



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

GOVERNMENT REFORM

Allowing Nonprofits to Endorse Political Candidates

A Survey of American Voters

November 2017

Methodology

Online Probability-Based Panel
provided by Nielsen Scarborough

Total Sample: 2,482 registered voters

Margin of Error: 2.0%

Fielding Dates: Sept. 7-Oct. 3, 2017



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- BRIEFING -

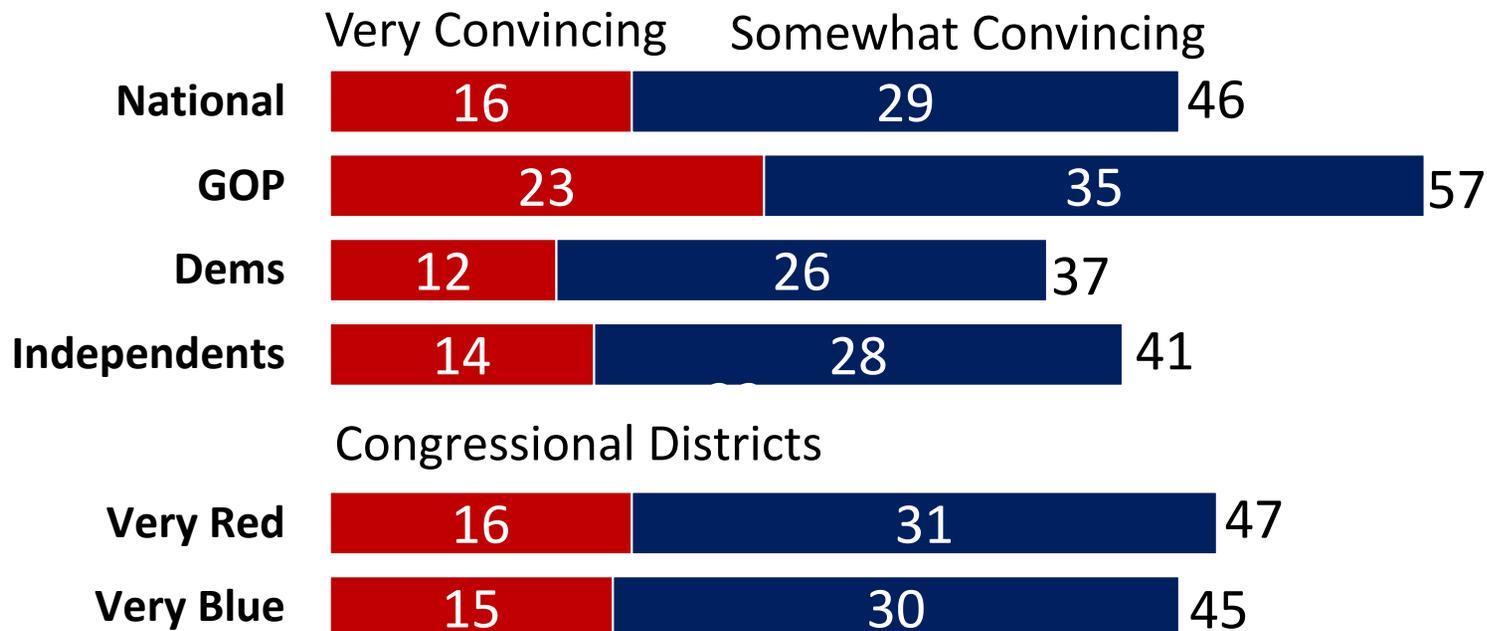
As you may know, under current law, there are certain organizations that do not have to pay taxes, such as religious institutions (churches, synagogues, or mosques), universities, foundations or other charities. However, to keep this tax-exempt status they cannot endorse political candidates or participate in political campaigns.

A proposed bill in Congress reverses this law, allowing tax-exempt organizations to endorse political candidates and provide them money and other support, while keeping the organization's tax-exempt status.

