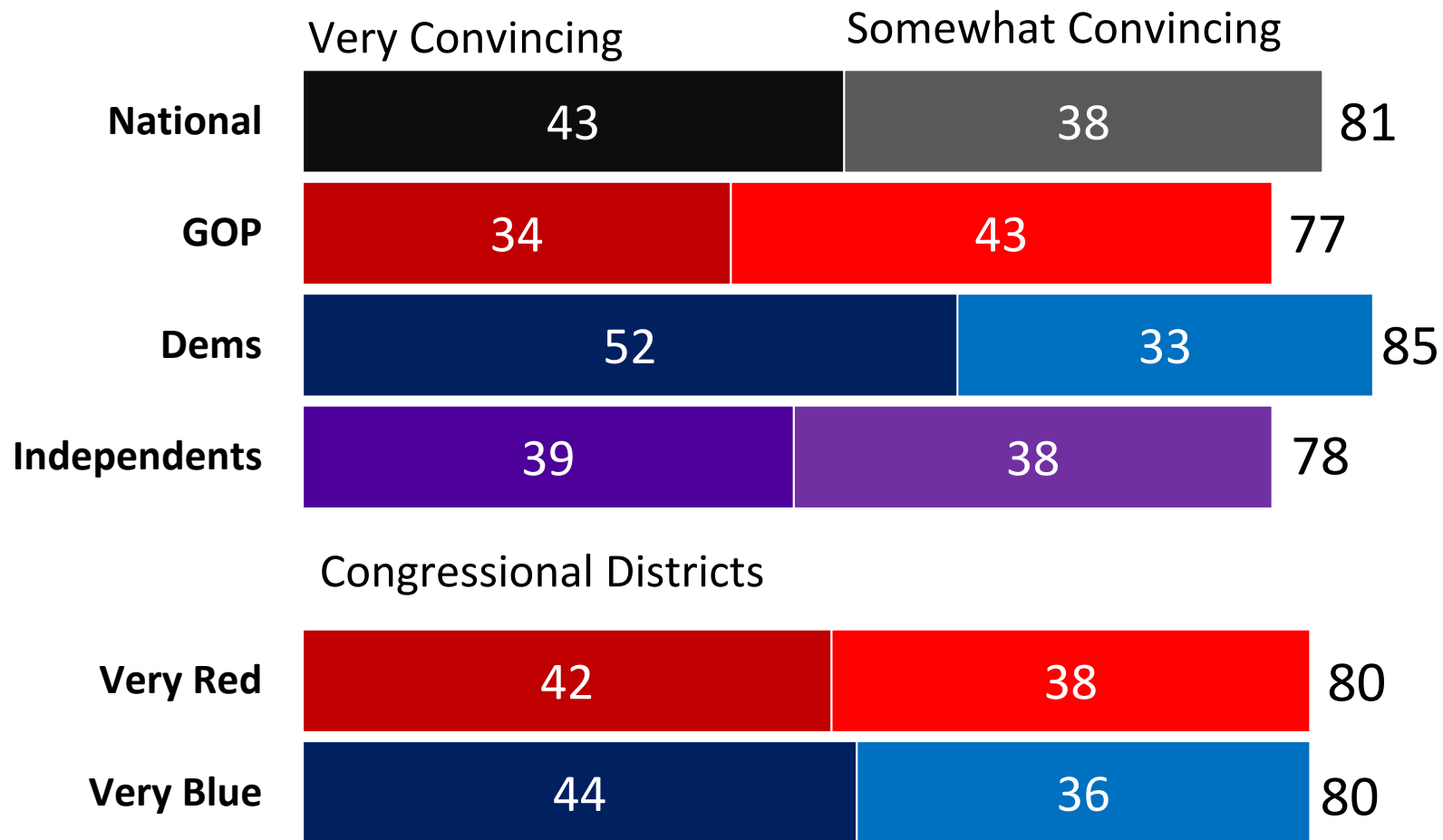
Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

PRO ARGUMENT:

When one party has control of the redistricting process, they tend to make great efforts to ensure that their party wins more districts, often creating weirdly shaped districts. The representatives from a particular state can be completely or almost completely from one party, though this does not reflect the real partisan balance in the state. This means that voters from the party not in control of the legislature get less representation in Congress, even though they may live in an area of the state where they are a majority.

Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

PRO ARGUMENT:



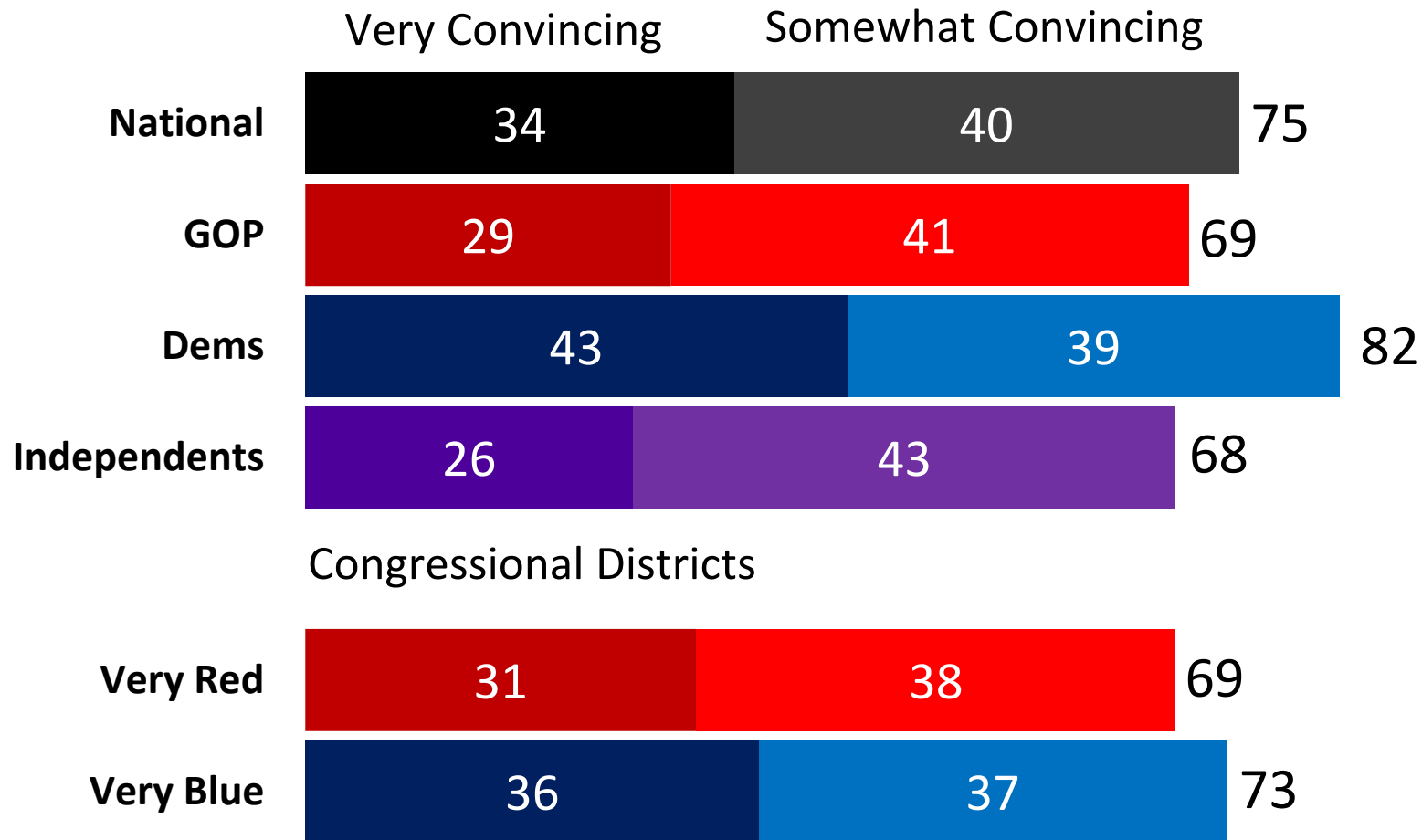
Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

PRO ARGUMENT:

When partisan politicians use gerrymandering to create safe districts for their party, the general election is not competitive, so the only really important election is the primary of the majority party in the district. Candidates who only need to appeal to the views of primary voters tend to be more ideologically extreme and, when in Congress, are less likely to find common ground with the other party. When nonpartisan commissions of citizens design districts, the districts are more likely to be competitive between the parties; candidates are more likely to appeal to and be responsive to the whole district, and are less partisan in Congress.

Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

PRO ARGUMENT:



