

# **AMERICAN GOVERNMENT IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**2021 EDITION**

***SPONSORED BY GWU AND THE SOCIETY OF  
PRESIDENTIAL POLLSTERS***

## SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This survey was conducted online within the United States from **September 8 – 9, 2021** among **1,803 registered voters** by HarrisX.

Results were weighted for age within gender, region, race/ethnicity, income, education, political party, and political ideology where necessary to align them with their actual proportions in the population.

## KEY FINDINGS

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Although voters say that America is currently on the wrong track, they are optimistic about the country's future



Majorities of both parties support keeping the filibuster as important check on power, although support among Democrats decreases after reading more information



Most voters say that Congress is not working, but that the other branches of government are. Congress is seen as powerful yet ineffective, while the Supreme Court is seen as effective, yet not very powerful



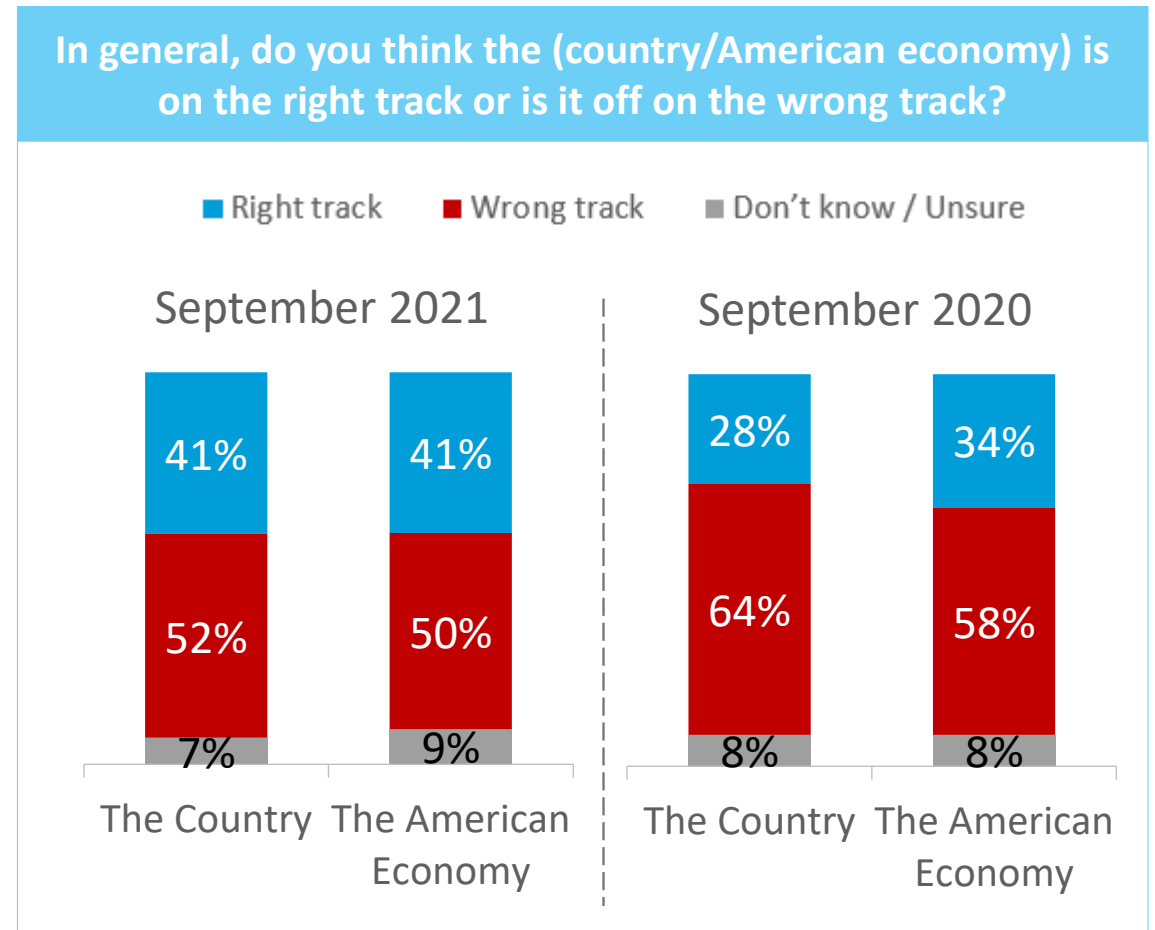
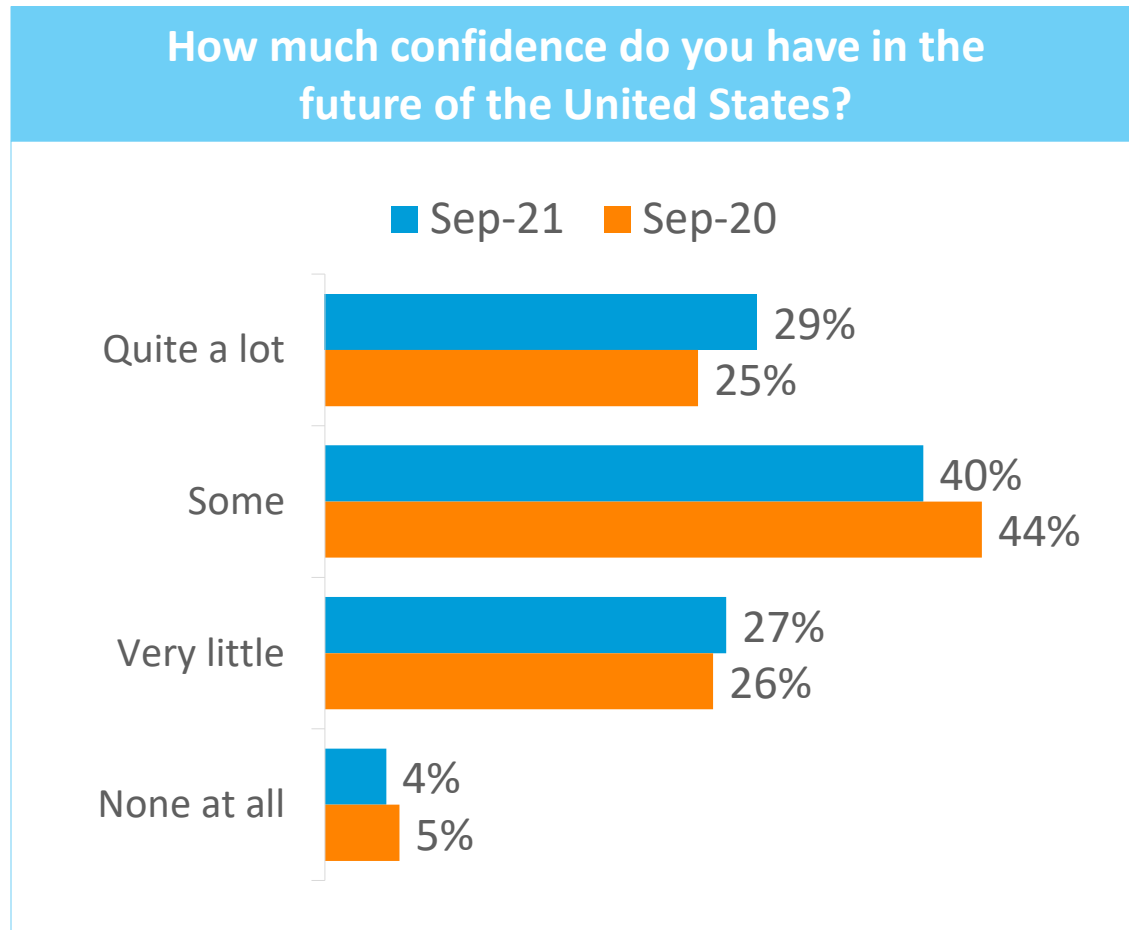
Just above half of voters believe that the use of executive orders has been proper and appropriate, though this view has primarily been driven by Democrats



Voters are increasingly optimistic about the bipartisan system of governing and creating legislation

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# MOST VOTERS HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED STATES, DESPITE THE CURRENT BELIEF THAT THE COUNTRY IS OFF ON THE WRONG TRACK



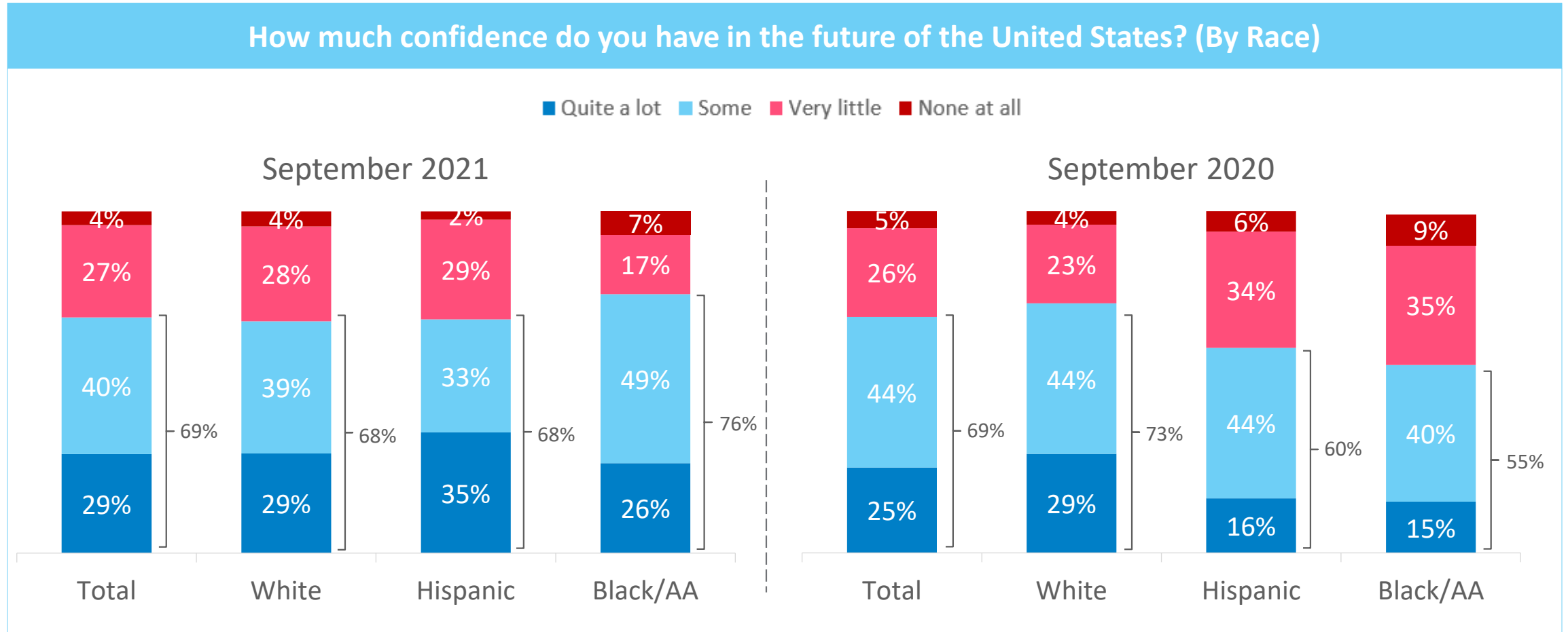
BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

TG1: How much confidence do you have in the future of the United States?

M1: In general, do you think the country is on the right track or is it off on the wrong track?

M2: In general, do you think the American economy is on the right track or is it off on the wrong track?

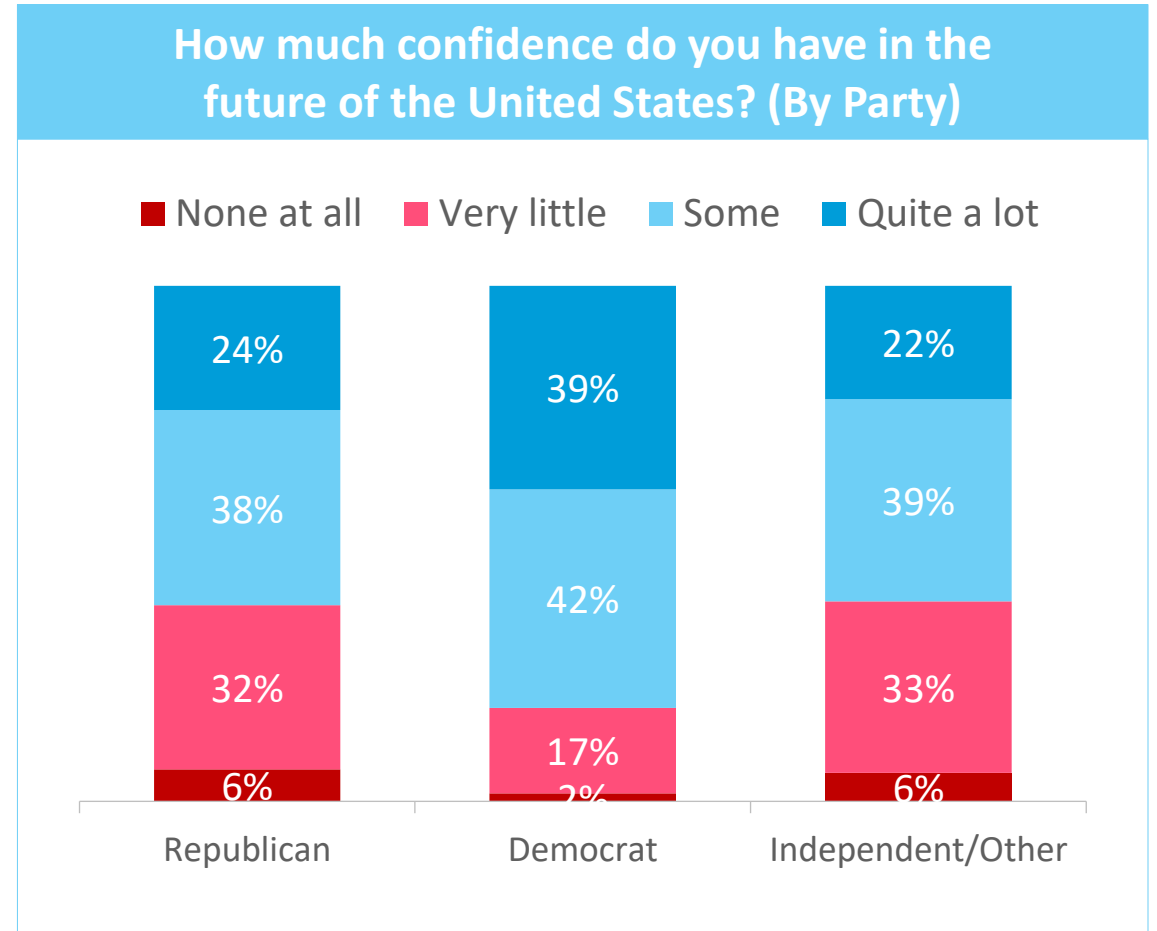
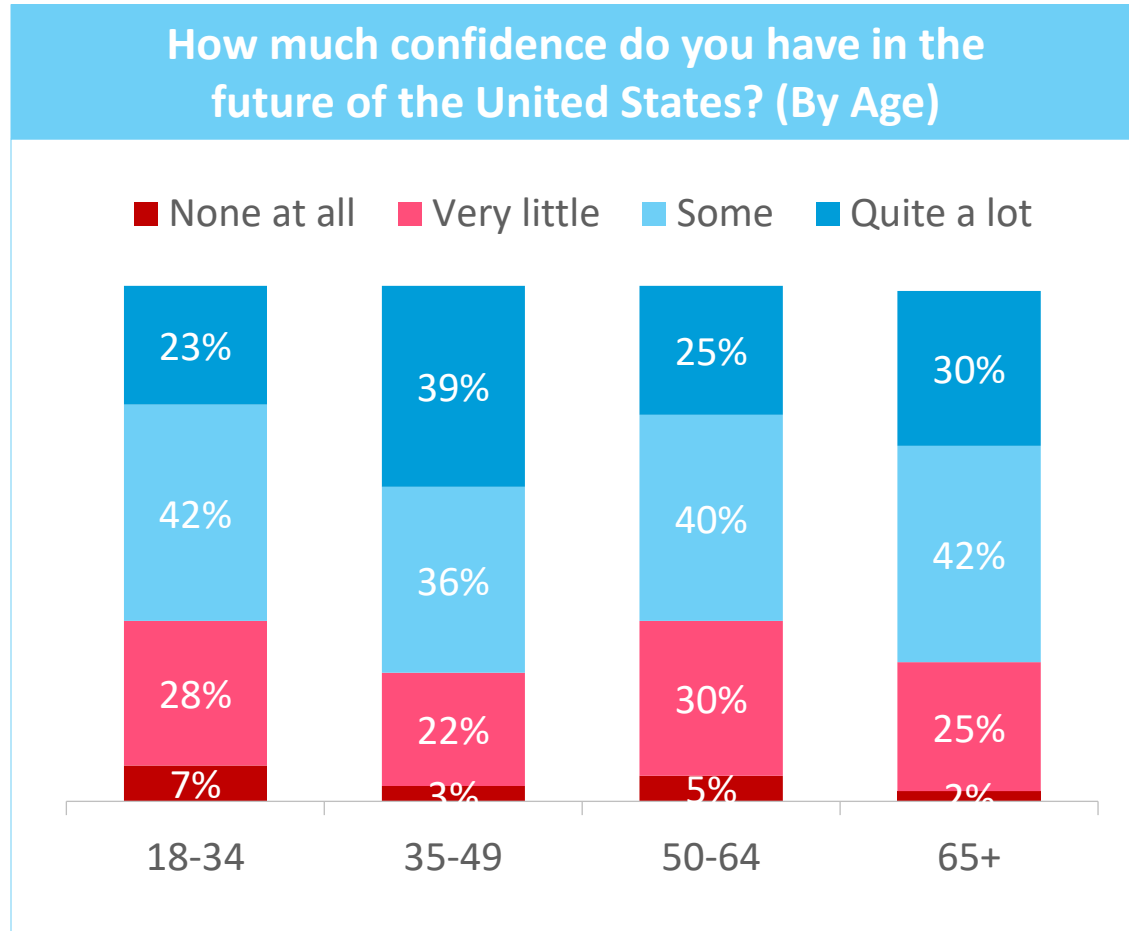
# THERE CONTINUES TO BE CONFIDENCE IN THE FUTURE OF THE UNITED STATES AMONG ALL RACIAL GROUPS



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

TG1: How much confidence do you have in the future of the United States?