Allowing Non-Profits to Endorse Political Candidates

- Argument in Favor -

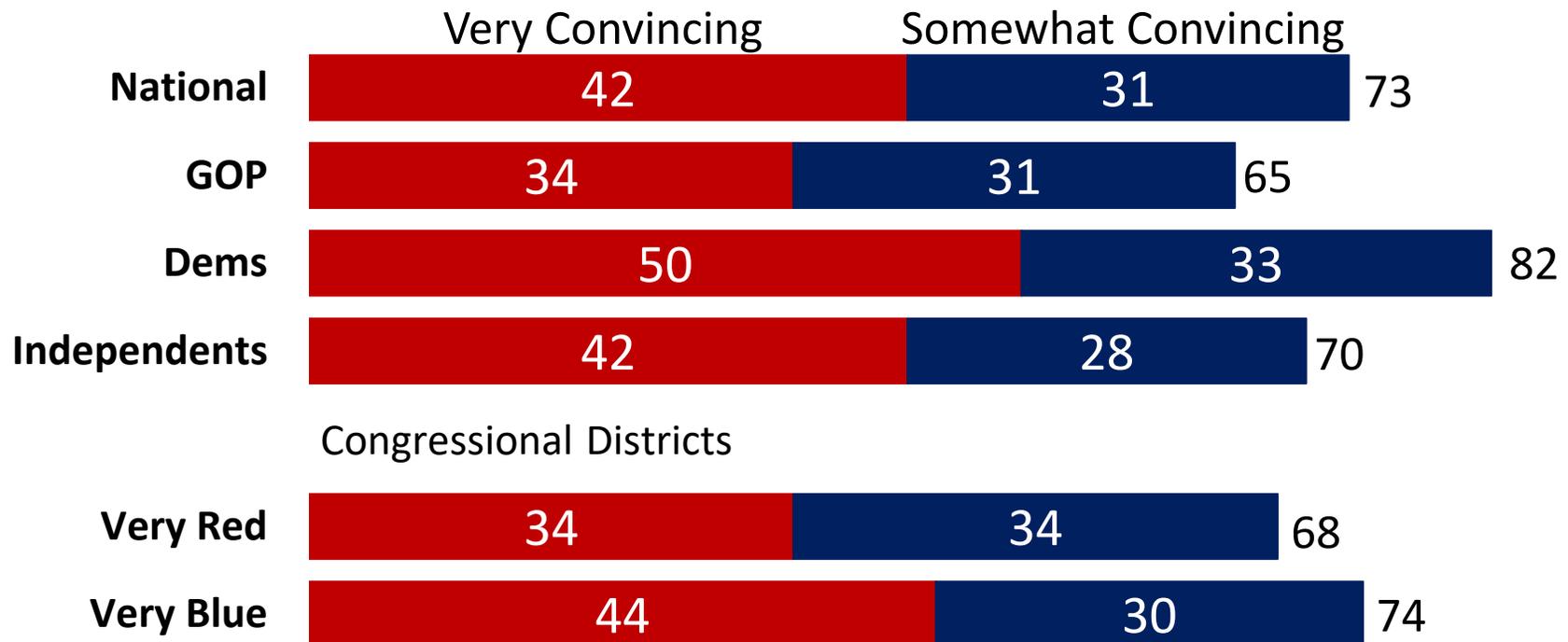
For many Americans, the decisions they make about who to vote for are deeply linked to their religious values. It is very important for them to be free to discuss these issues in their house of worship and to hear how their religious leaders apply religious principles to political decisions. We should not muzzle religious leaders --they have important things to say about the political issues of our time. Some religions may feel that they want to keep religion separate from political issues--but that should be their choice, not something imposed on them by the government.