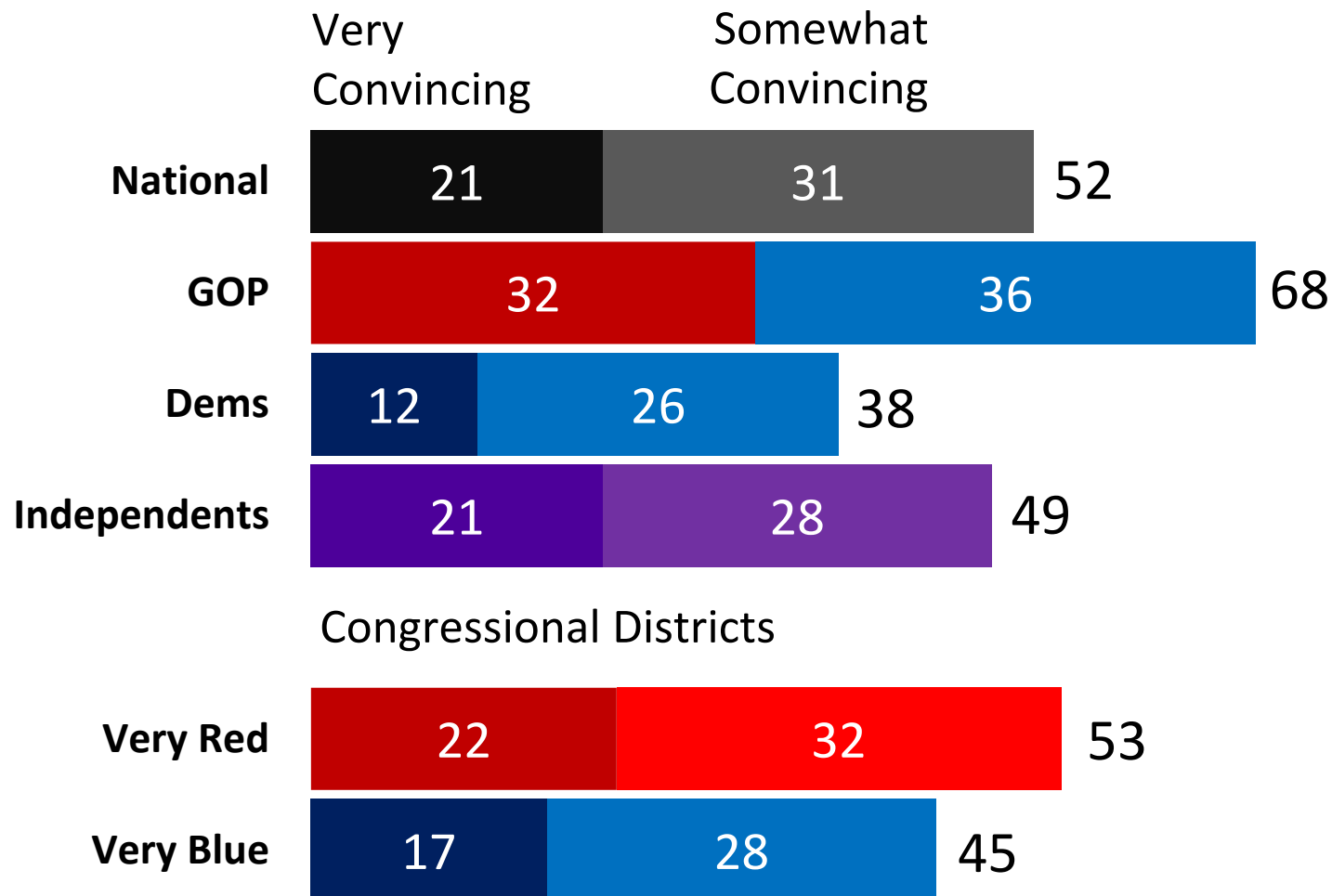
Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

CON ARGUMENT:

The federal government should not step in and tell the states how to design their Congressional districts. Doing so overrides the state legislatures that have been elected by and are accountable to the people. Giving the authority to redistrict to unelected citizen commissioners actually takes power away from the people.

Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

CON ARGUMENT:



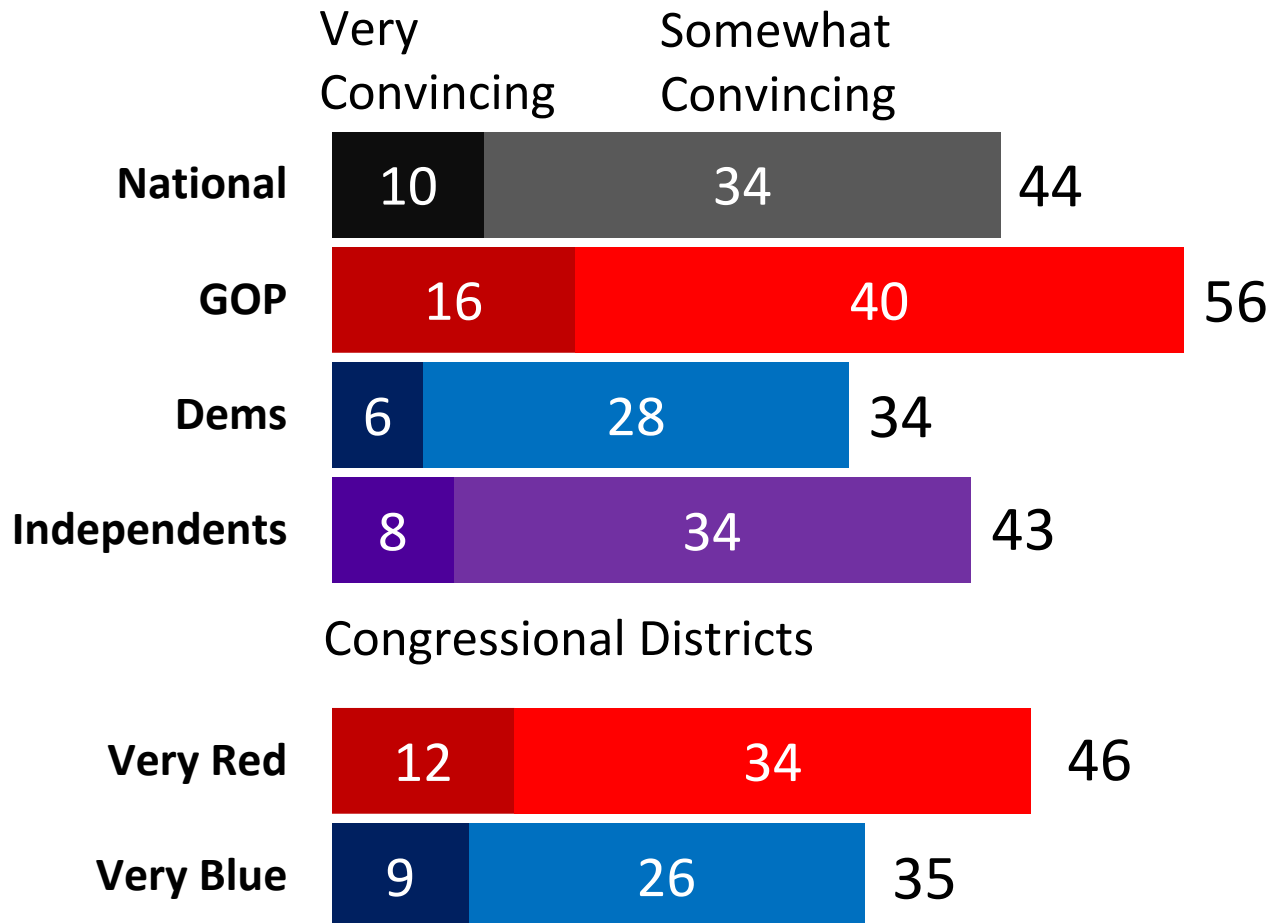
Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

PRO ARGUMENT:

The way citizen commissions draw the lines will not necessarily lead to more competitive districts. People increasingly cluster in areas with others who are of the same party. So, whatever the citizen commission does, the districts are still likely to be dominated by one party. This will all be a lot of effort with no real gain.

Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

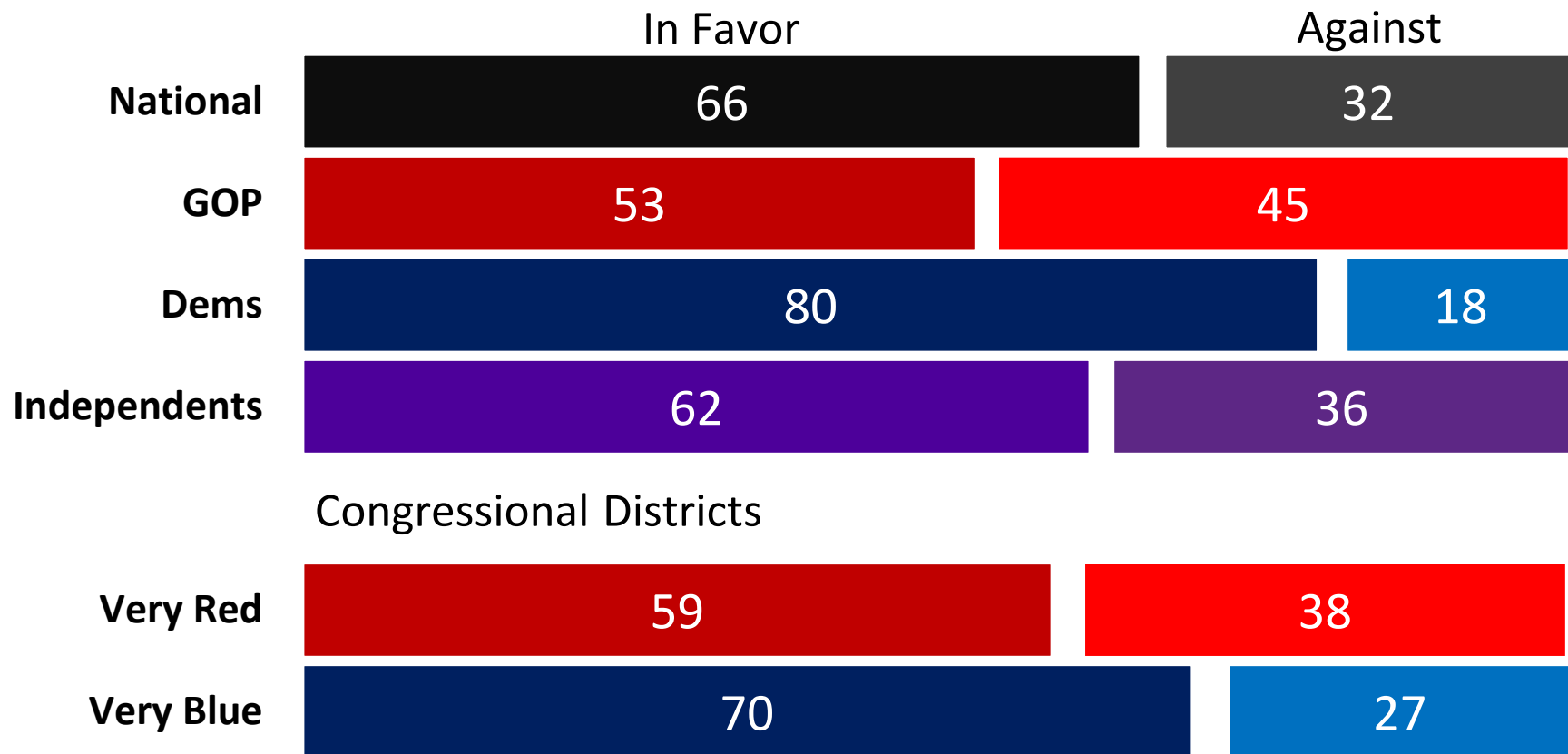
PRO ARGUMENT:



Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

FINAL RECOMMENDATION:

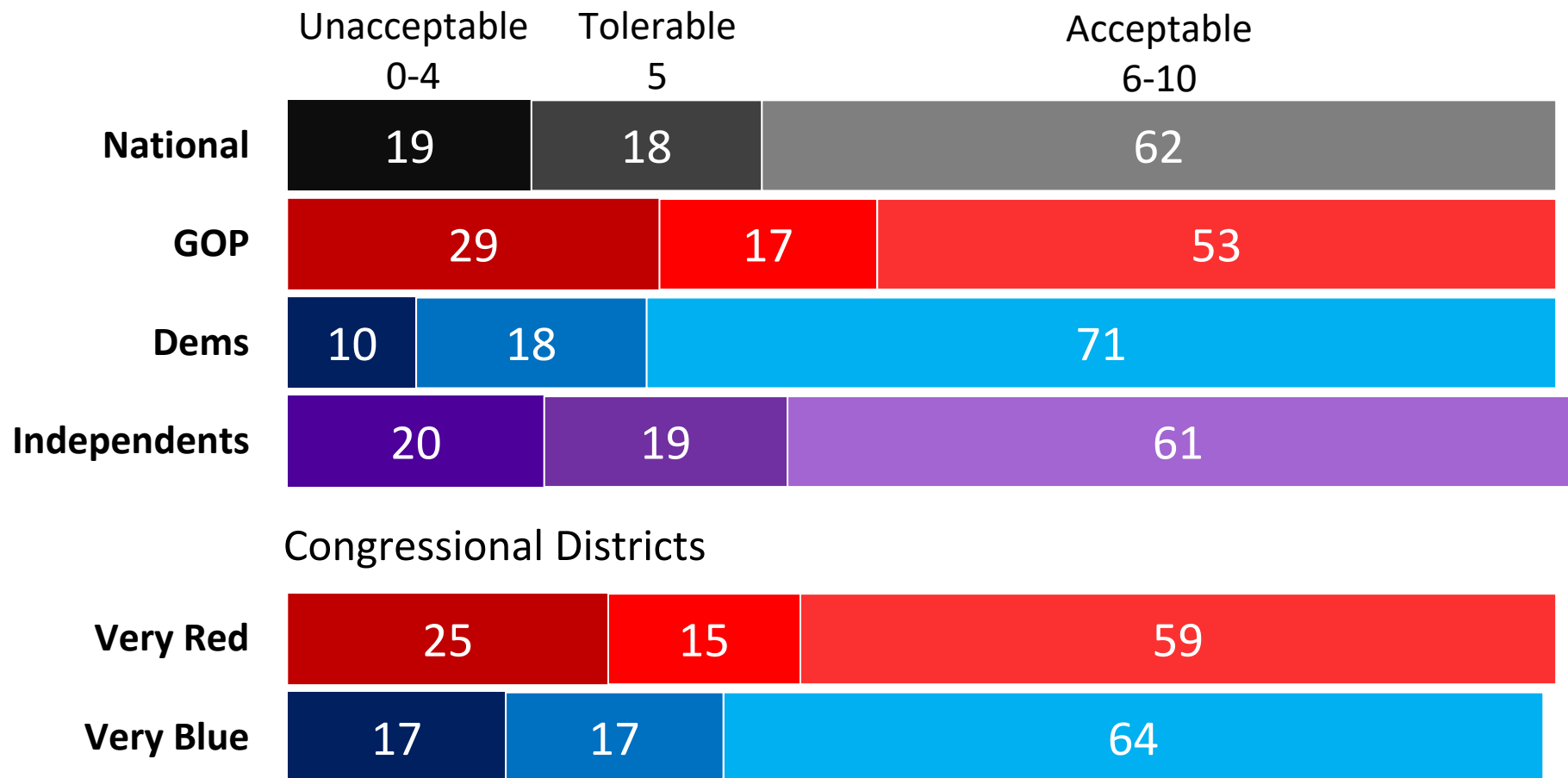
Would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote:



Congressional Redistricting By Citizen Commission

ASSESSMENT:

Please select how acceptable this proposal would be to you.