# A MAJORITY OF VOTERS, NO MATTER THE AGE OR PARTY IDENTIFICATION, HAVE CONFIDENCE IN THE UNITED STATES IN 2021

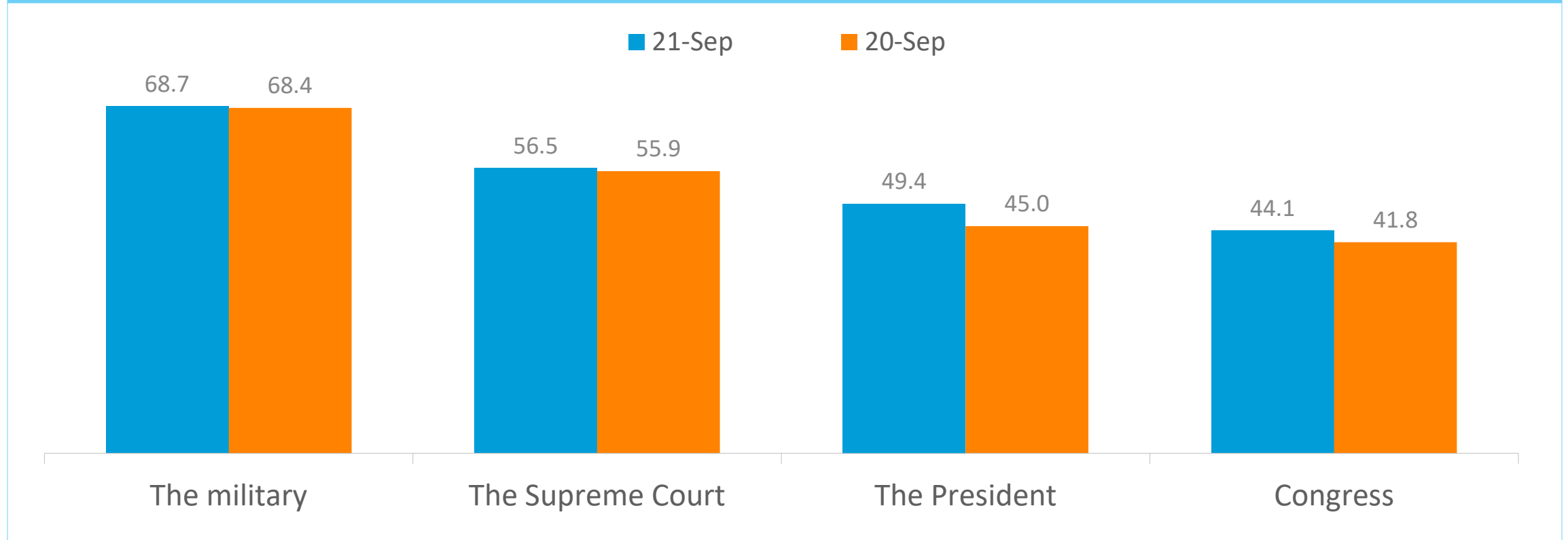


BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

TG1: How much confidence do you have in the future of the United States?

# VOTERS HAVE THE MOST CONFIDENCE IN THE MILITARY, FOLLOWED BY THE SUPREME COURT

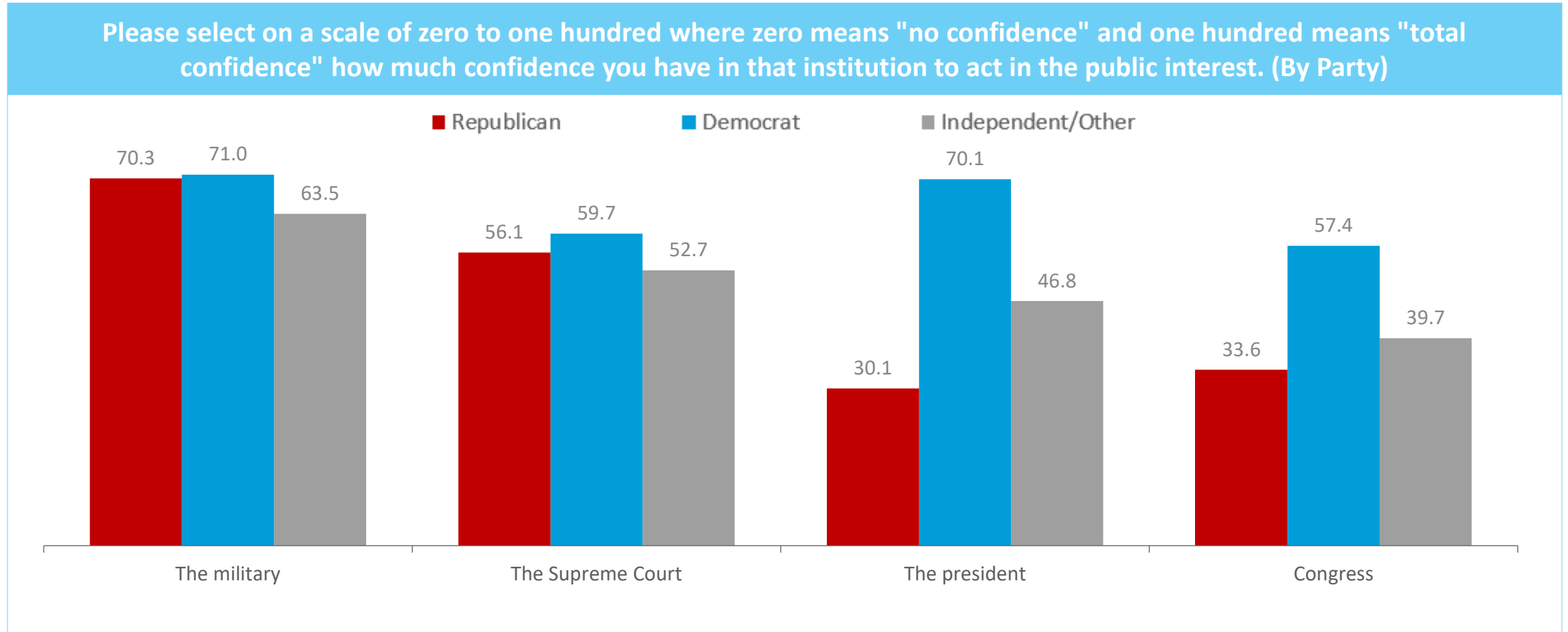
Please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means "no confidence" and one hundred means "total confidence" how much confidence you have in that institution to act in the public interest.



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

TG3 – TG6: Now you will see some government institutions. For each one, please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means "no confidence" and one hundred means "total confidence" how much confidence you have in that institution to act in the public interest.

# VIEW OF THE PRESIDENT AND CONGRESS IS DIVIDED ALONG PARTISAN LINES, UNLIKE THE MILITARY AND SUPREME COURT

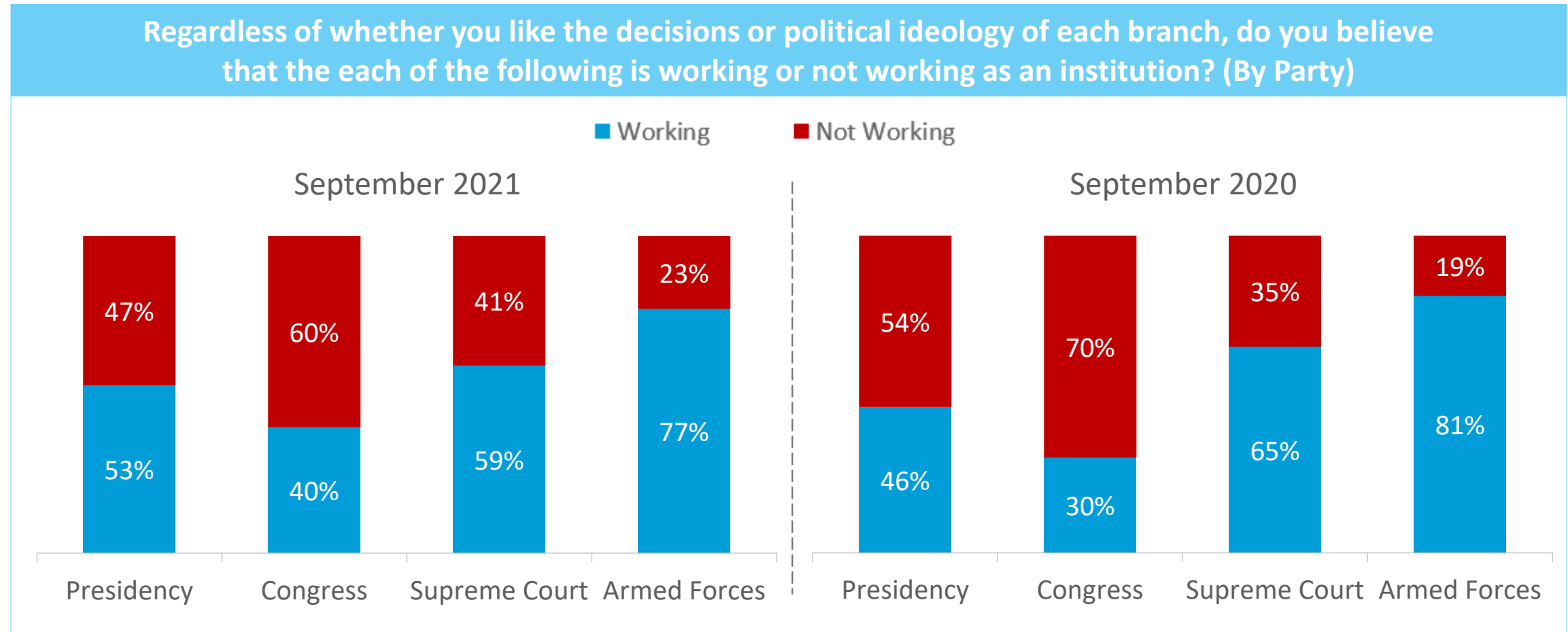


BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803)

TG3 – TG6: Now you will see some government institutions. For each one, please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means "no confidence" and one hundred means "total confidence" how much confidence you have in that institution to act in the public interest.



# OVER HALF OF VOTERS SAY THAT CONGRESS IS NOT WORKING, BUT THAT THE PRESIDENCY, SUPREME COURT, AND THE ARMED FORCES ARE WORKING



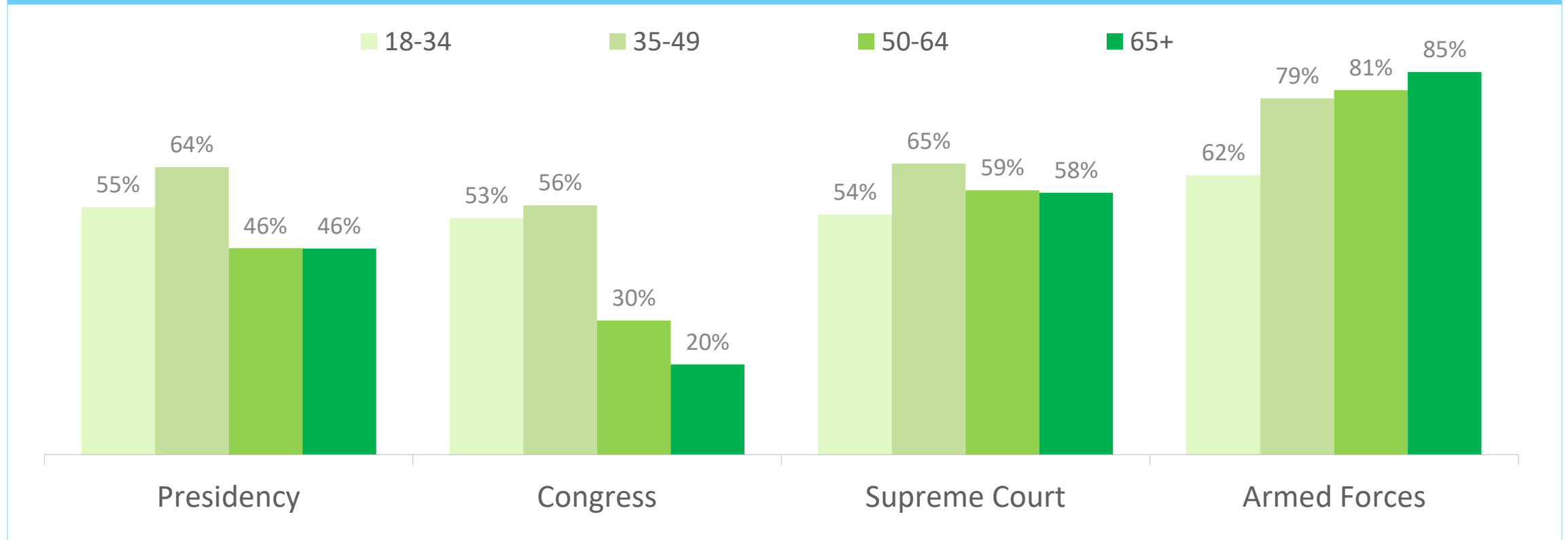
BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

Regardless of whether you like the decisions or political ideology of each branch, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution?

C1r1: Presidency C1r2: Congress C1r3: Supreme Court C1r4: Armed Forces

# MORE THAN HALF OF VOTERS UNDER 50 BELIEVE THAT CONGRESS IS WORKING, WHILE ONLY 20% OF VOTERS 65+ SHARE THAT BELIEF

Regardless of whether you like the decisions or political ideology of each branch, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution? (% Working by Age)



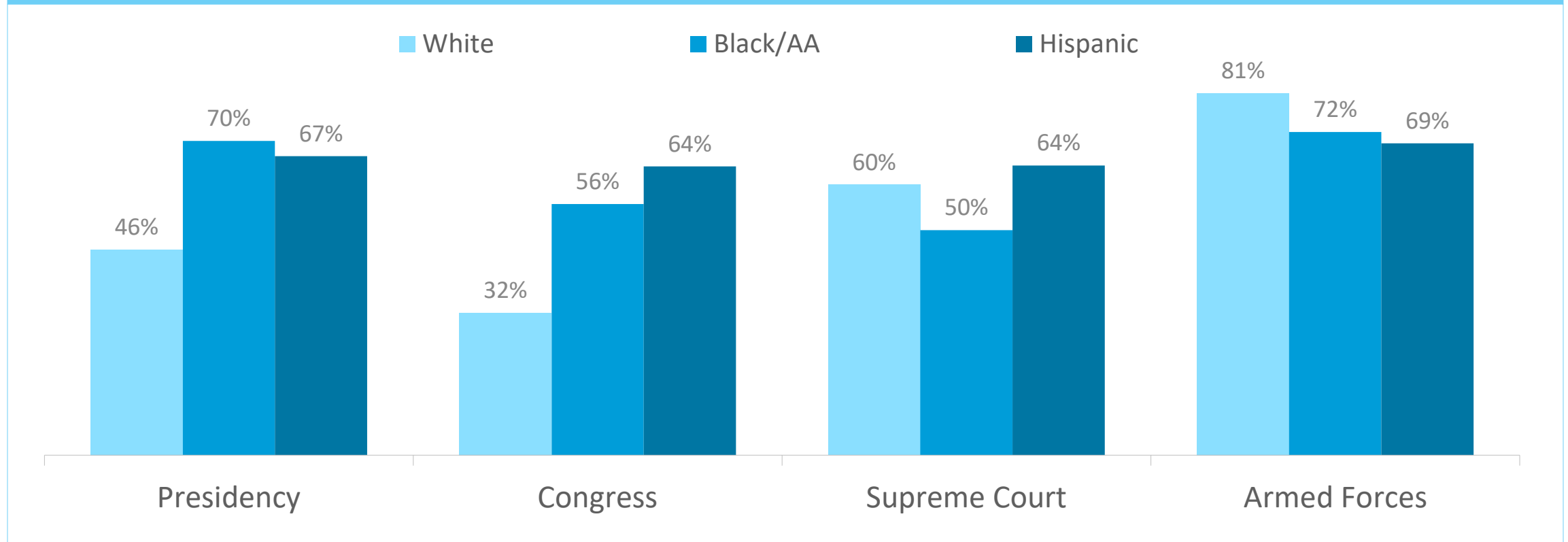
BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

Regardless of whether you like the decisions or political ideology of each branch, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution?

C1r1: Presidency C1r2: Congress C1r3: Supreme Court C1r4: Armed Forces

# FEWER THAN HALF OF WHITE VOTERS SAY THAT THE PRESIDENCY AND CONGRESS IS WORKING, COMPARED WITH MAJORITIES OF BLACKS AND HISPANICS

Regardless of whether you like the decisions or political ideology of each branch, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution? (% Working by Race)



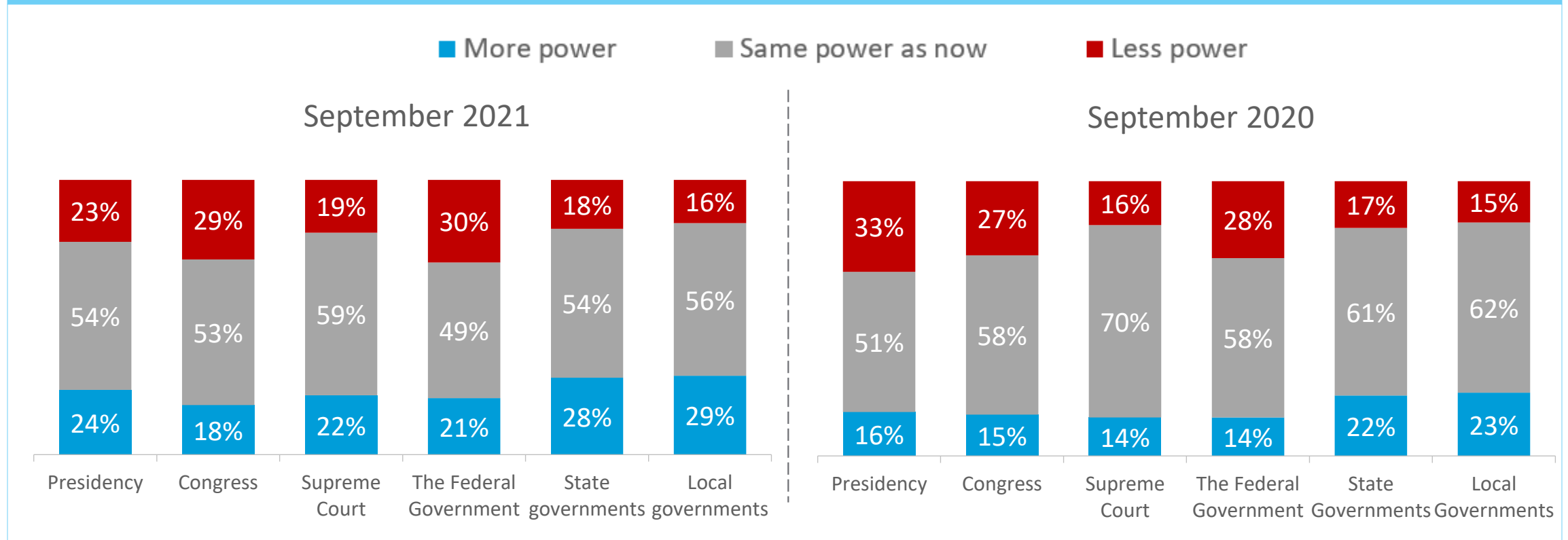
BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

Regardless of whether you like the decisions or political ideology of each branch, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution?

C1r1: Presidency C1r2: Congress C1r3: Supreme Court C1r4: Armed Forces

# MOST VOTERS THINK THAT VARIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT SHOULD HAVE THE SAME AMOUNT OF POWER AS THEY HAVE NOW

In general, do you think each of these institutions/levels of Government, regardless of who is leading them at any given moment, should have more power, less power, or the same power as now?