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- Argument Against -

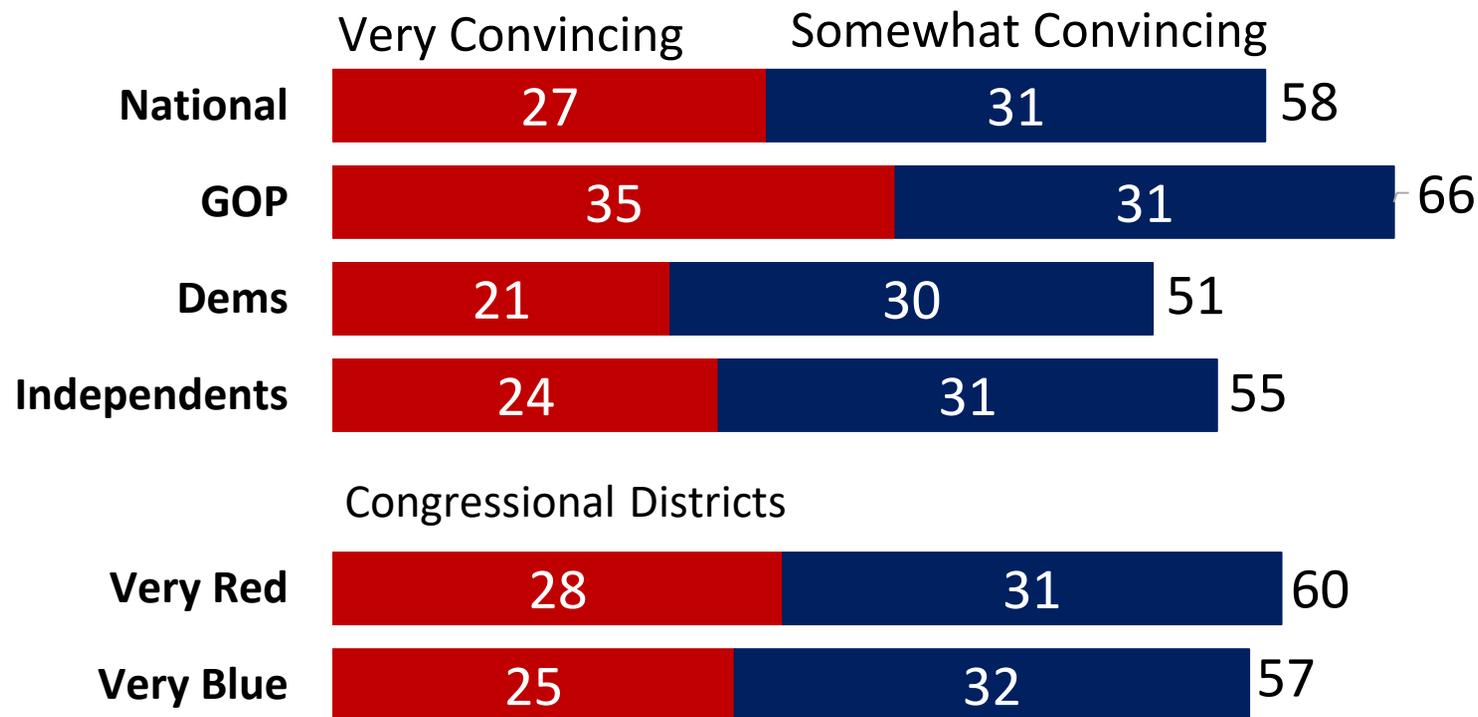
The whole idea of tax-exempt organizations is that they are providing a service for the common good. When people make contributions to tax-exempt organizations and get a deduction, this takes money away from the US Treasury, so in a way we all pay for the donation. Political activity in support of a political candidate is something that may serve some citizens, while others feel it is a disservice to them. Political activity should not be done on the taxpayer's dime.