Multi-Member Districts

A current bill in Congress proposes a new way of structuring districts in the US House of Representatives. Proponents say this proposal addresses two issues

In some states, all of their Members of Congress are from one party, even though a very large portion of the population identifies with the other party.

Independents and third-party candidates have little chance of getting elected, even though a substantial number of voters might favor them. As you know, under current law, a Congressional district is represented by one Member of Congress, and each state elects two Senators, who represent the entire state.

The idea of this proposal is one that is allowed by the Constitution. This proposal would make larger US House districts that would be represented by more than one Member of Congress. This would increase the likelihood Members of Congress would more accurately mirror the partisan mix of the population.

Multi-Member Districts

Here is how it would work:

In a state with five or fewer Congressional districts, the state would still have the same number of House Members, but they would be elected by all of the state's voters and represent the whole state. For example, for a state with five Congressional districts, on the ballot there would be at least five Republicans and five Democrats, as well as possible independent and third-party candidates. Five U.S. House Members would be elected by all voters in the state.

Research has been done on what the likely effect would be: election results would more closely mirror the partisan balance of the state. For example, Connecticut is a state in which all five House seats are currently held by Democrats and Oklahoma is one in which all five House seats are currently held by Republicans. The proposed system would likely result in 1-2 Republicans being elected in Connecticut and 1-2 Democrats in Oklahoma.

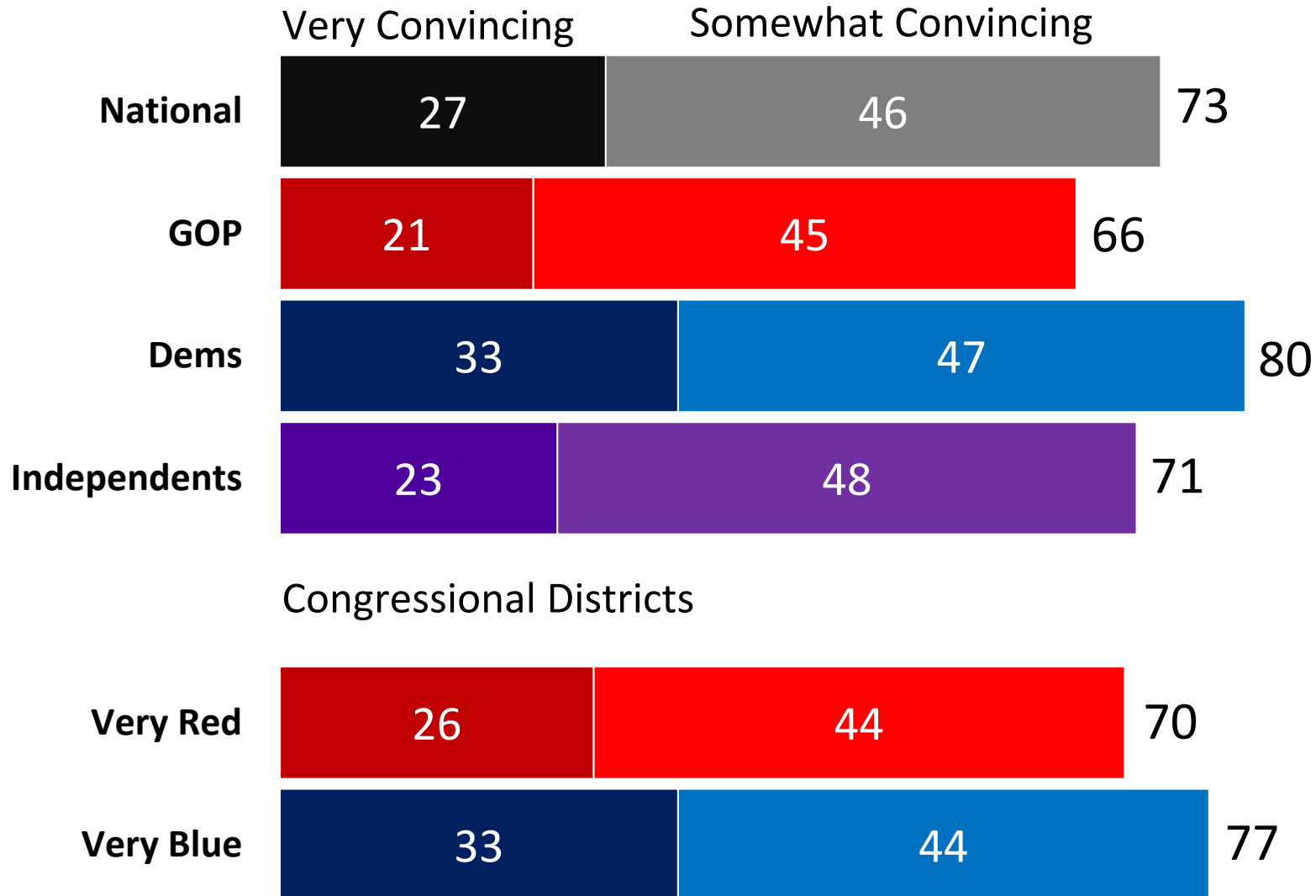
For states with more than five districts, the state would keep the same number of House Members, but the districts would be redesigned to be larger and have 3-5 Members each. The 3-5 House Members would be elected by all of the voters in these larger districts.