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

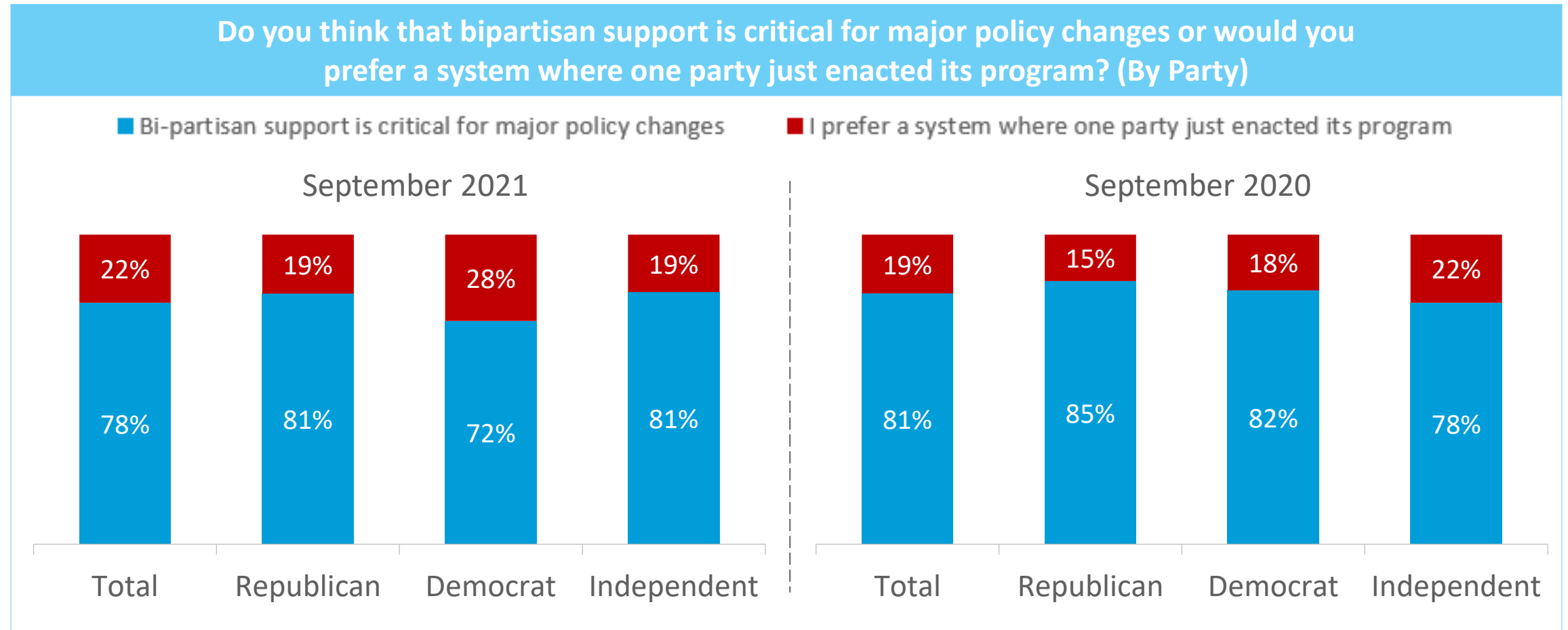
In general, do you think each of these institutions, regardless of who is leading them at any given moment, should have more power, less power, or the same power as now?

C2r1: Presidency C2r2: Congress C2r3: Supreme Court

In general, for each of these levels of government, regardless of who is leading them at any given moment, should have more power, less power, or the same power as now?

C2Xr1: The federal government C2Xr2: State governments C2Xr3: Local governments

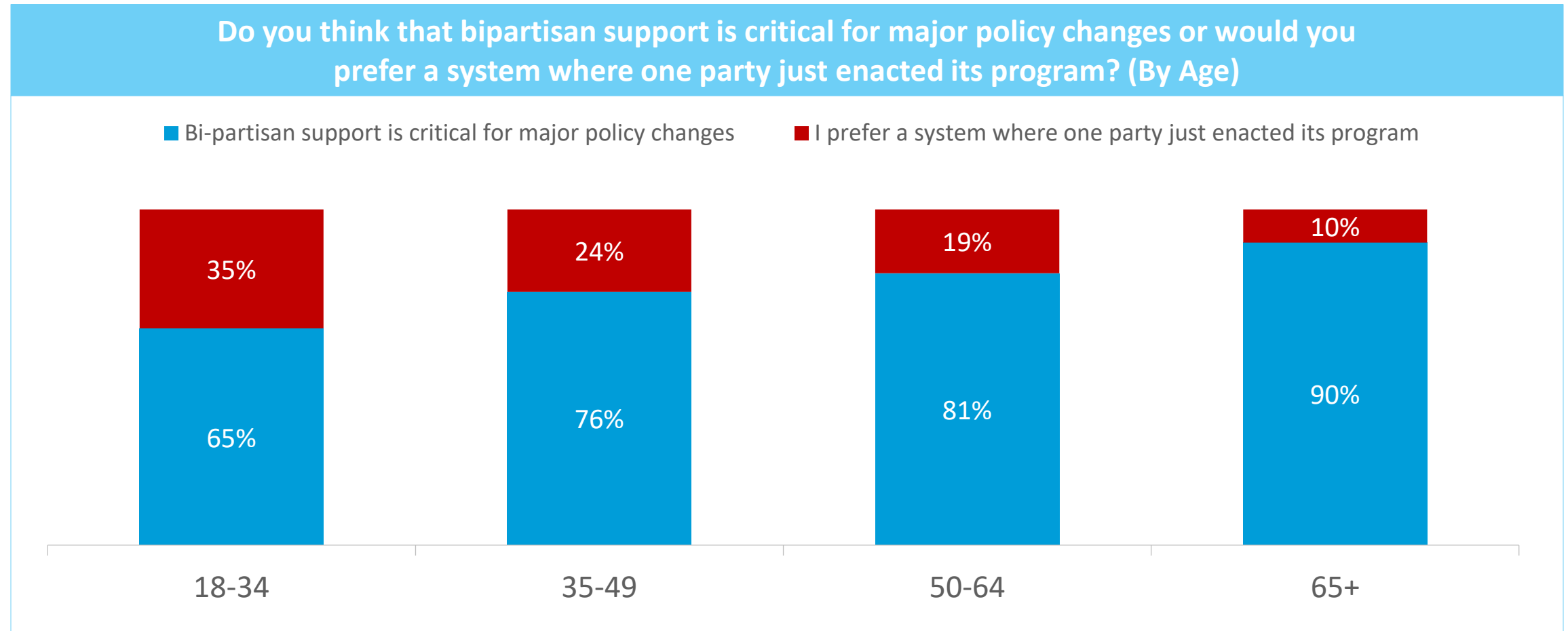
# MOST VOTERS, REGARDLESS OF PARTY, BELIEVE THAT BIPARTISAN SUPPORT IS CRITICAL FOR MAJOR POLICY CHANGES



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C3: Do you think that bipartisan support is critical for major policy changes or would you prefer a system where one party just enacted its program?

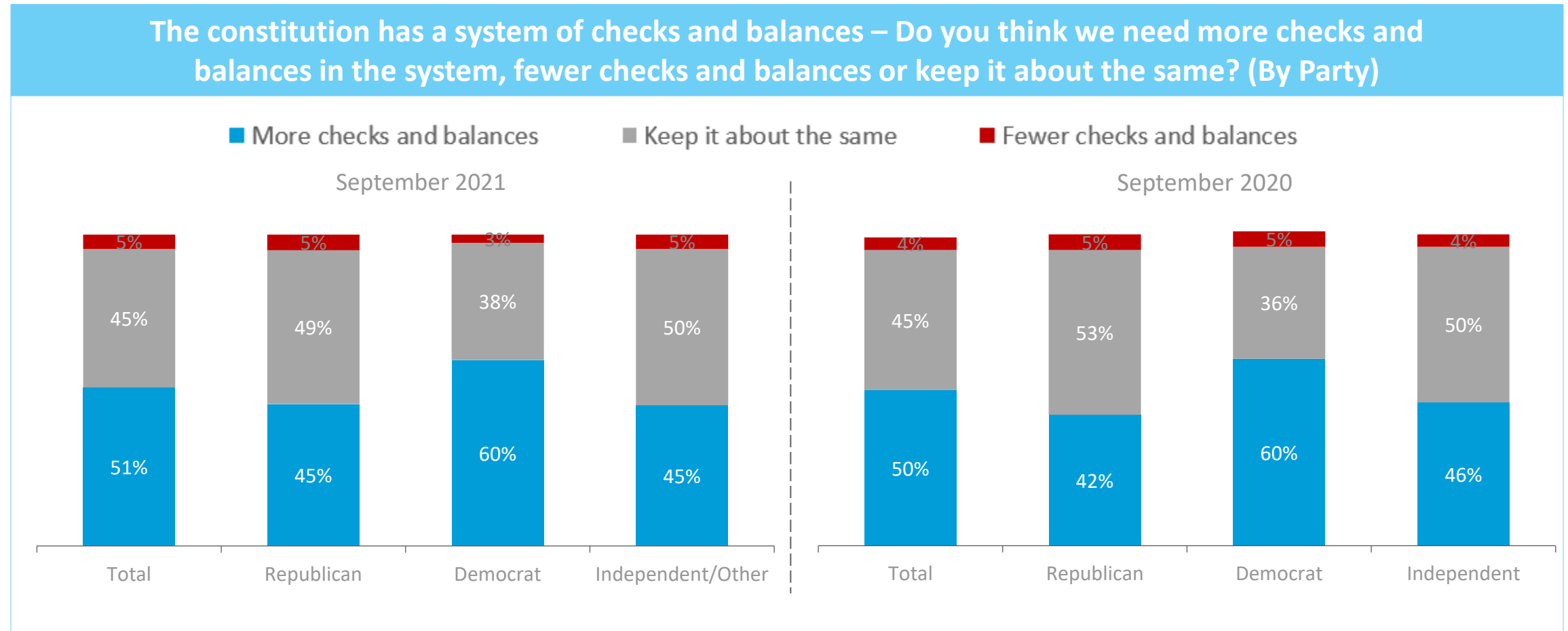
# OLDER VOTERS ARE MUCH MORE LIKELY TO THINK THAT BIPARTISAN SUPPORT IS CRITICAL FOR MAJOR POLICY CHANGES, WHILE YOUNGER VOTERS ARE SLIGHTLY MORE LIKELY TO PREFER ONE PARTY SYSTEMS



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C3: Do you think that bipartisan support is critical for major policy changes or would you prefer a system where one party just enacted its program?

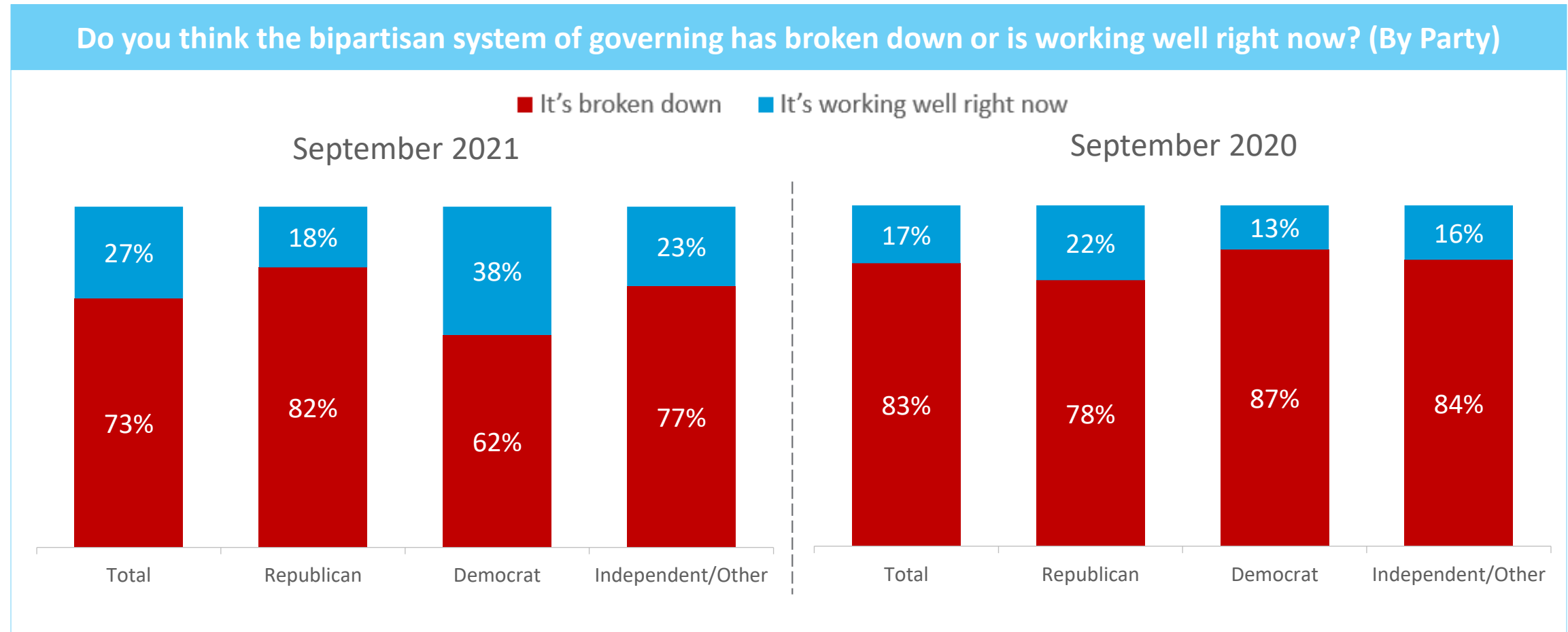
# HOWEVER, HALF OF VOTERS CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THAT THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE CHECKS AND BALANCES IN THE SYSTEM



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C4: The constitution has a system of checks and balances - do you think we need more checks and balances in the system, fewer checks and balances or keep it about the same?

# LIKE LAST YEAR, MOST VOTERS FEEL THE BIPARTISAN SYSTEM IS BROKEN DOWN, BUT 38% OF DEMOCRATS FEEL IT'S WORKING WELL, UP FROM 13% IN 2020

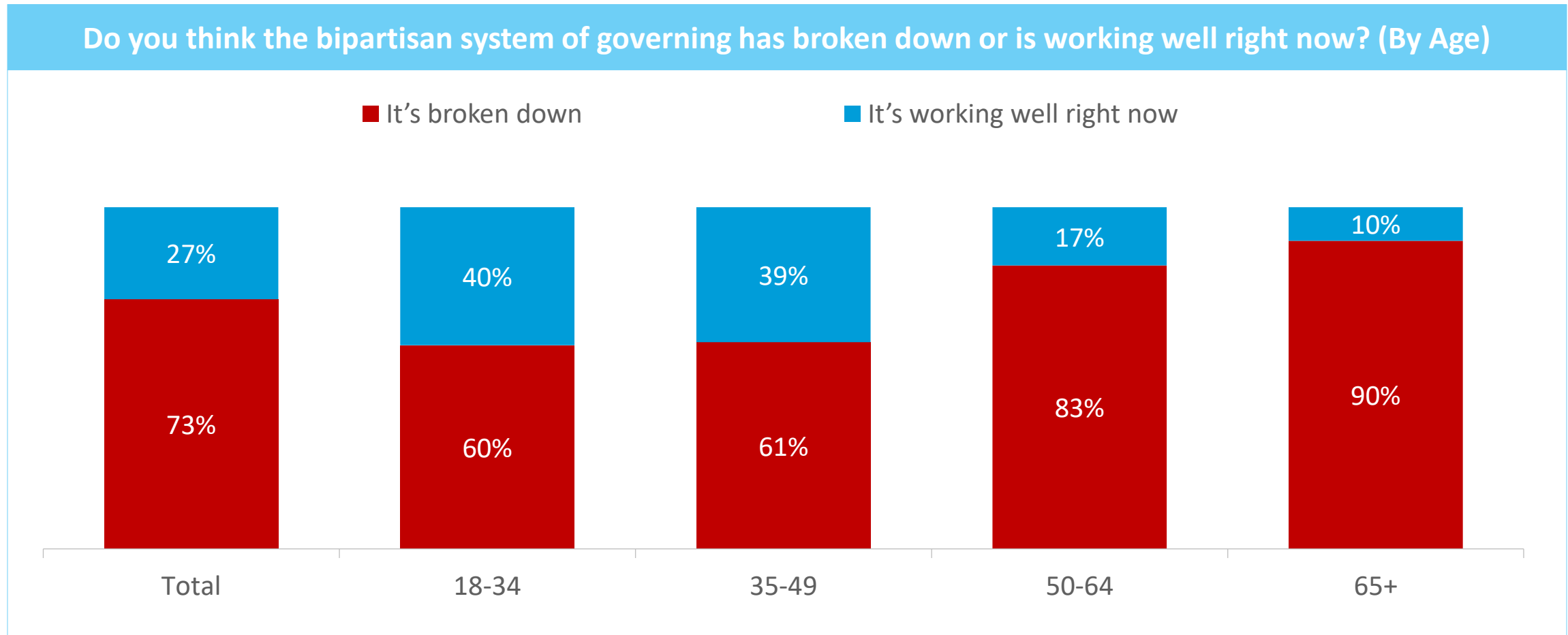


BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C5: Do you think the bipartisan system of governing has broken down or is working well right now?



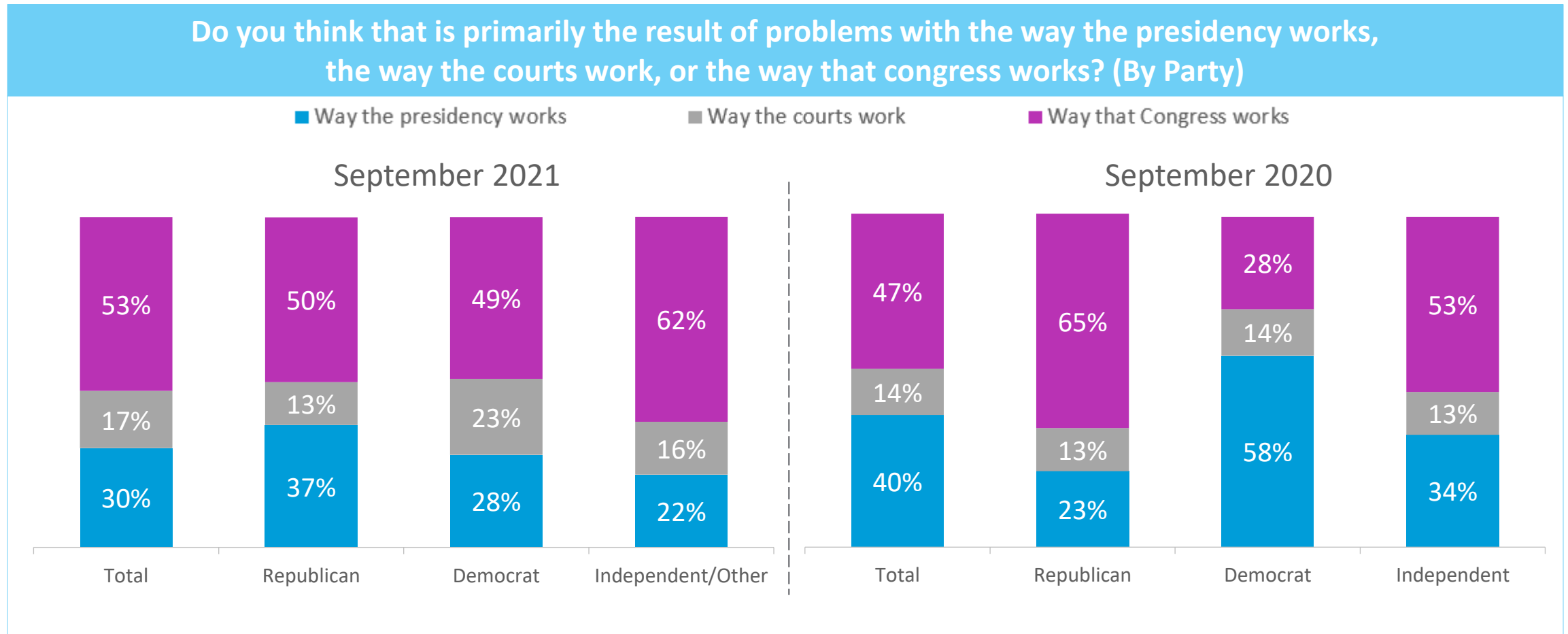
# ALMOST HALF OF VOTERS 18-34 SAY THAT BI-PARTISANSHIP IS WORKING WELL, COMPARED WITH JUST 10% OF VOTERS 60+



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C5: Do you think the bipartisan system of governing has broken down or is working well right now?