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- Argument in Favor -

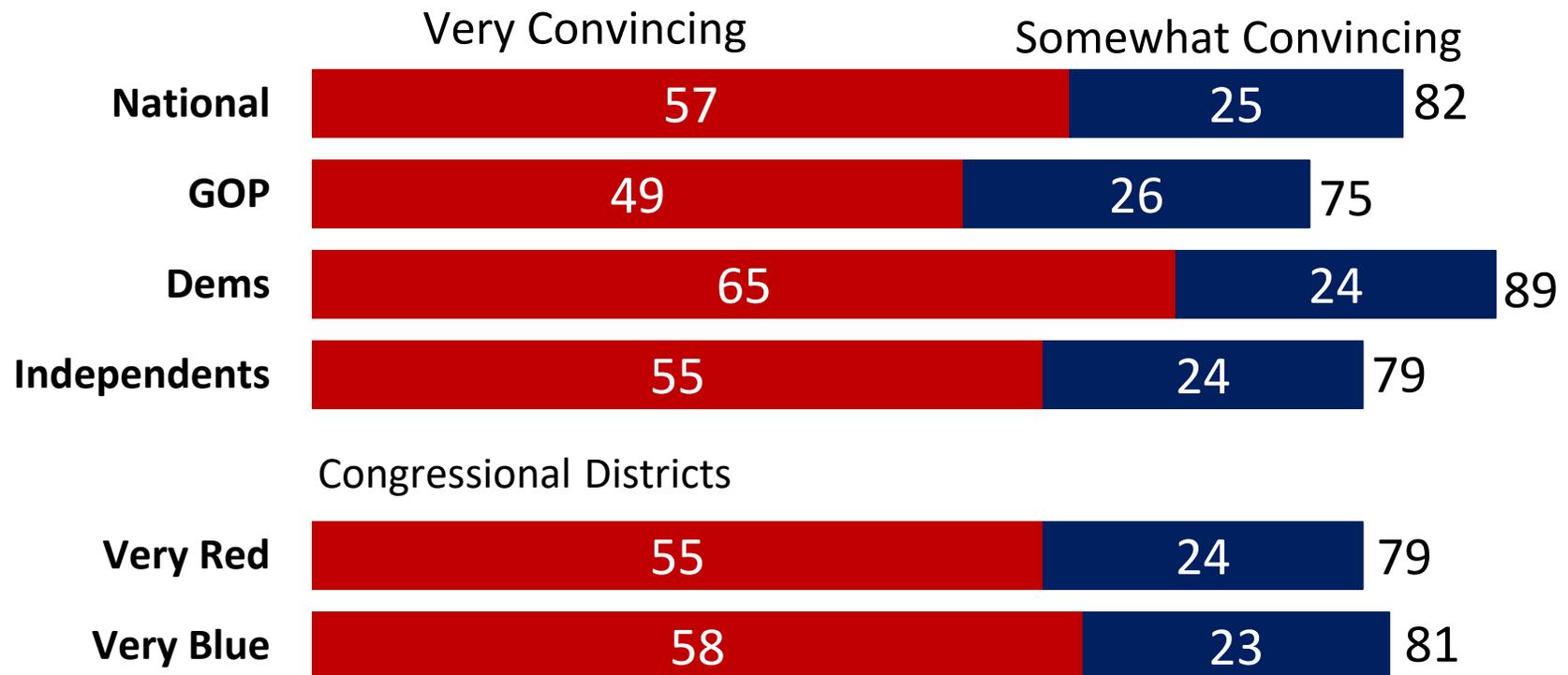
The First Amendment right of free expression is a core American value. We should not restrict Americans' freedom of expression when it comes to talking about who to vote for, whether in a church, a university, or in a conversation with neighbors. The choices we make as American voters are some of the most important decisions we make. Americans should be allowed to express their support for candidates wherever they may be or whatever position they may have in an organization.