Multi-Member Districts

PRO ARGUMENT:

Right now, in some states, people who are part of the minority party have no representation in Congress, even though they are a substantial portion of the population. Using this new system would make it more likely that people from both parties would have at least one Member from their party representing their concerns. In many cases, independents are the swing voters and are likely to vote for candidates from more than one party. With multiple choices, even partisan voters are more likely to choose someone from the other party, an independent or a third-party candidate. The elected Members from that state would more accurately mirror the partisan balance in their state, making Congress more accountable.

Multi-Member Districts PRO ARGUMENT:

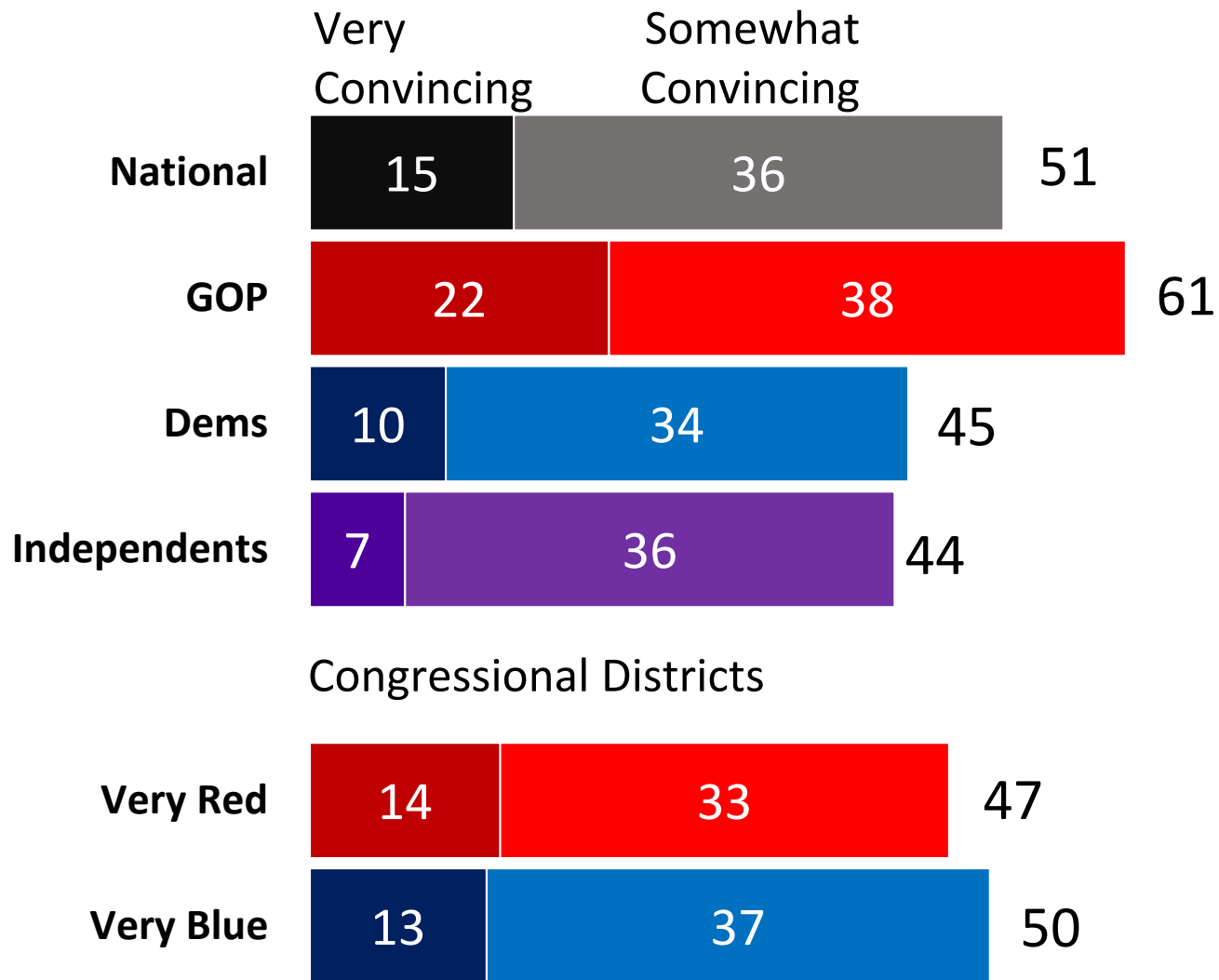


Multi-Member Districts

CON ARGUMENT:

This idea is too complicated and requires too much from voters. They would have to get to know many more candidates than they do now. That would probably discourage some people from even trying to vote. With so many candidates to choose from, more people would be making uninformed decisions. The people who would put in the time and effort to get to know so many candidates, are more likely to be highly partisan. It would just make districts too big. These members would be more distant and less accessible to the people just like Senators. Overall, it could have all kinds of problems that people have not even considered.