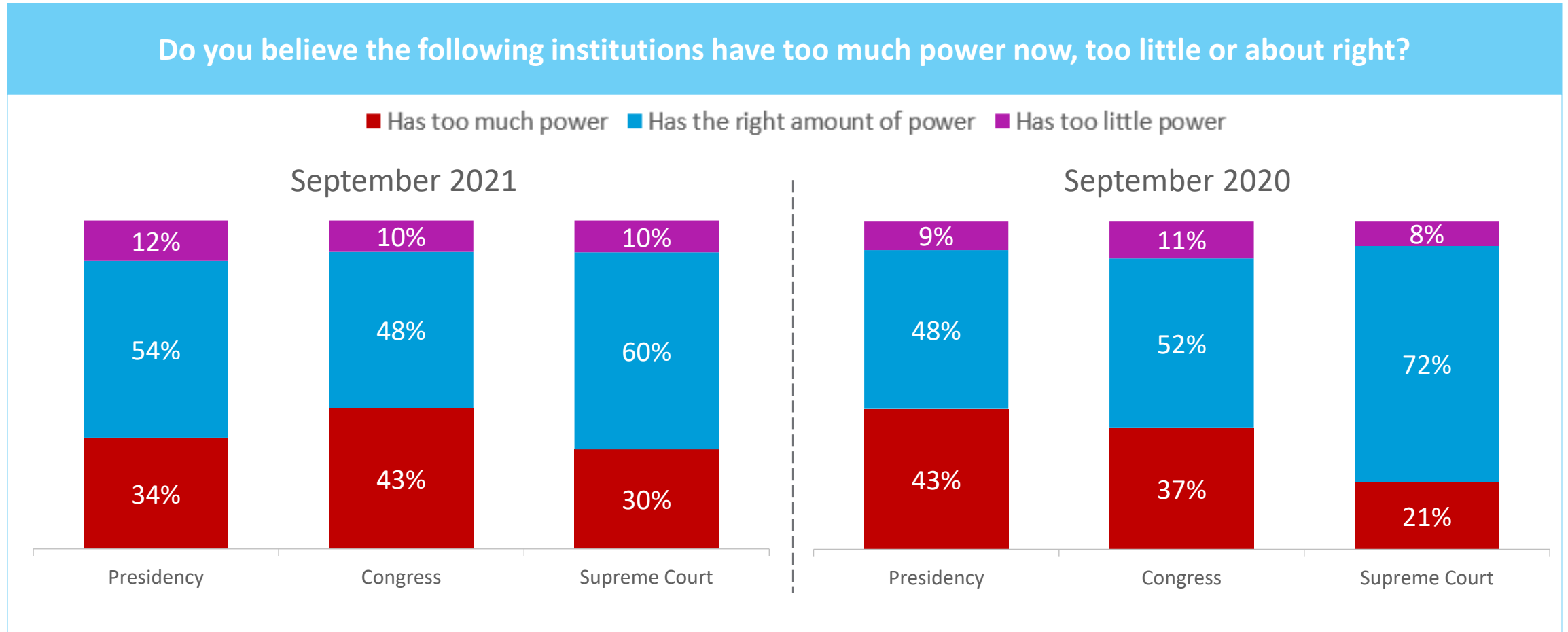
# REPUBLICAN BLAME SHIFTED FROM CONGRESS TO THE PRESIDENCY BETWEEN 2020 AND 2021, WHILE INDEPENDENT BLAME SHIFTED TO CONGRESS AND AWAY FROM THE PRESIDENCY OVER THE PAST YEAR



BASE: Bipartisan system is broken down (September 2021 n=1,053; September 2020 n=1,601)

C6: Do you think that is primarily the result of problems with the way the presidency works, the way the courts work, or the way that congress works?

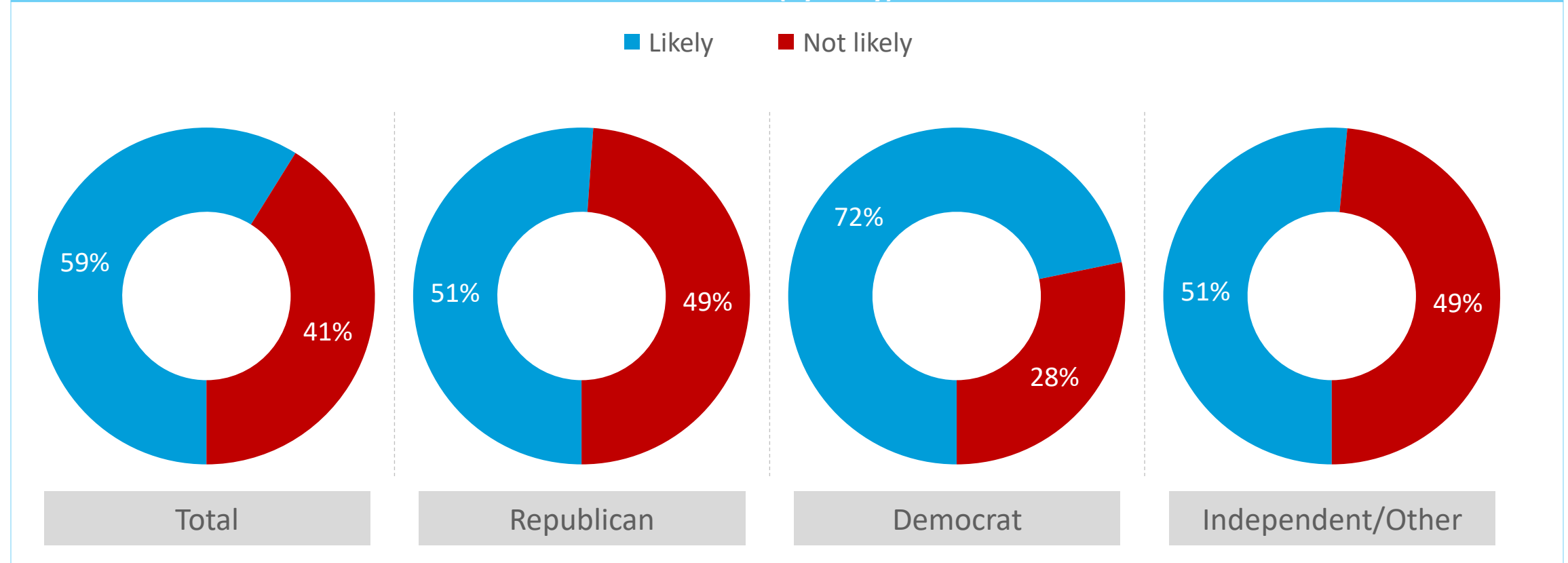
# 43% SAY THAT CONGRESS HAS TOO MUCH POWER, UP 6% FROM 2020



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)  
C7: Do you believe the following institutions have too much power now, too little or about right?

# MAJORITY OF DEMOCRATS SAY THAT PEOPLE WOULD LIKELY RECOGNIZE THOSE WHO HOLD POSITIONS IN GOVERNMENT, COMPARED WITH HALF OF REPUBLICANS

Do you think people who hold major positions in the government are now more or less likely to be recognized by the average citizen? (By Party)

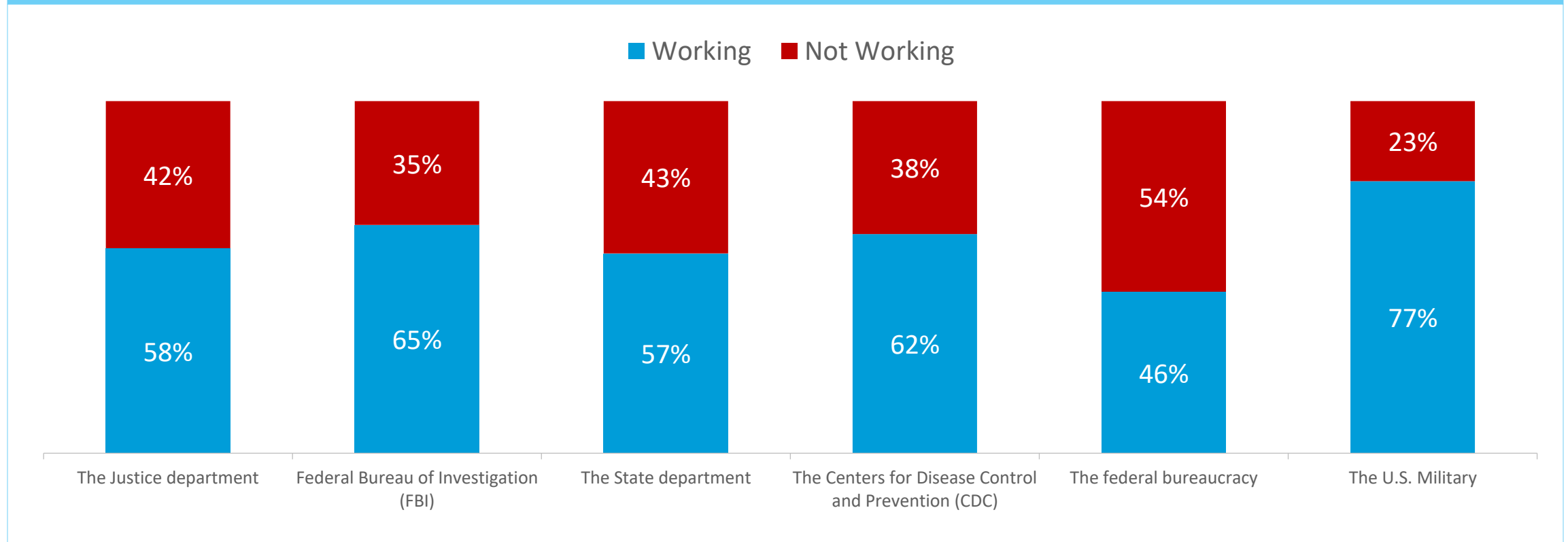


BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C7A: Do you think people who hold major positions in the government are now more or less likely to be recognized by the average citizen?

## 3 IN 4 VOTERS SAY THAT THE MILITARY IS WORKING AS AN INSTITUTION

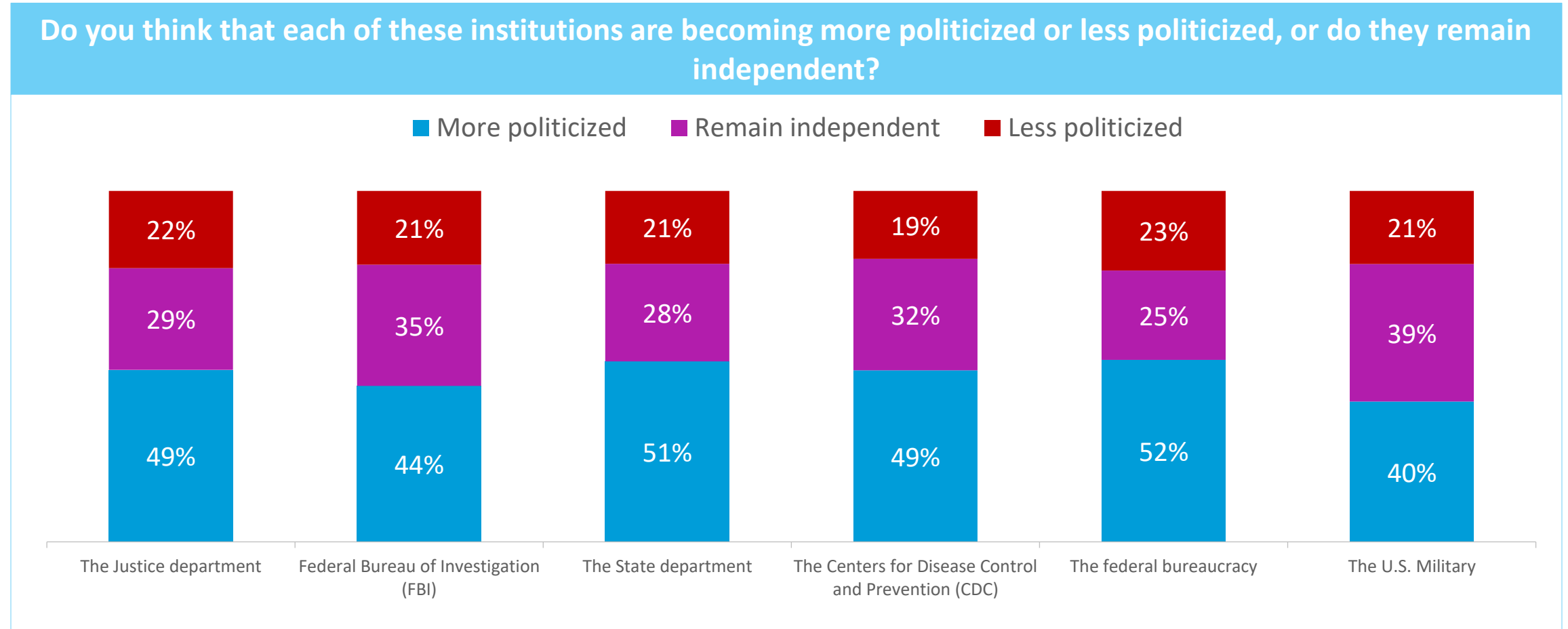
Regardless of whether you like the decisions made, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution?



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803)

C7B: Regardless of whether you like the decisions made, do you believe that the each of the following is working or not working as an institution?

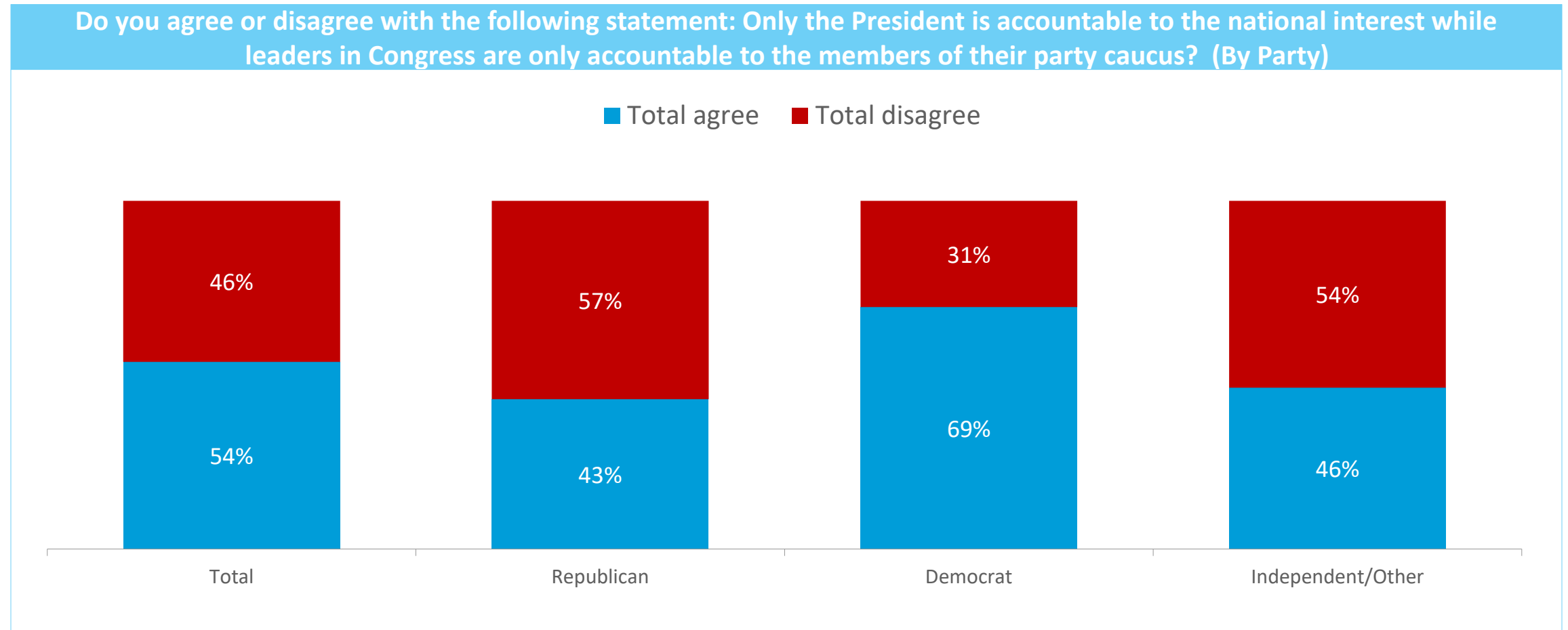
# AROUND HALF OF VOTERS SAY THAT THE STATE DEPARTMENT AND THE CDC ARE BECOMING MORE POLITICIZED



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803)

C7C: Do you think that each of these institutions are becoming more politicized or less politicized, or do they remain independent?

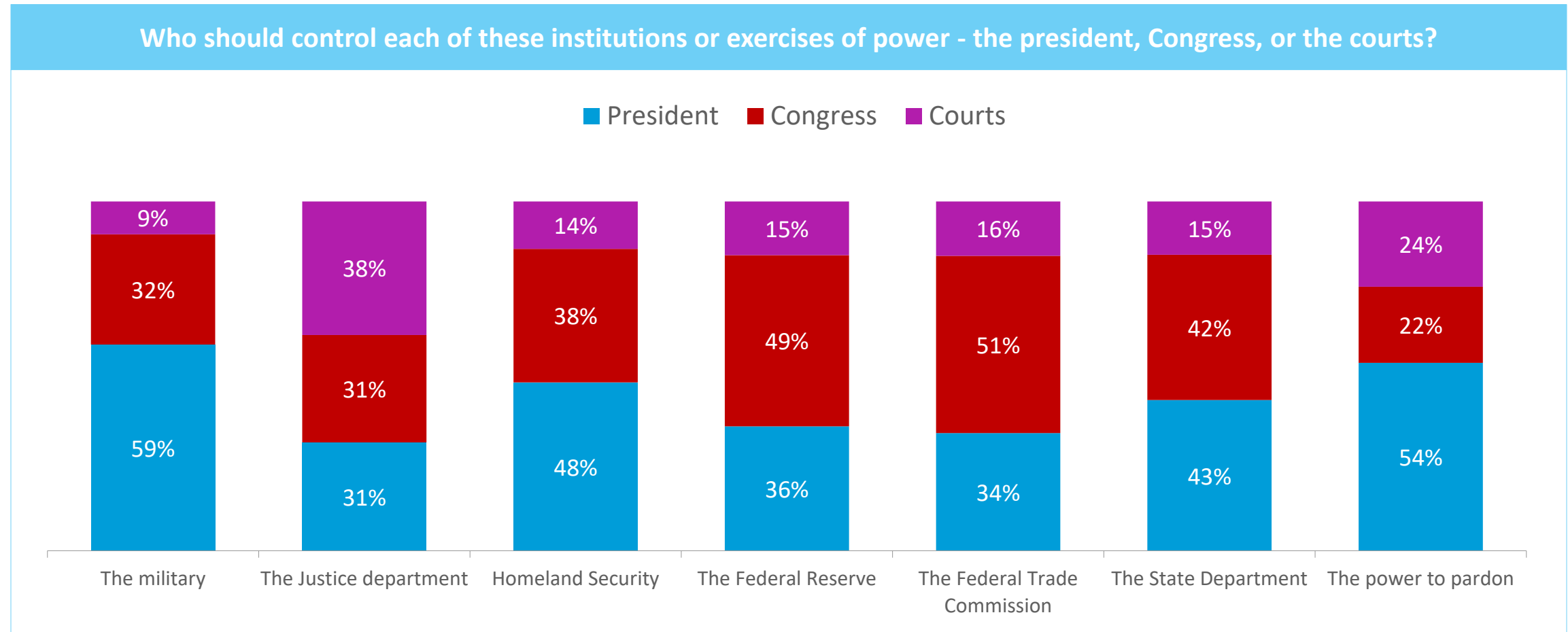
# MAJORITY OF DEMOCRATS AGREE THAT ONLY THE PRESIDENT IS ACCOUNTABLE TO THE NATIONAL INTEREST, COMPARED WITH 43% OF REPUBLICANS



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C7D: Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: Only the President is accountable to the national interest while leaders in Congress are only accountable to the members of their party caucus?