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- Argument Against -

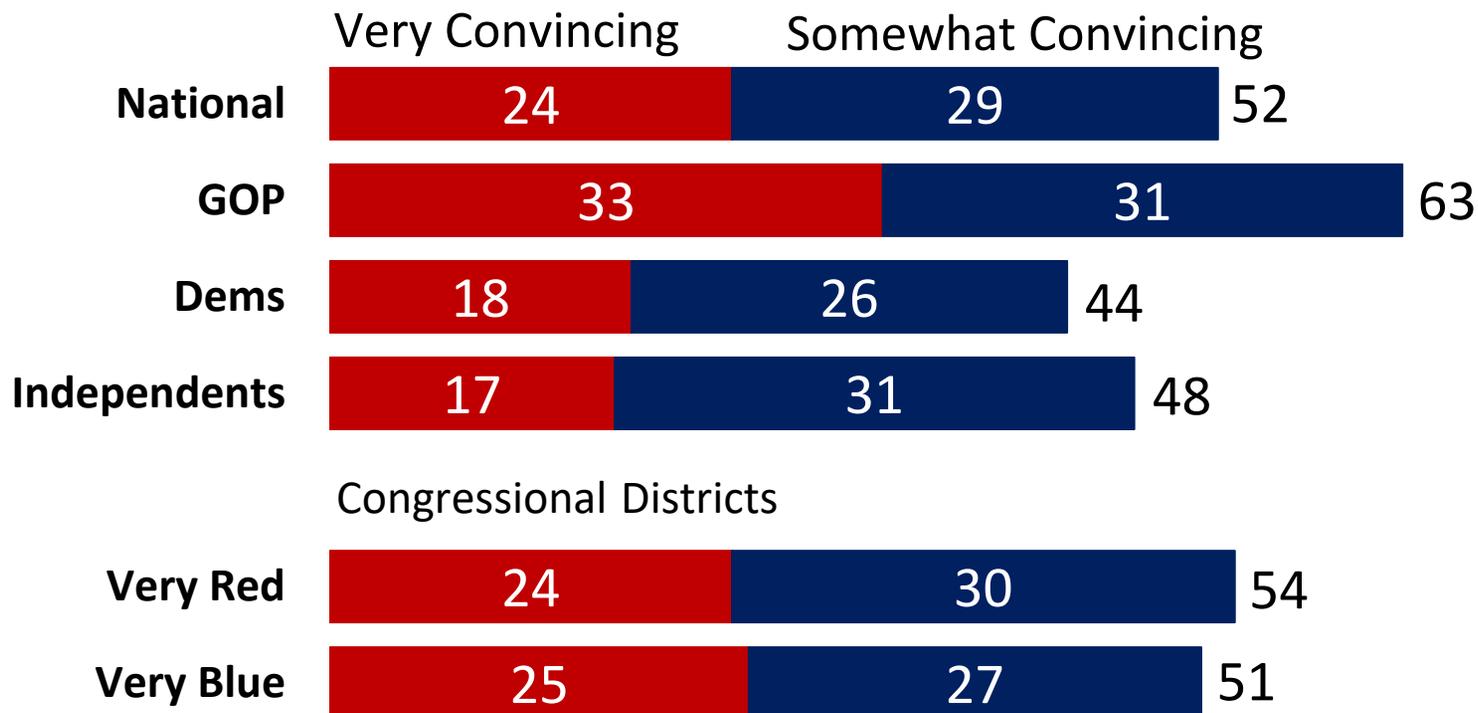
Americans are free to express their political views. But churches and universities should be special places where people can worship or study, not places where they are pressured to vote for specific candidates. If churches and universities can endorse political candidates, donors may start saying they will only contribute if the organization endorses a particular candidate. Houses of worship and universities may become affiliated with specific parties. Congregations will fracture. We already have enough political