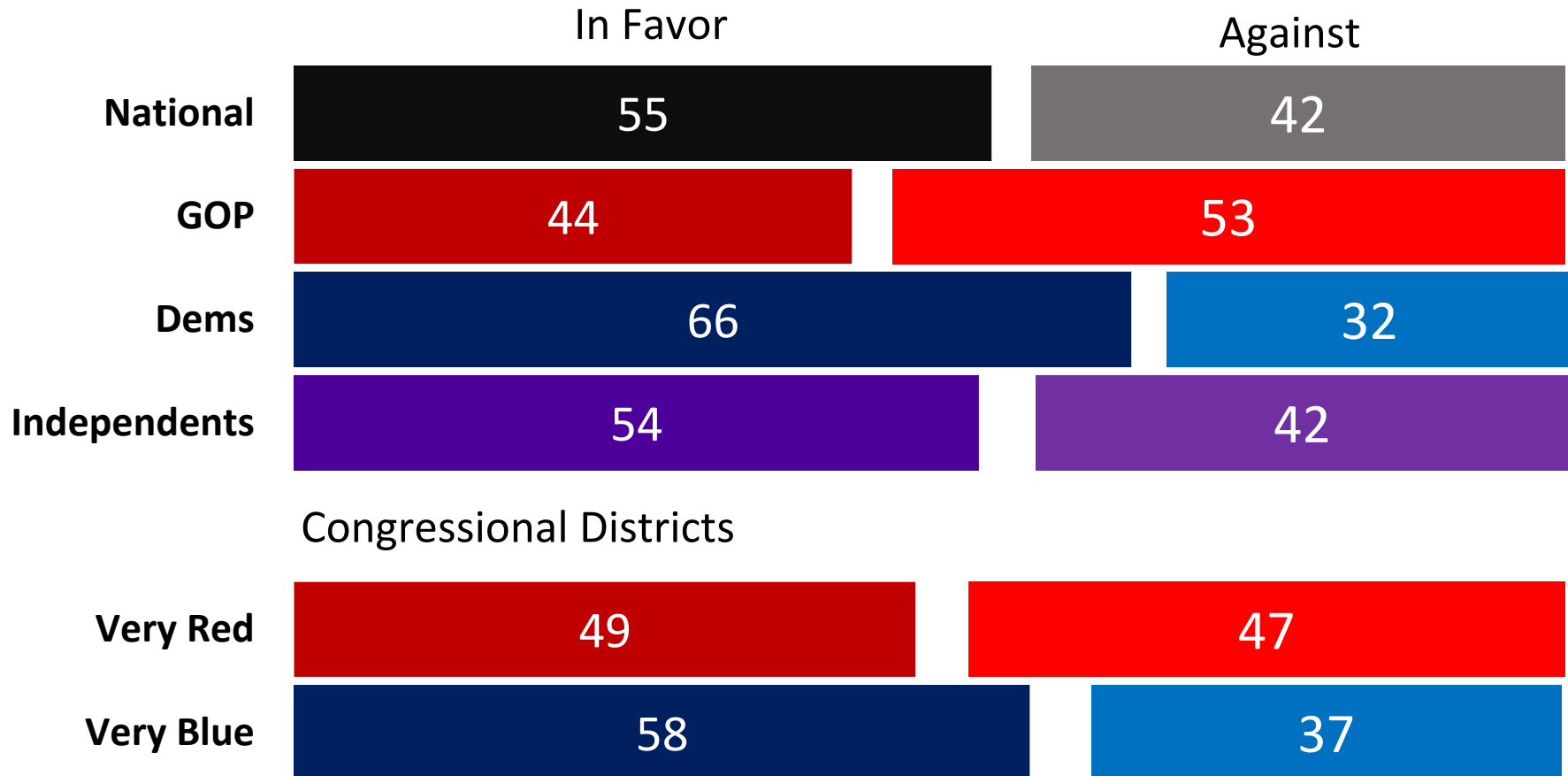
Multi-Member Districts CON ARGUMENT:



Multi-Member Districts

FINAL RECOMMENDATION:

Would you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor or against this proposal?



Multi-Member Districts ASSESSMENT:

Please select how acceptable this proposal would be to you.