# MOST VOTERS BELIEVE THAT THE PRESIDENT OR CONGRESS SHOULD HOLD CONTROL OVER MOST MAJOR INSTITUTIONS EXCEPT FOR THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT



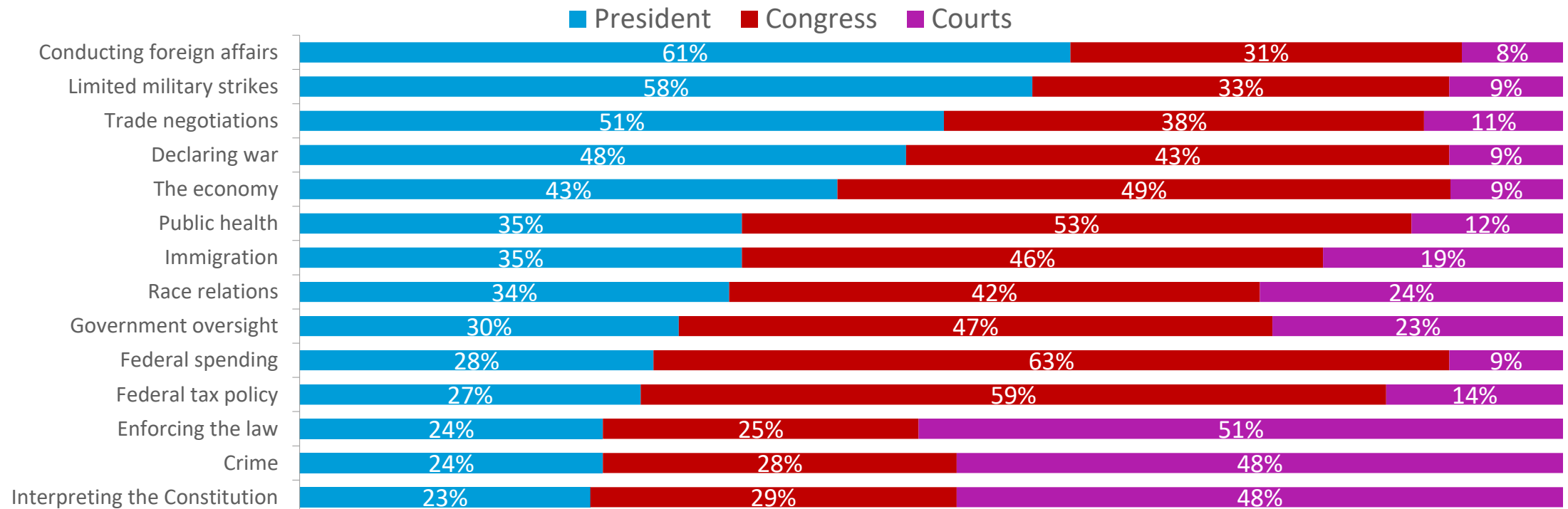
BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C8: Who should control each of these institutions or exercises of power - the president, Congress, or the courts?



# VOTERS SAY THAT THE PRESIDENT SHOULD CONTROL FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND MILITARY STRIKES AND CONGRESS SHOULD CONTROL FEDERAL SPENDING AND TAX POLICY

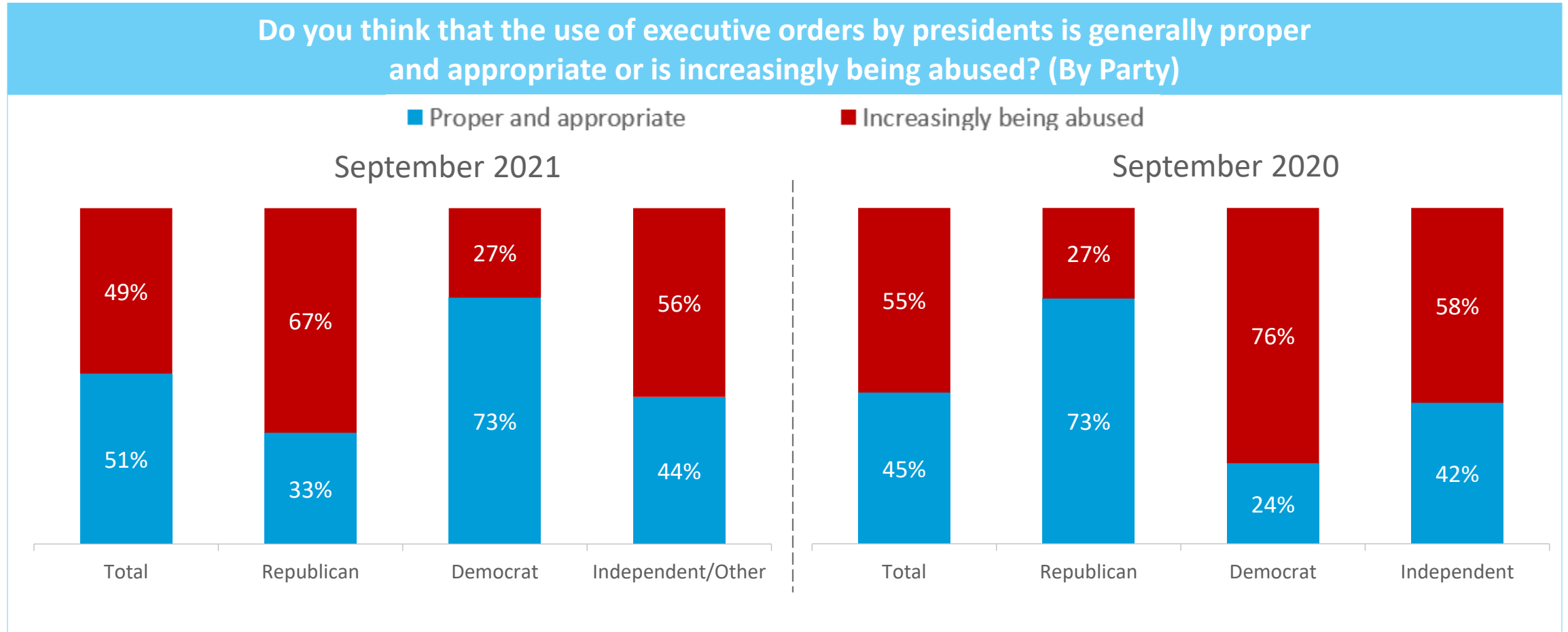
Who should control each of these institutions or exercises of power - the president, Congress, or the courts?



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C8A: Who should be most responsible for the following government actions - the president, Congress, or the courts?

# JUST ABOVE HALF OF VOTERS BELIEVE THAT THE USE OF EXECUTIVE ORDERS HAS BEEN PROPER AND APPROPRIATE; THIS IS PRIMARILY DRIVEN BY DEMOCRATS

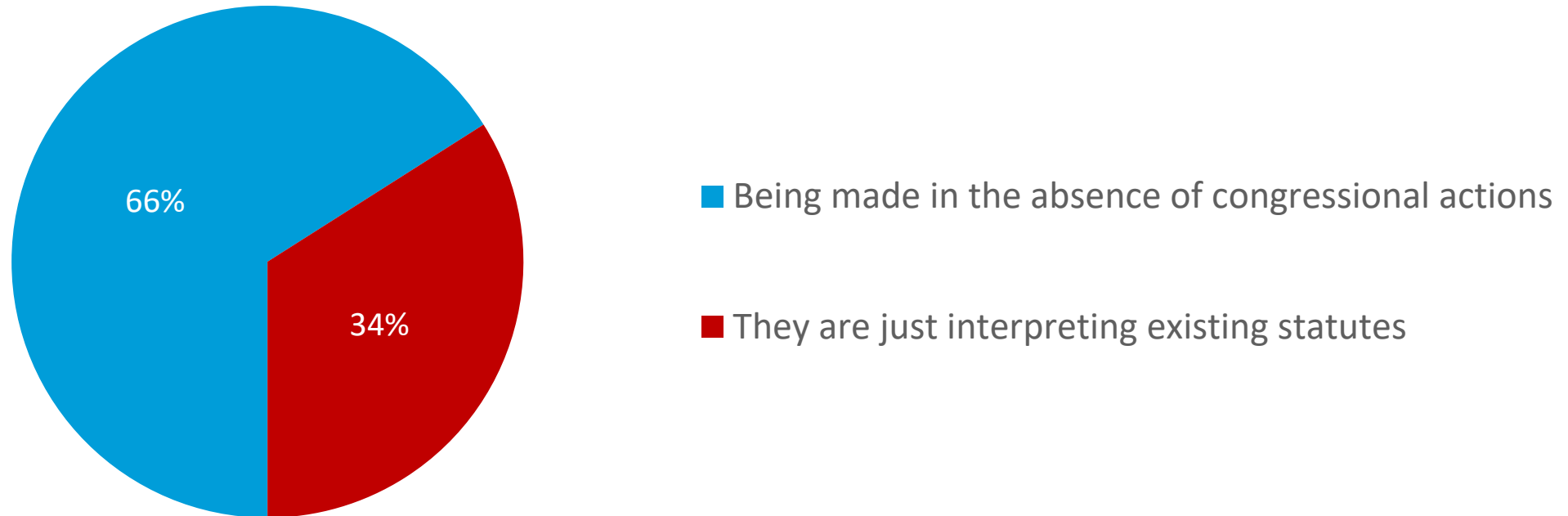


BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C9: Do you think that the use of executive orders by presidents is generally proper and appropriate or is increasingly being abused?

# A MAJORITY OF VOTERS SAY THAT LEGISLATION IS BEING MADE IN THE ABSENCE OF CONGRESSIONAL ACTIONS

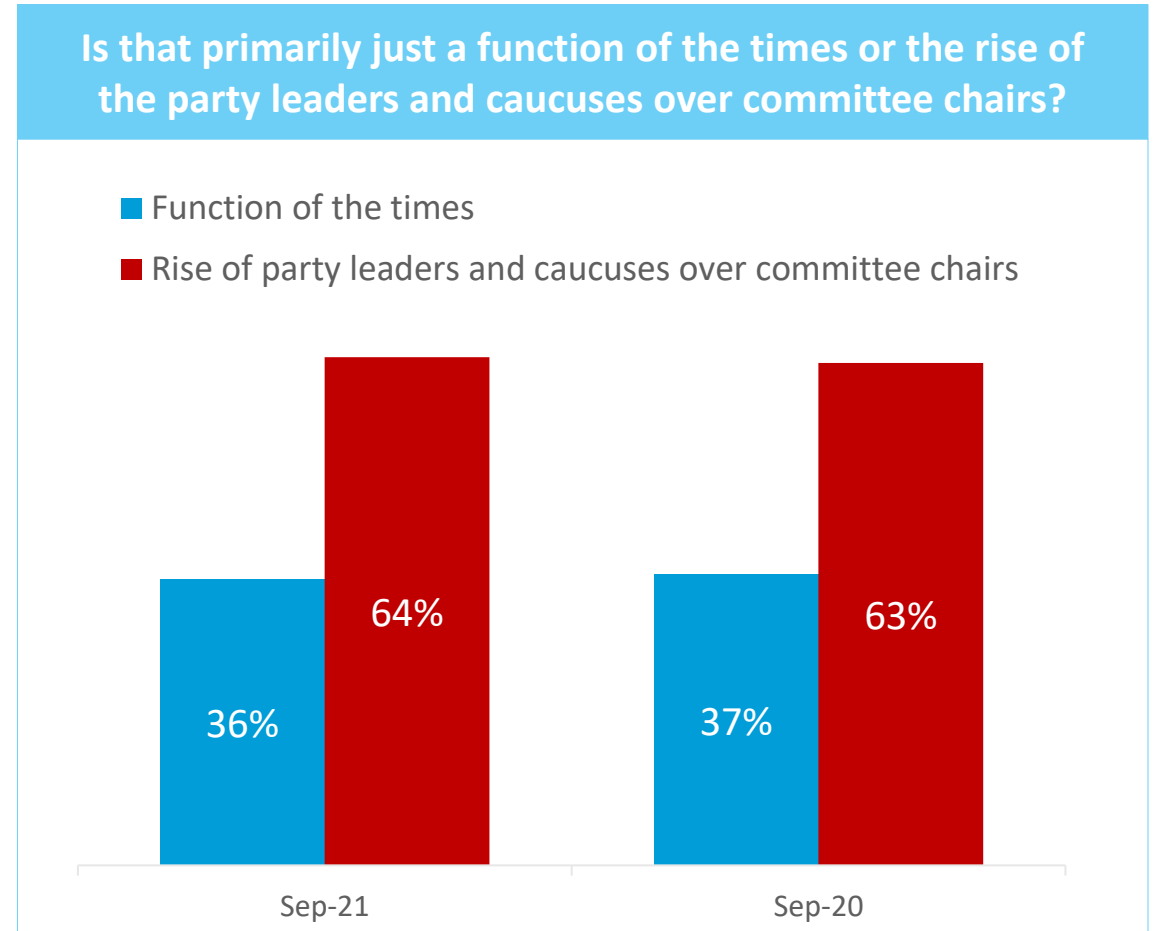
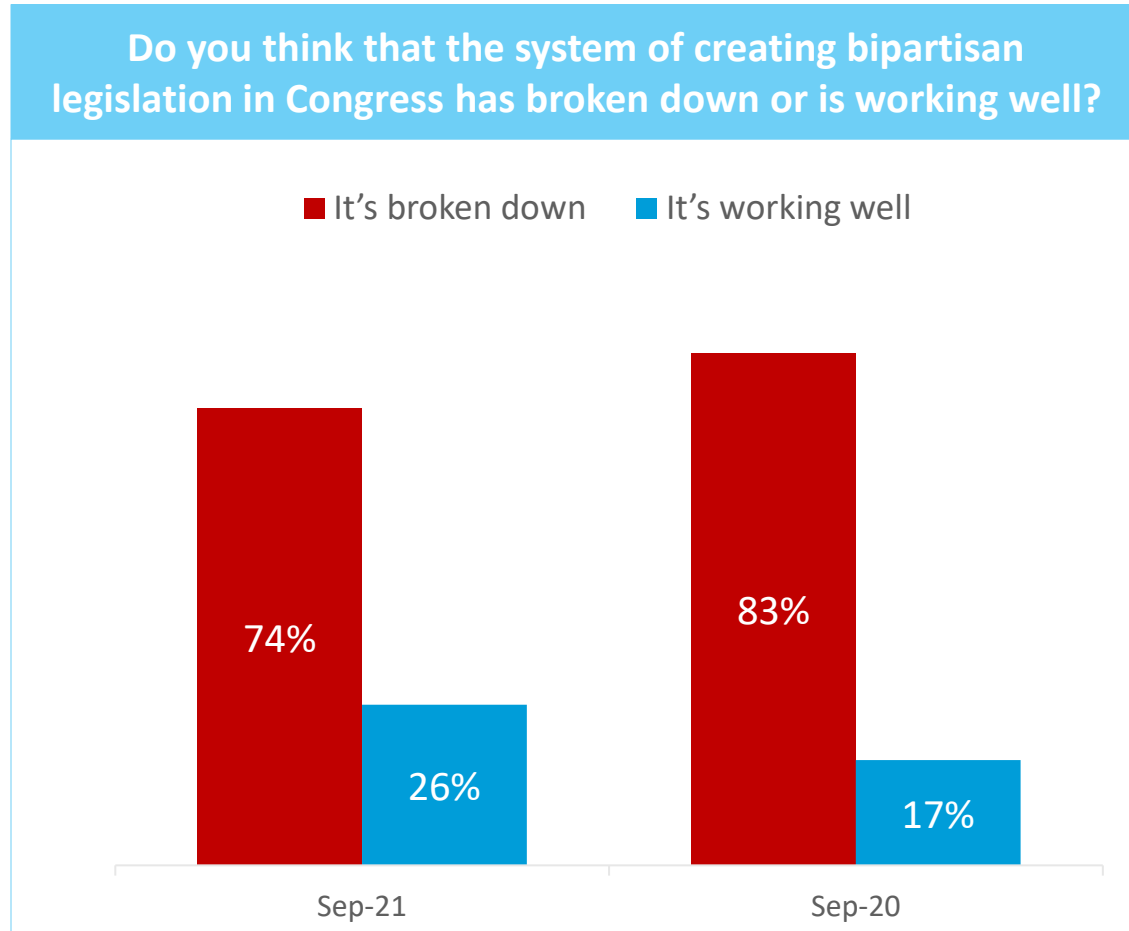
Do you think legislation is now being made by the administrative departments in the absence of congressional actions or are administrative departments just interpreting existing statutes?



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C10: Do you think legislation is now being made by the administrative departments in the absence of congressional actions or are administrative departments just interpreting existing statutes?

# MOST VOTERS SAY THAT THE BREAKDOWN OF BIPARTISAN LEGISLATION SYSTEM IS DUE TO THE RISE OF PARTY LEADERS AND CAUCUSES OVER COMMITTEE CHAIRS

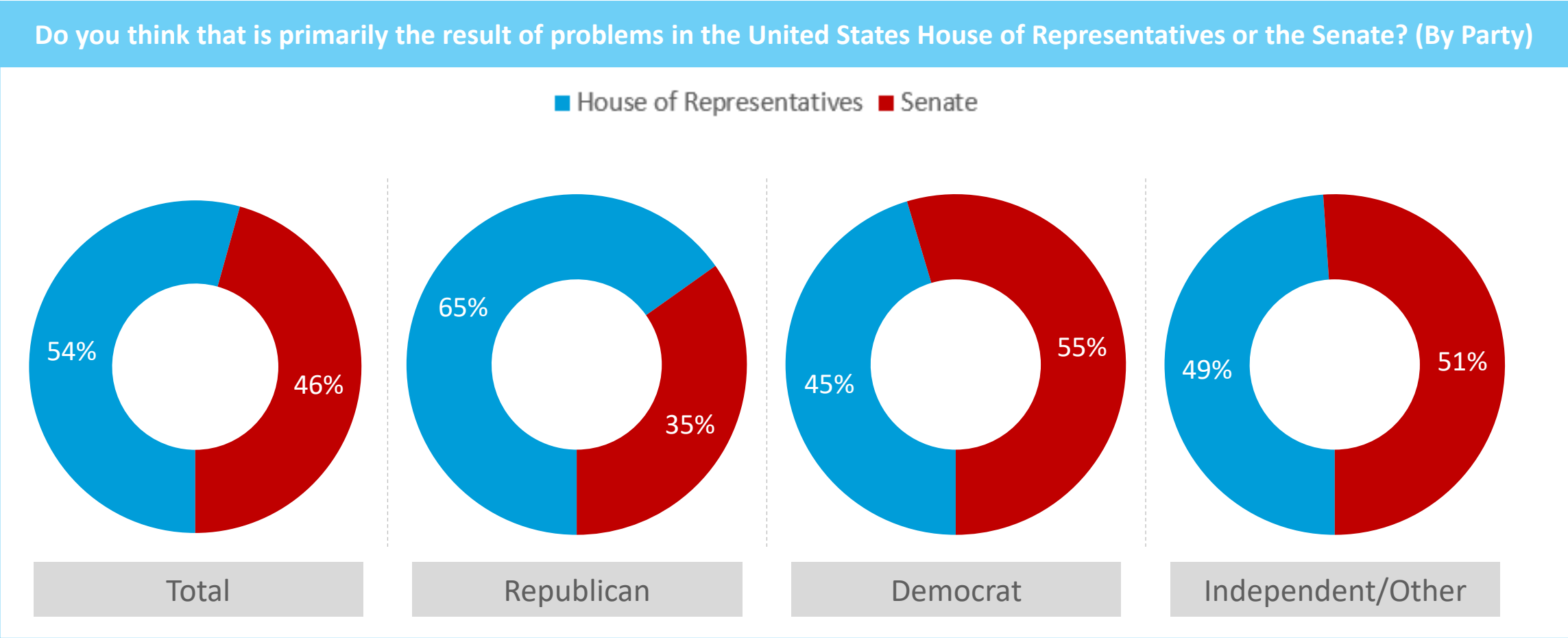


BASE: C12 Registered voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907), BASE: C13 It's broken down (September 2021 n=1,365; September 2020 n=1,582)

C12: Do you think that the system of creating bipartisan legislation in Congress has broken down or is working well?