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- Argument in Favor -

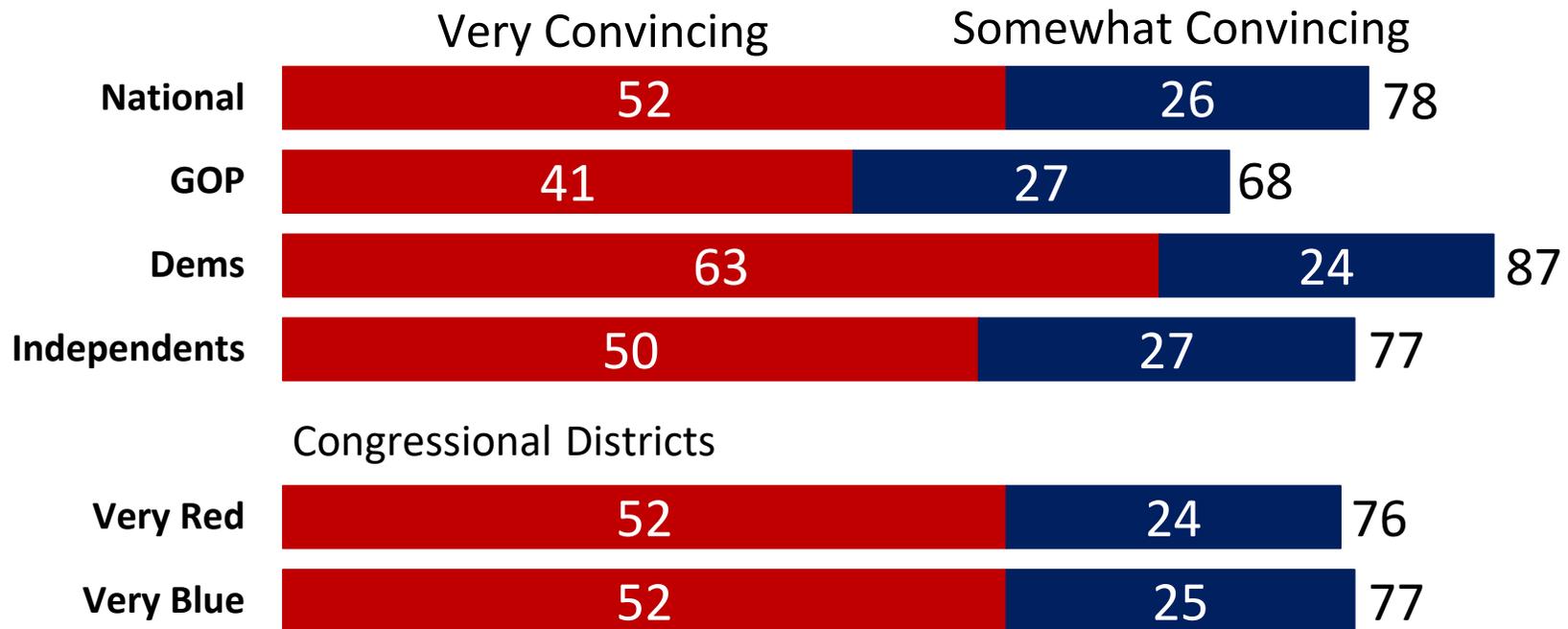
Before the 1960s, nonprofit organizations and houses of worship had the freedom to speak on political matters. They exercised that right responsibly and houses of worship were not turned into arms of political parties. We should return to the principle that every American should be able to speak freely about their conscience and convictions, within any institution, without fear that the institution will lose its tax-exempt status.