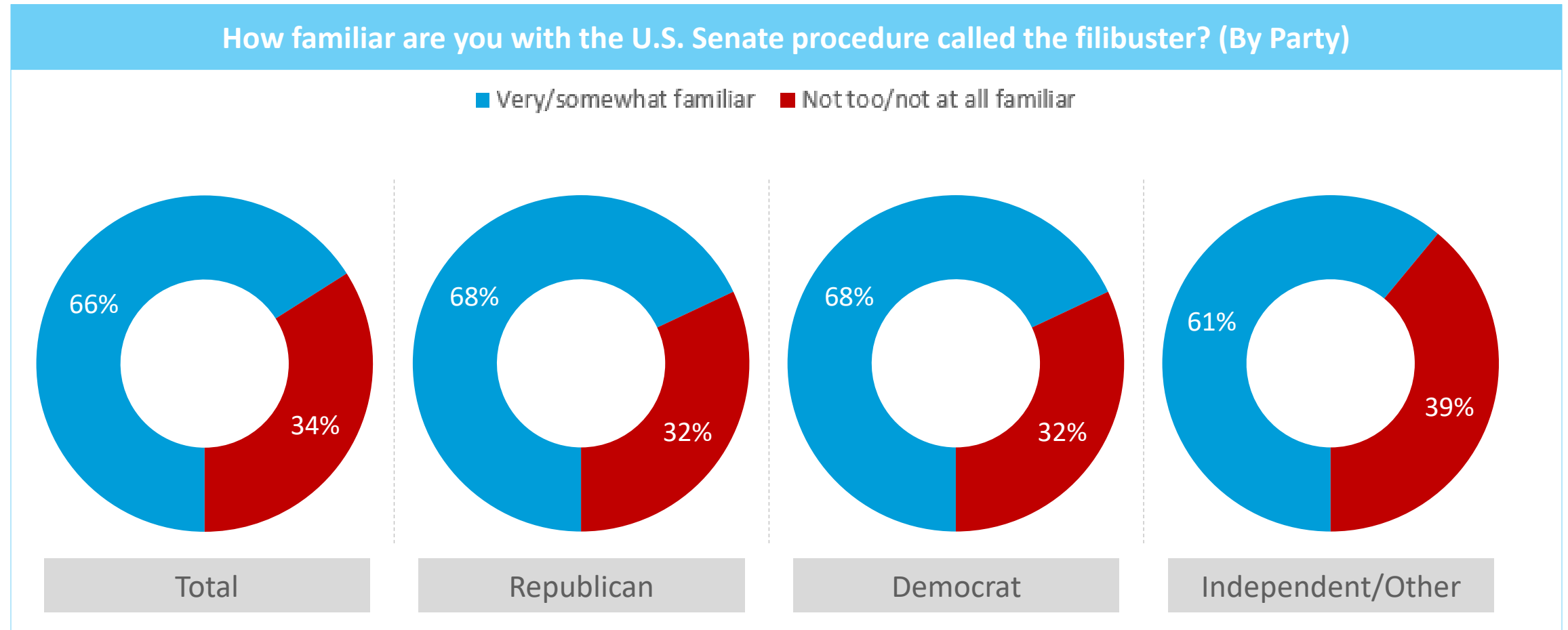
C13: Is that primarily just a function of the times or the rise of the party leaders and caucuses over committee chairs?

# AND THEY PLACE MORE BLAME ON THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES THAN THE SENATE; THIS IS STRONGLY DRIVEN BY REPUBLICANS



BASE: It's broken down (September 2021 n=1,365; September 2020 n=1,582)  
C13A: Do you think that is primarily the result of problems in the United States House of Representatives or the Senate?

# DEMOCRATS AND REPUBLICANS ARE EQUALLY FAMILIAR WITH THE FILIBUSTER



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

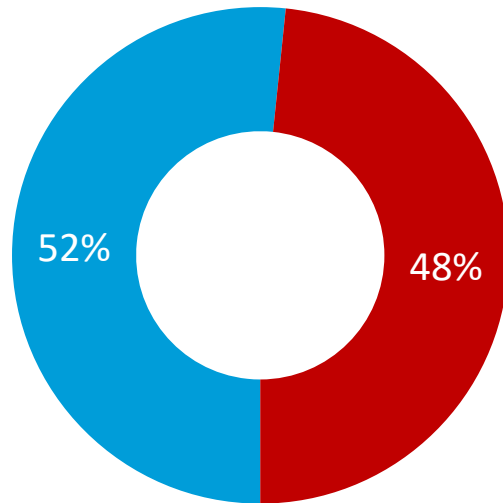
C14A: How familiar are you with the U.S. Senate procedure called the filibuster?

# A NEARLY IDENTICAL MAJORITY OF VOTERS IN BOTH MAJOR PARTIES SAY KEEPING THE FILIBUSTER IS CRITICAL TO BIPARTISANSHIP

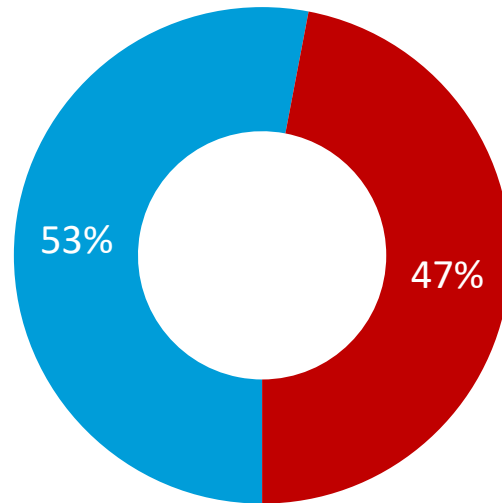
## Which comes closest to your view about the filibuster? (By Party)

■ It is an important tool to protect the rights of the minority party in the Senate and promote compromise

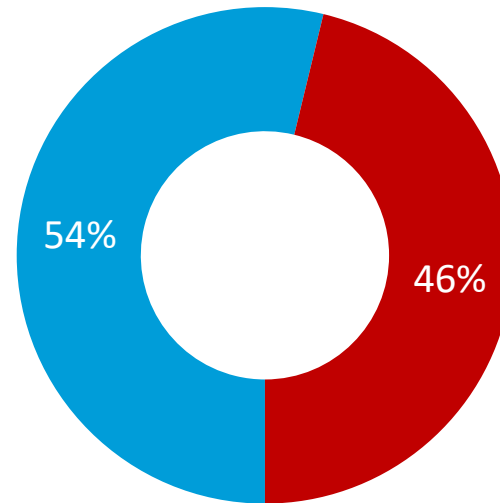
■ It is used primarily to promote gridlock and prevent the Senate from taking action since it requires 60 Senate votes



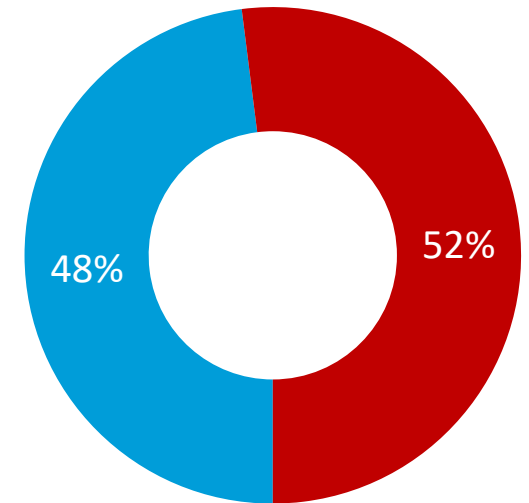
Total



Republican



Democrat



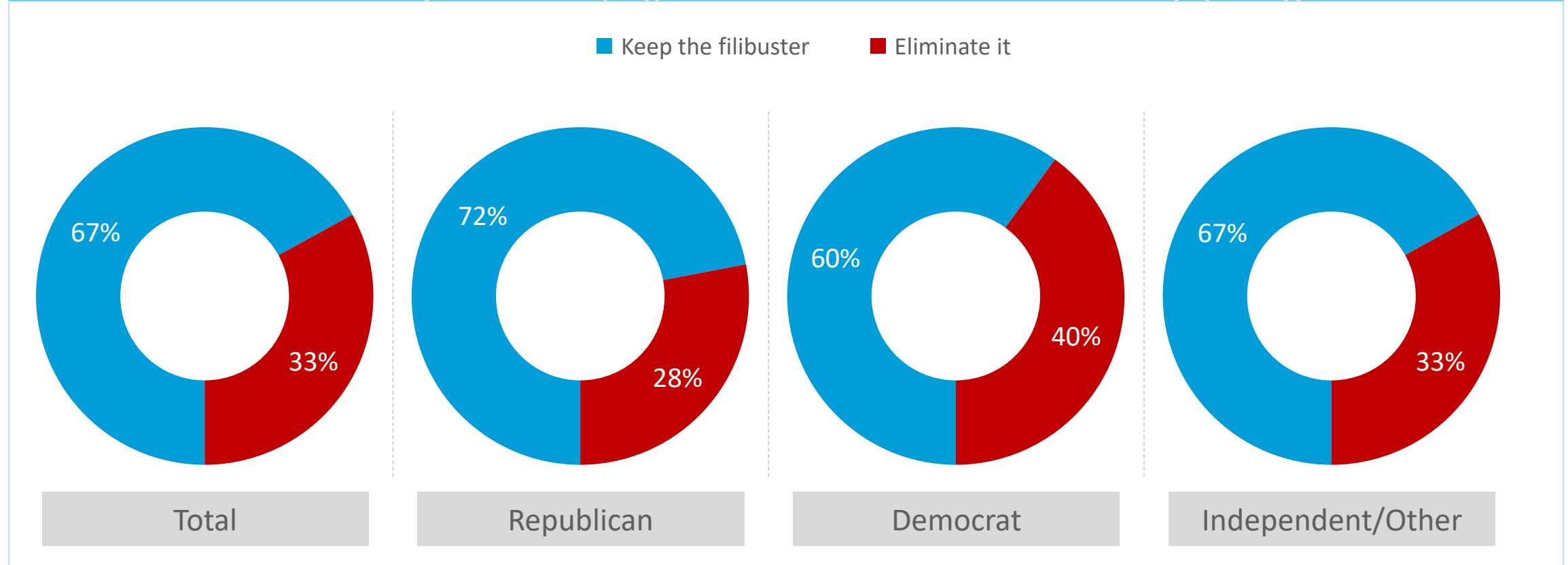
Independent/Other

BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C14B: Which comes closest to your view about the filibuster?

# MOST VOTERS WANT TO KEEP THE FILIBUSTER IN PLACE

The filibuster requires bipartisan support for major legislation by requiring 60 votes to pass legislation in the senate. Do you favor keeping the filibuster or want to eliminate it? (By Party)



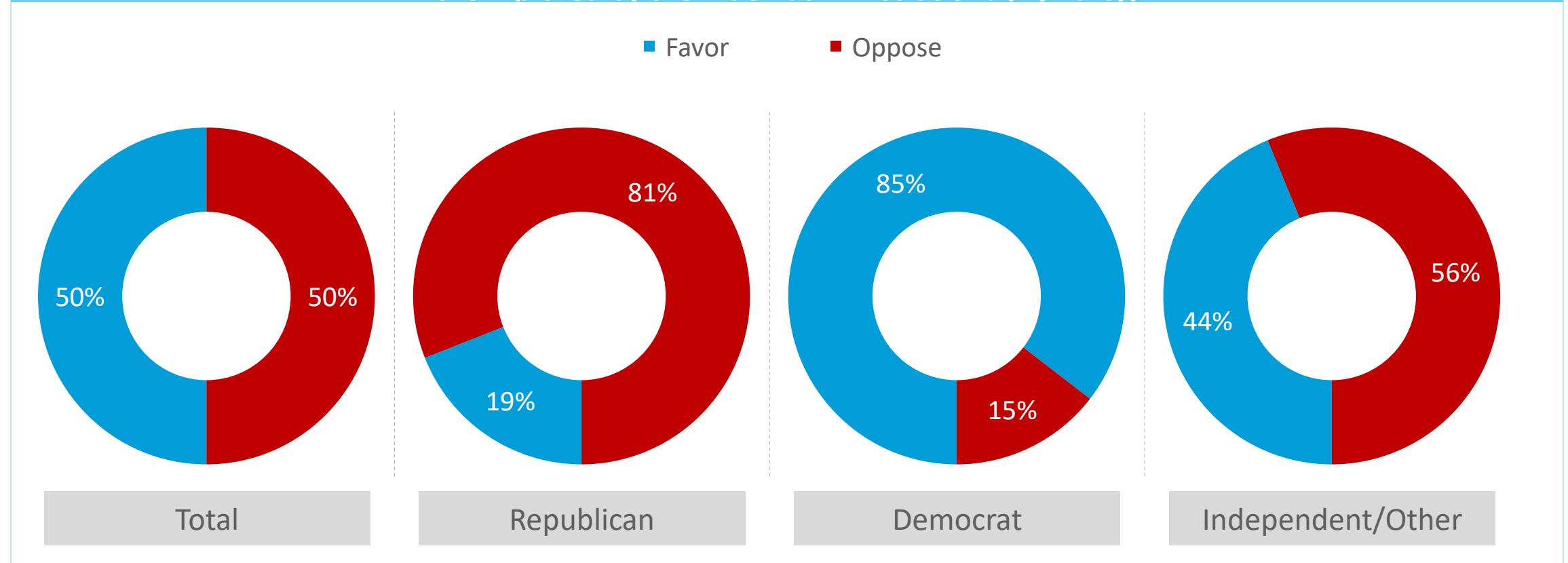
BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C14C: The filibuster requires bipartisan support for major legislation by requiring 60 votes to pass legislation in the senate. Do you favor keeping the filibuster or want to eliminate it?



# DEMOCRATS OVERWHELMINGLY FAVOR A PLAN TO PACK THE COURT WITH 4 NEW MEMBERS PICKED BY THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

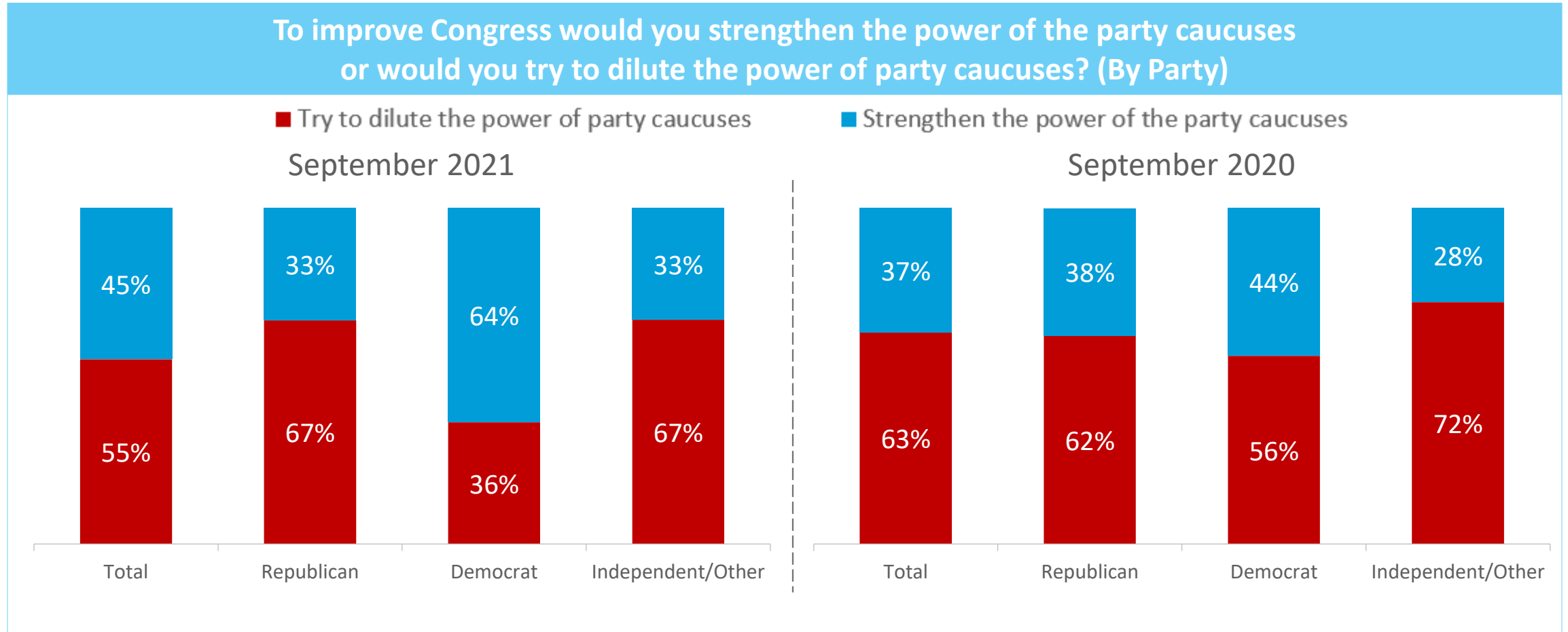
Do you favor or oppose a plan from some Democrats to add 4 new members to the Supreme Court and have them picked by the Biden administration? (By Party)



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

C14D: Do you favor or oppose a plan from some Democrats to add 4 new members to the Supreme Court and have them picked by the Biden administration?

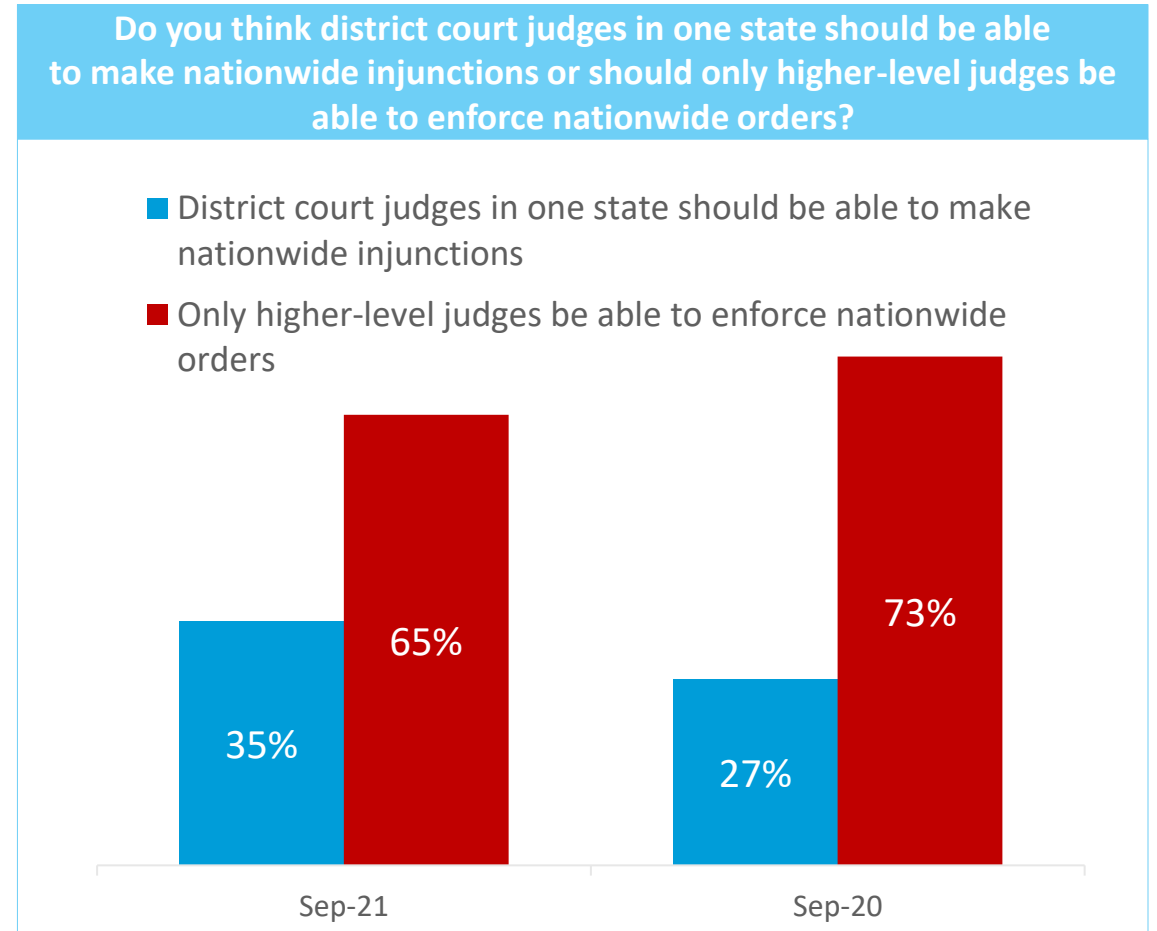
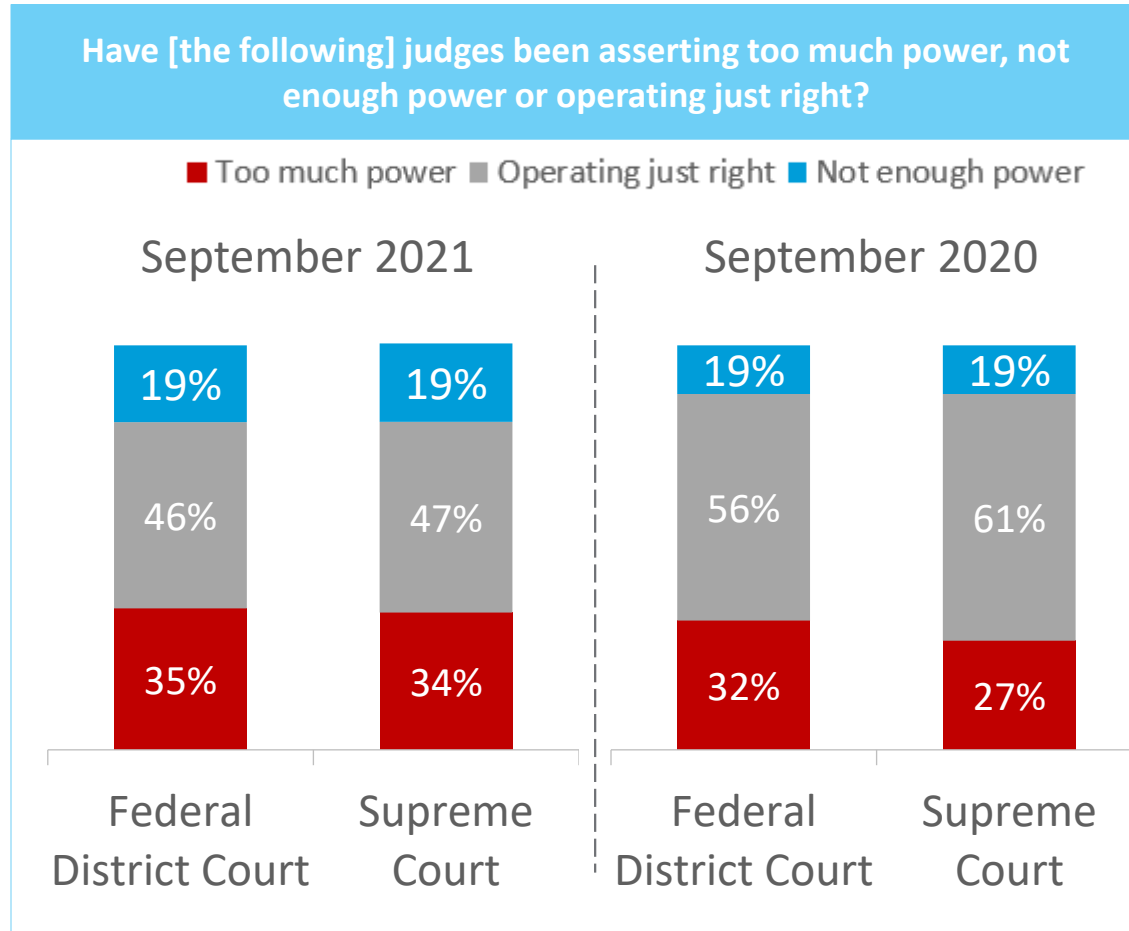
# TO IMPROVE CONGRESS, MOST REPUBLICAN AND INDEPENDENT VOTERS WOULD TRY TO DILUTE THE POWER OF PARTY CAUCUSES



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C15: To improve Congress would you strengthen the power of the party caucuses or would you try to dilute the power of party caucuses?

# VOTERS SAY THAT DISTRICT COURT JUDGES SHOULD NOT BE ABLE TO MAKE NATIONWIDE INJUNCTIONS, UP 8% FROM LAST YEAR



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C16: Have federal district court judges been asserting too much power, not enough power or operating just right?

C17: Have supreme court judges been asserting too much power, not enough power or operating just right?

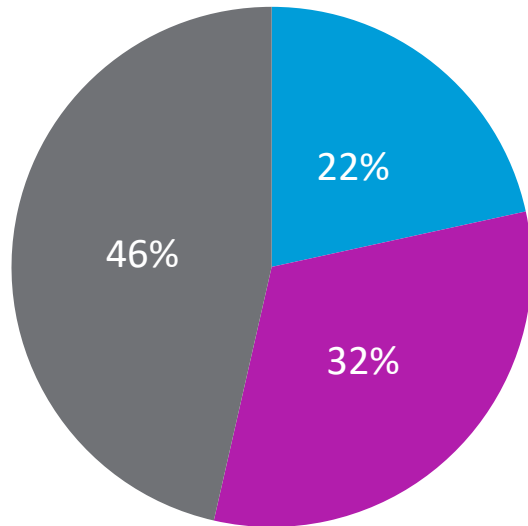
C18: Do you think district court judges in one state should be able to make nationwide injunctions or should only higher-level judges be able to enforce nationwide orders?

# MOST VOTERS THINK THAT SUPREME COURT JUDGES SHOULD SERVE A MAXIMUM TERM, OR AT LEAST UNTIL A FIXED AGE

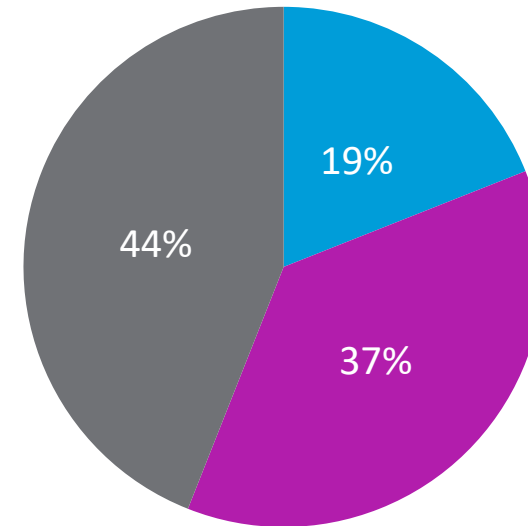
Should Supreme court judges serve for life as now, until a fixed age like 85, or a maximum term of something like 18 years?

■ Serve for life   ■ Serve until a fixed age   ■ Serve a maximum term

September 2021



September 2020



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

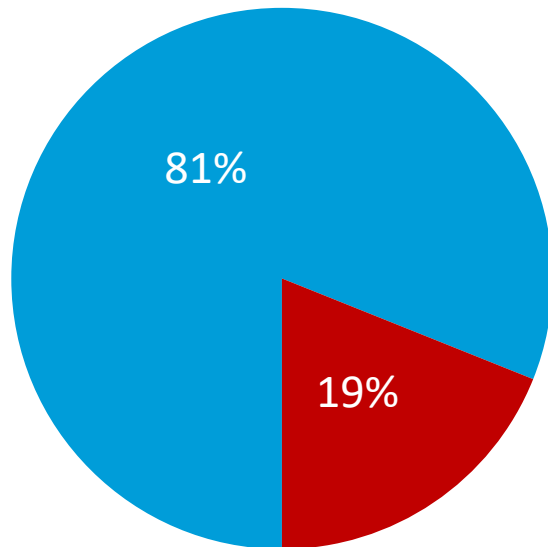
C19: Should Supreme court judges serve for life as now, until a fixed age like 85, or a maximum term of something like 18 years?

# MOST VOTERS AGREE THAT WE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE ENFORCEMENT OF FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOMS, UP 9% FROM LAST YEAR

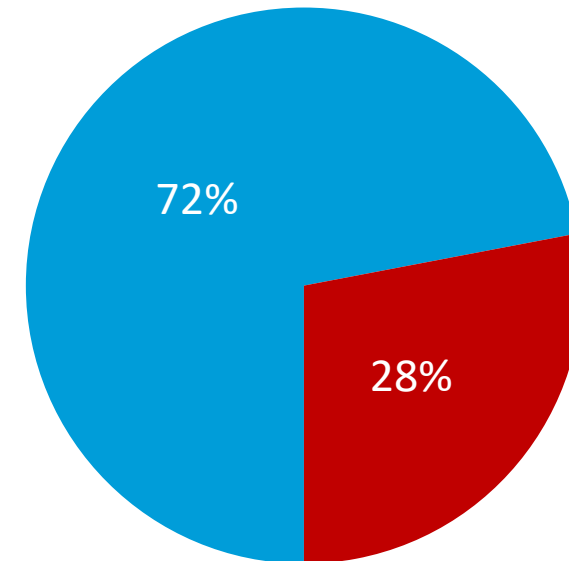
Do you think we need to strengthen these First Amendment freedoms, or should we be limiting more areas of speech?

■ Strengthen the First Amendment freedom of speech ■ Limit or ban more areas of speech

September 2021



September 2020

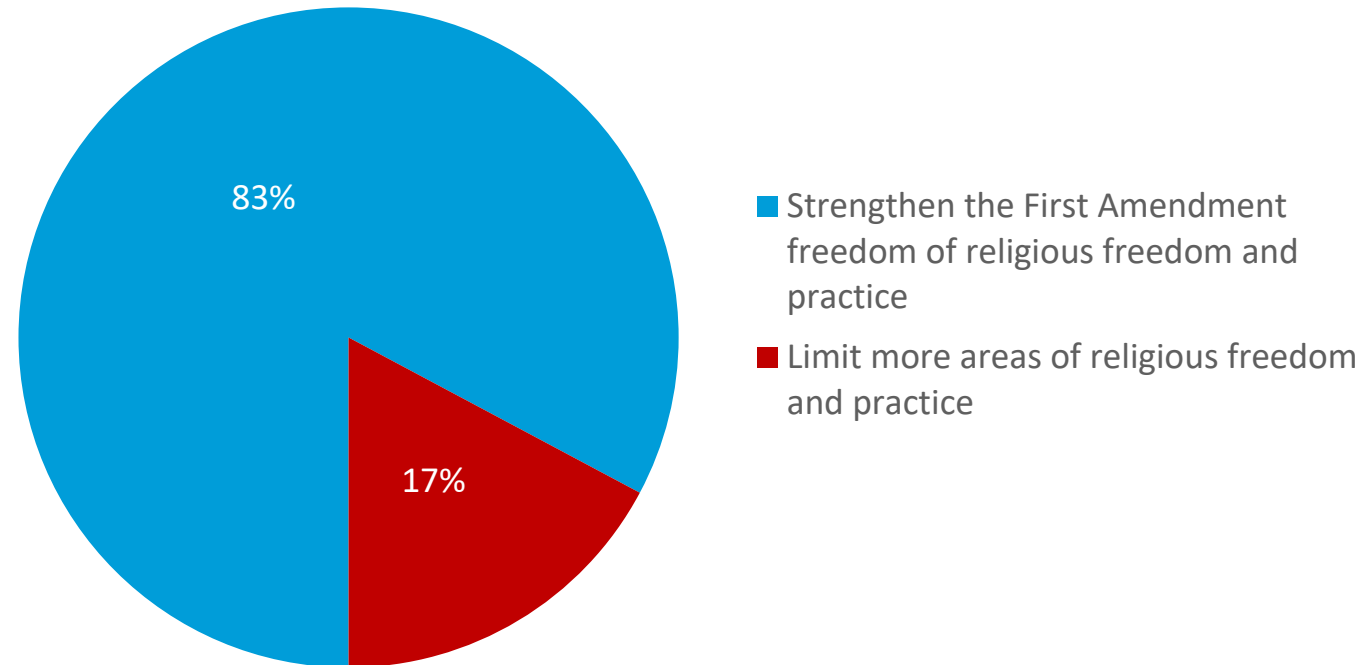


BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C22: The First Amendment of the Constitution provides for freedom of speech and the press. Do you think we need to strengthen these First Amendment freedoms, or should we be limiting more areas of speech?

# VOTERS AGREE THAT THE COUNTRY NEEDS TO STRENGTHEN THE FIRST AMENDMENT FREEDOM OF RELIGION

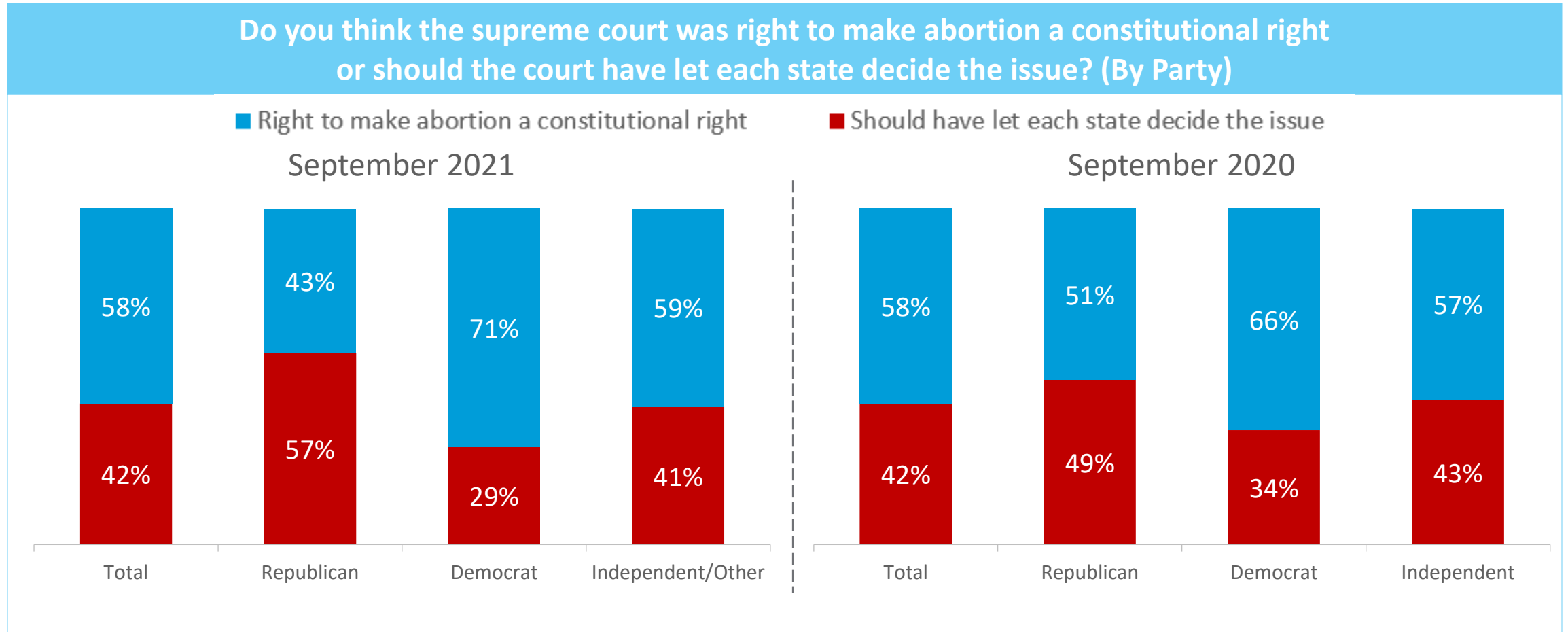
Do you think we need to strengthen this set of First Amendment freedoms, or should we be limiting more areas of religious freedom and practice?



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C22A: The First Amendment of the Constitution also provides for freedom of religion. Do you think we need to strengthen this set of First Amendment freedoms, or should we be limiting more areas of religious freedom and practice?