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- Argument Against -

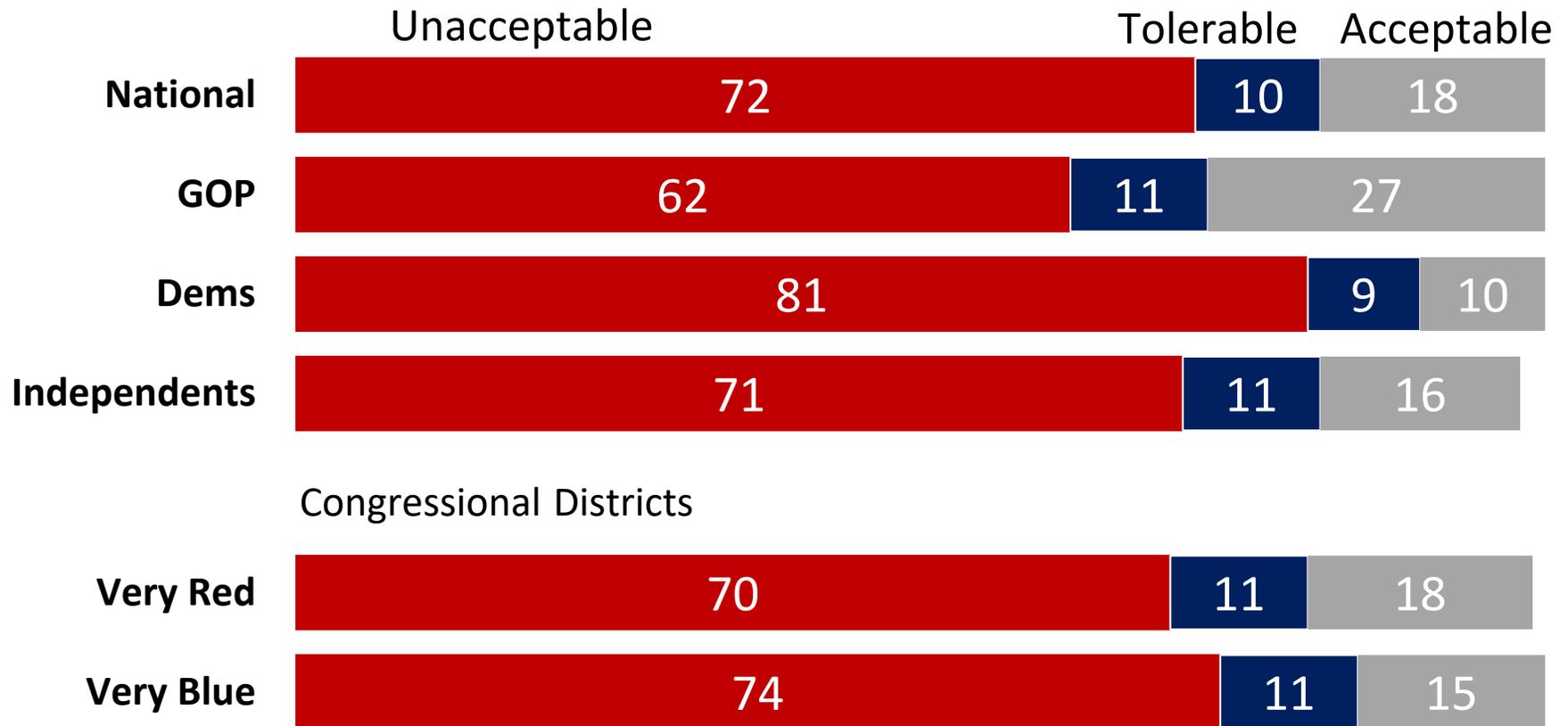
If we let tax-exempt organizations support political candidates, pretty soon most political contributions will be channeled through them because people can get a tax deduction for making the donation, something that particularly helps rich people. There are also no limits on how much you can give to a tax-exempt organization. This will open up the floodgates for unlimited and tax-deductible money to flow through houses of worship and other nonprofits in support of political candidates.



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- ASSESSMENT -

How acceptable would it be to you for Congress to pass a proposed bill, which would change current law and allow tax-exempt organizations to endorse political candidates and provide them money and other support, while keeping the organization's tax-exempt status.



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- FINAL RECOMMENDATION -

Do you recommend that your Members of Congress vote in favor of the proposed bill, or oppose proposed bill, thus keeping the current law?