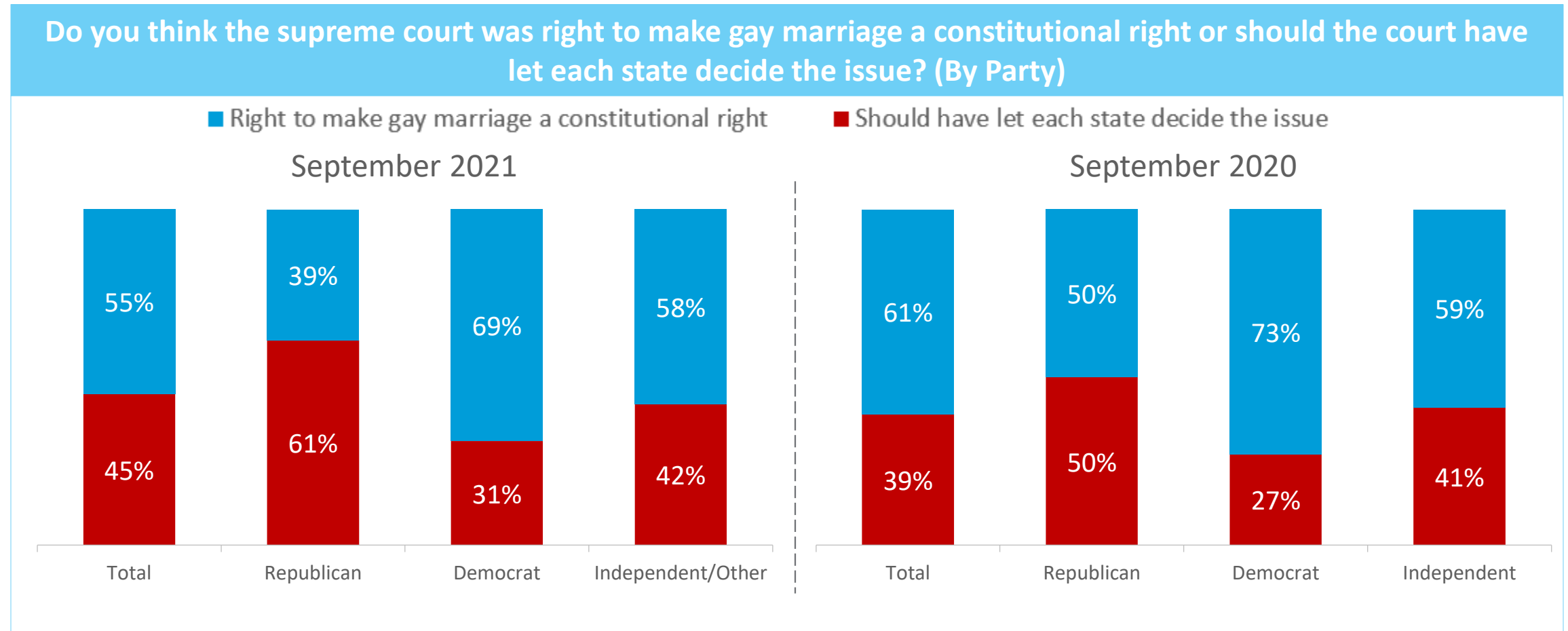
# VOTERS AGREE THE SUPREME COURT WAS JUSTIFIED IN MAKING ABORTION A CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHT; PARTISANSHIP HAS INTENSIFIED AFTER THE COURT'S RULING



BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C20: Do you think the supreme court was right to make abortion a constitutional right or should the court have let each state decide the issue?

# VOTERS ALSO AGREE WITH THE COURT'S DECISION TO LEGALIZE GAY MARRIAGE, BUT REPUBLICANS SAY THAT EACH STATE SHOULD BE ABLE TO DECIDE ON ITS OWN

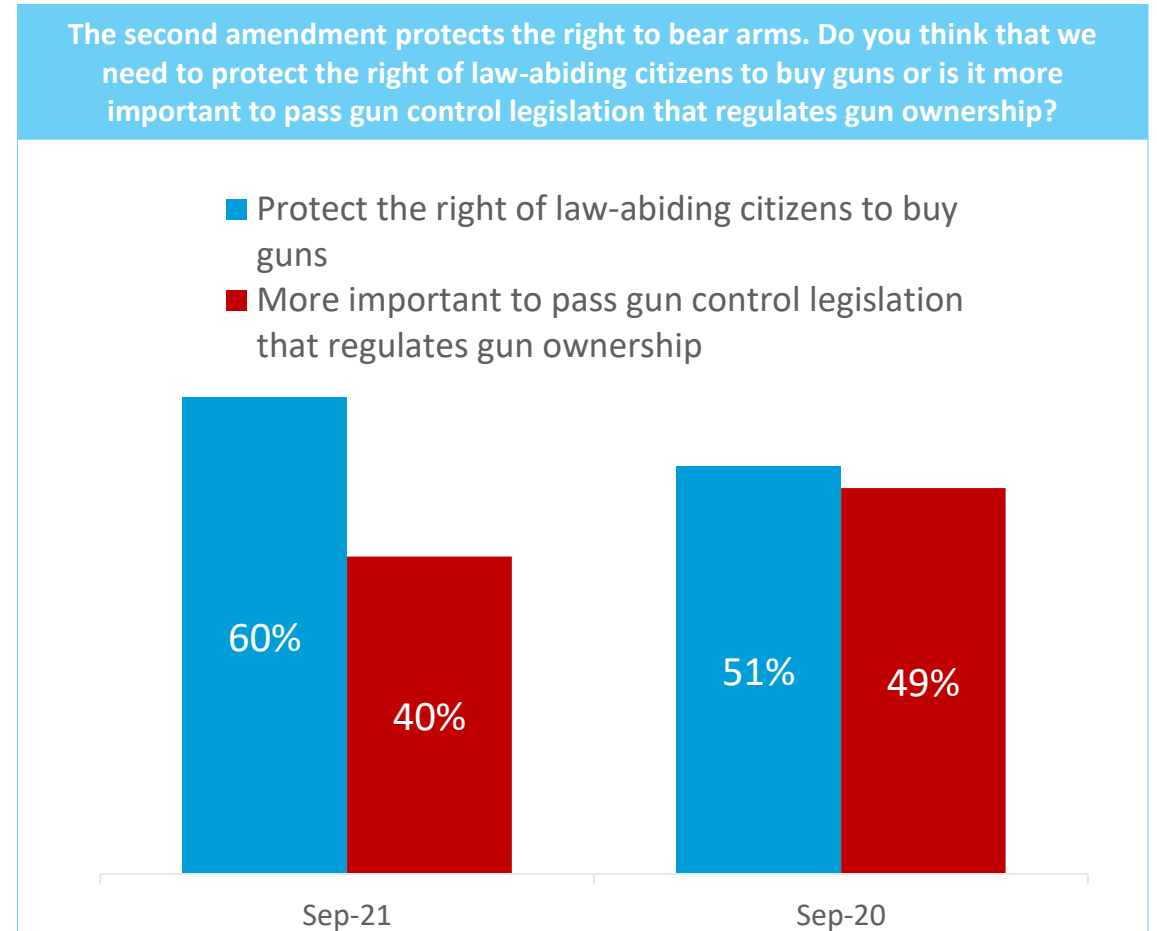
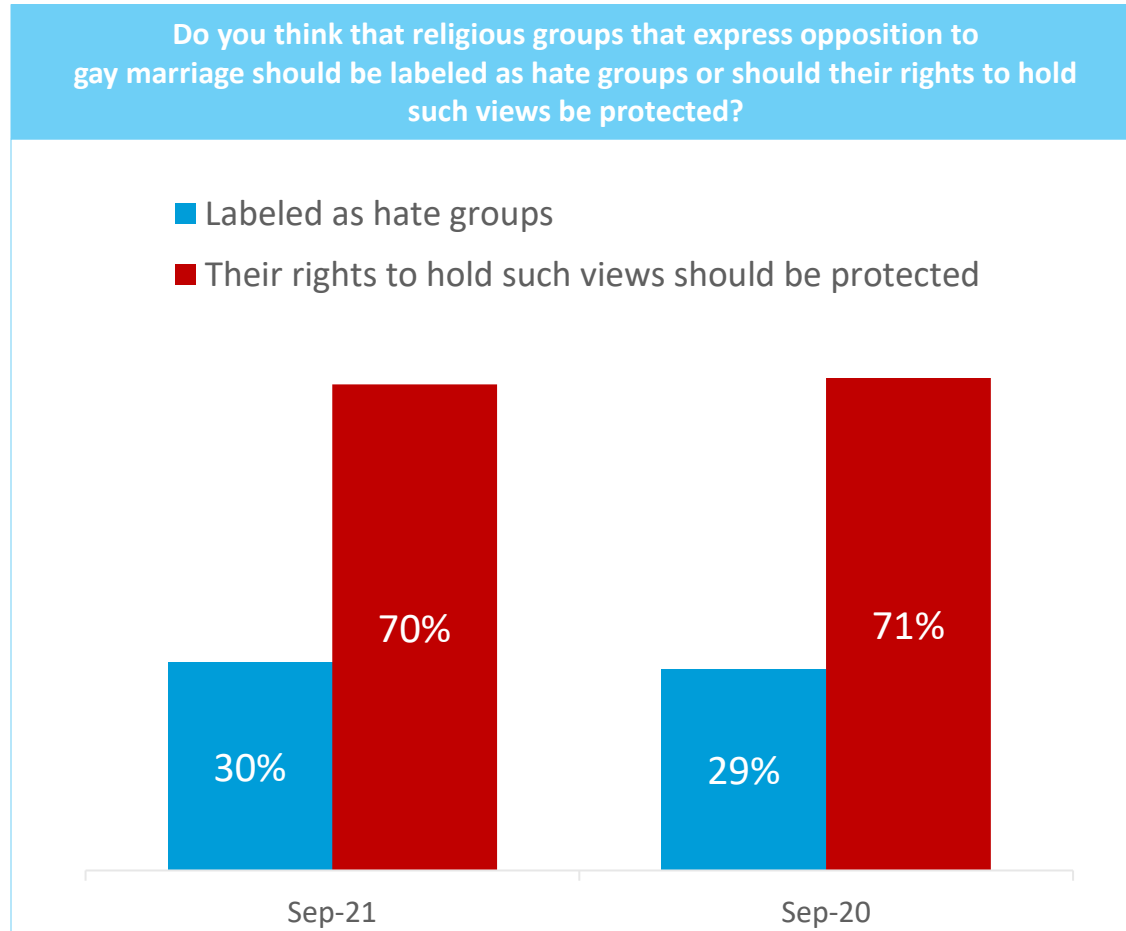


BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C21: Do you think the supreme court was right to make gay marriage a constitutional right or should the court have let each state decide the issue?



# THE PROTECTION OF THE RIGHT TO BUY GUNS IS CONSIDERED A HIGHER PRIORITY FOR MOST VOTERS THAN PASSING GUN CONTROL LEGISLATION



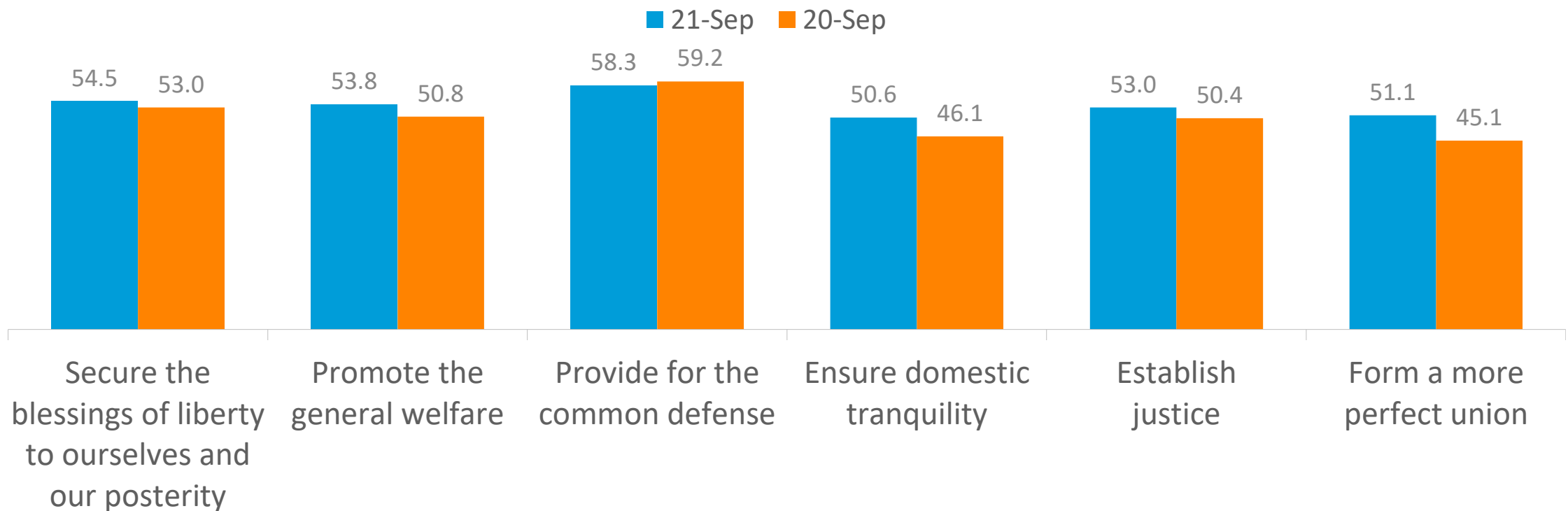
BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

C23: Do you think that religious groups that express opposition to gay marriage should be labelled as hate groups or should their rights to hold such views be protected?

C24: The second amendment protects the right to bear arms. Do you think that we need to protect the right of law-abiding citizens to buy guns or is it more important to pass gun control legislation that regulates gun ownership?

# VOTERS HAVE THE MOST CONFIDENCE THAT THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT IS PROVIDING FOR THE COMMON DEFENSE; LEAST IN FORMING A MORE PERFECT UNION

Please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal.

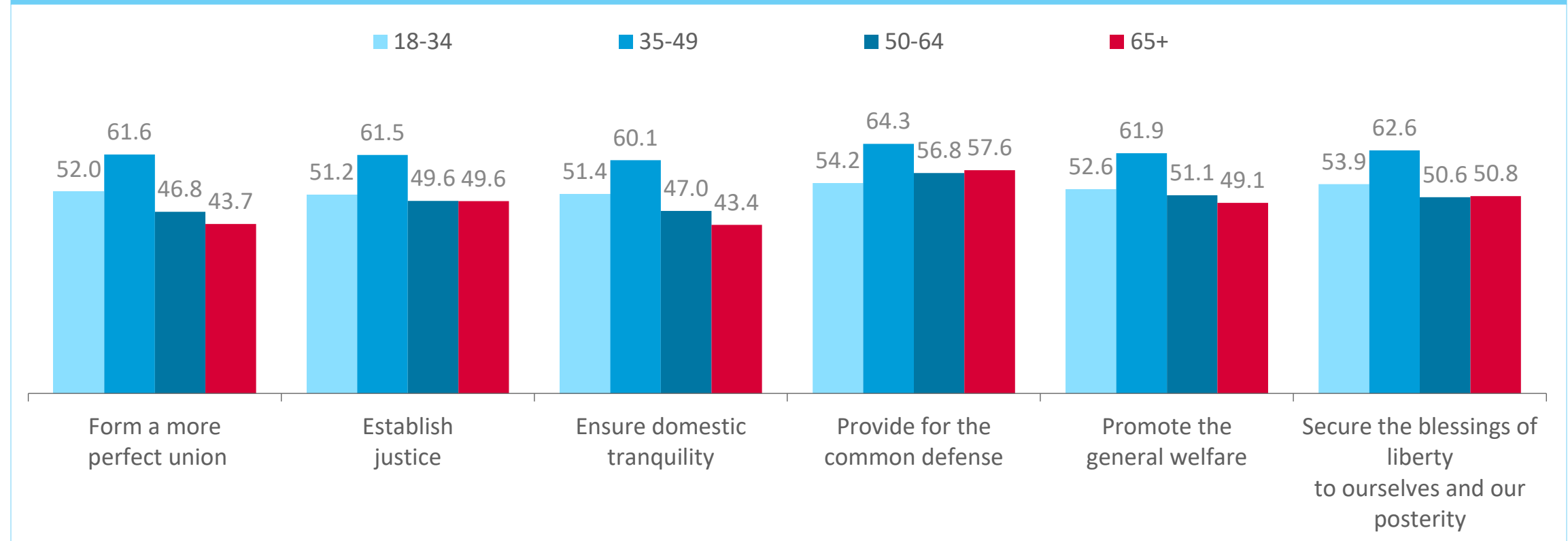


BASE: Registered Voters (September 2021 n=1,803; September 2020 n=1,907)

CON1-CON6: The preamble of the United States Constitution states the goals of the national government. I am going to read you some statements from this preamble. For each one, please tell me on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal.

# VOTERS AGE 35-49 HAVE THE MOST CONFIDENCE THAT THE GOALS OUTLINED IN THE PREAMBLE OF THE CONSTITUTION ARE BEING ACHIEVED

Please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal. (By age)

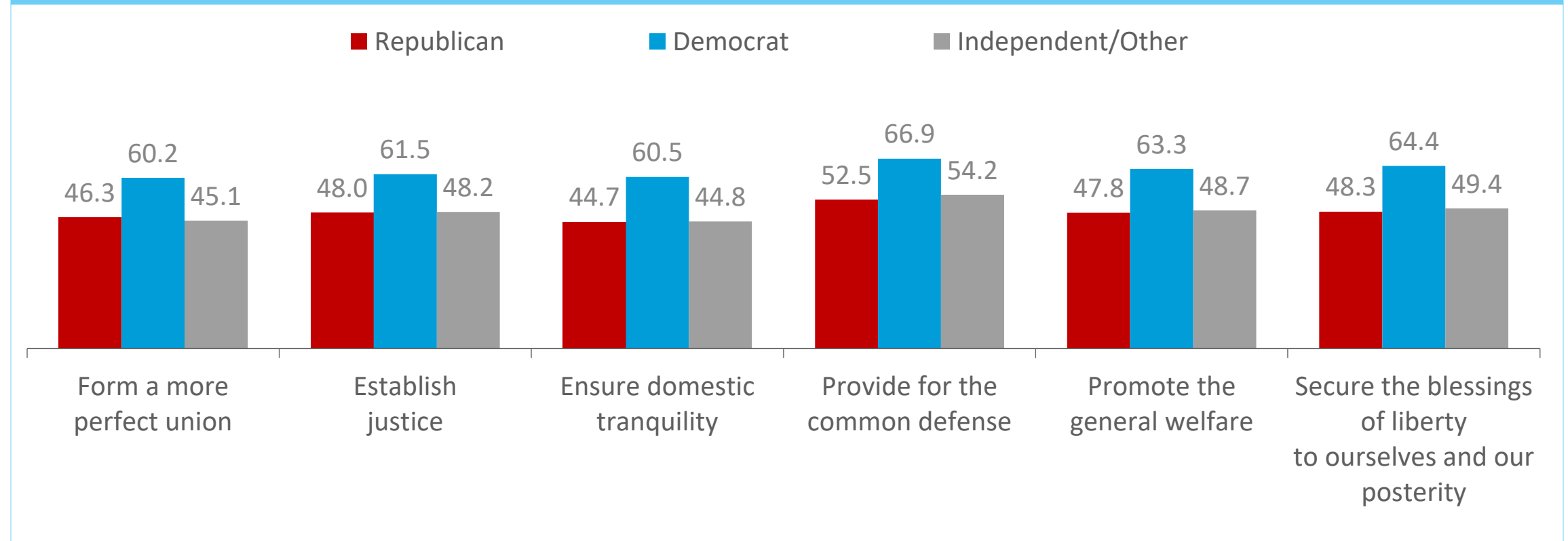


BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

CON1-CON6: The preamble of the United States Constitution states the goals of the national government. I am going to read you some statements from this preamble. For each one, please tell me on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal.

# DEMOCRATS SHOW MORE CONFIDENCE THAT EACH INSTITUTION OF GOVERNMENT IS ACHIEVING ITS GOALS, COMPARED TO REPUBLICANS AND INDEPENDENTS

Please select on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal. (By Party)



BASE: Registered Voters (n=1,803)

CON1-CON6: The preamble of the United States Constitution states the goals of the national government. I am going to read you some statements from this preamble. For each one, please tell me on a scale of zero to one hundred where zero means “no confidence” and one hundred means “total confidence” how much confidence you have that the federal government, including the President, Congress, and the federal courts, is achieving this goal.