

TO: Everytown for Gun Safety
FROM: Geoff Garin and Guy Molyneux, Hart Research Associates
DATE: October 28, 2018
RE: Guns and the 2018 Election

On behalf of Everytown for Gun Safety, Hart Research Associates conducted a survey among 1,200 likely voters with a focus on the issue of gun policies and its impact on voters' choices in this year's elections. The survey was conducted online from October 20 to 24, 2018, concluding prior to the mass shooting at a Pittsburgh synagogue. The survey's margin of error is ± 2.9 percentage points. This memo reports the survey's key results.

1. This year, the intensity gap on gun policy issues favors supporters of gun violence prevention, not the NRA. Those voting on the gun issue in 2018 favor stricter regulation of firearms.

- Overall, 43% of voters say that candidates' positions on gun policy issues will be very important to them, compared to other issues, in making voting decisions this year. Significantly, the "intensity gap" on guns now favors supporters of gun violence prevention rather than the NRA. Voters who favor stricter gun laws are ten points more likely to say gun policy issues are a very important voting issue (47%) than those who do not favor stricter gun laws (37%).
- In addition, a 61% majority of all voters now favors stricter gun laws, while just 39% want laws to be less strict (9%) or kept as they are now (30%). This means that gun violence prevention single-issue voters ("GVP Voters") now outnumber single-issue voters who oppose new regulations ("NRA Voters") by a remarkable two to one ratio. GVP Voters (who say the gun issue is very important and favor stricter laws) account for 29% of the electorate, compared to just 14% for NRA Voters (who say the gun issue is very important but do not favor stricter laws). GVP Voters outnumber NRA voters by three to one in suburban communities (31% vs. 10% of electorate), and by five to one among suburban women (35%, 7%).

2. Support from the gun lobby is more of a political liability than an advantage for candidates in 2018.

- By 52% to 13%, voters feel that the NRA has too much rather than too little influence over elected officials (35% say right amount).
- If voters learn that a candidate had accepted campaign donations from the NRA, they report this would reduce (41%) rather than increase (16%) their likelihood of supporting the candidate. This deficit for candidates who take NRA money is especially large among suburban voters (-30 points), women (-32 points), and seniors (-38 points).

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- Voters prefer a candidate who does not take money from the gun lobby (67%) over one who has the gun lobby’s financial backing (33%) by a margin of 34 points, which grows to 40 points in the suburbs and 42 points among swing voters in House races.

3. The gun violence prevention issue is helping Democratic candidates to open up a massive generation gap, especially with suburban women, college-educated white women, and older women.

- The survey reveals that women represent the vanguard driving strong public sentiment for gun violence prevention. Women strongly favor stricter gun laws, prefer candidates who reject funding from the gun lobby, and have more confidence in Democrats than Republicans to handle the gun issue. This is undoubtedly contributing to the strong Democratic leads among women that we find in elections for both U.S. House (Democrats +21) and U.S. Senate (+17).

Guns and the Gender Gap					
	All Men	All Women	Women 50+	White College Women	Suburban Women
House Vote (Democrats – Republicans)	R+8	D+21	D+18	D+19	D+24
Gun laws should be more strict	54	68	70	71	72
Favor candidate who doesn’t take money from the gun lobby	59	74	76	79	76
Preferred party to handle gun violence	R+6	D+20	D+18	D+22	D+26
Candidate should give more attention to reducing gun violence	55	67	70	65	72

4. Voters say they want to hear more from candidates about the issue of reducing gun violence, and indicate they will reward candidates who support violence prevention policies.

- Fully six in ten voters (61%) say candidates should give more attention to the gun violence prevention issue. This sentiment is especially strong among suburban women (72%), women over 50 (70%), women of color (75%), and white college-educated women (65%).
- The survey asked voters how a candidate’s support for eight different gun violence reductions policies would impact their support for a candidate. In every case, 59% or more say they would be more likely to support the candidate, while less than a quarter register less support. The policies with the strongest support are criminal background checks on all gun sales, making it harder for domestic abusers to get firearms, and red-flag laws. Voter also appear poised to reward candidates who favor waiting periods for gun purchases as well as bans on bumpstocks, assault weapons, and high-capacity magazines.

Embracing gun violence prevention policies increases support for a candidate.....		
	Less Likely to Support	More Likely to Support
Supports criminal background checks on all gun sales	9%	81%
Supports legislation that would make it harder for domestic abusers to get firearms	11%	78%
Supports red-flag laws that allow family members or law enforcement to ask a court to temporarily suspend a person's access to guns if there is clear evidence they pose a danger to themselves or others	11%	75%
Supports a three-day waiting period for gun purchases	13%	70%
Supports raising the purchasing age for assault-style rifles from 18 to 21	17%	67%
Supports a ban on bumpstocks, which allow semi-automatic rifles to fire at nearly the rate of a machine gun	18%	65%
Supports a ban on the sale of assault weapons	24%	61%
Supports a limit on high-capacity gun magazines	21%	59%

But voters are less likely to support a candidate who obstructs gun violence prevention efforts.		
	Less Likely to Support	More Likely to Support
Supports legislation that would allow people convicted of domestic violence to carry concealed weapons across state lines, even if that violates the laws of the state they arrive in	75%	13%
Supports allowing people deemed "mentally incompetent" to buy and own firearms	72%	17%
Voted against a background checks rule that would have prohibited 75,000 severely mentally ill people from purchasing guns	71%	15%
Opposes closing the background check loophole, which makes it easy for criminals, terrorists, and other dangerous people to buy a gun with no background check and no questions asked	66%	22%
Opposes legislation that blocks suspected or known terrorists from buying firearms	65%	25%
Opposes any new gun regulations	55%	22%
Supports requiring all colleges and universities to allow people to carry concealed, loaded firearms on their campuses	55%	25%
Supports arming teachers and staff in public schools	42%	38%

5. Obstructing efforts to reduce gun violence, as many Republican candidates across the country have done, diminishes a candidate's appeal to voters.

- The flip side of voters' favorable response to candidates' advocacy of gun violence prevention measures is their strongly negative response when they learn a candidate has sought to obstruct such commonsense reforms, or worked

to impose elements of the gun lobby’s “guns everywhere” agenda. This survey measured voter response to eight different anti-regulation positions taken by many Republican candidates on the ballot this year. In every case, these positions made voters less likely rather than more likely to vote for a candidate, and in seven of the eight cases the margin is greater than two to one.

- Voters respond especially negatively to candidates who support legislation allowing people convicted of domestic violence to carry concealed weapons in any state (75% less likely to support), support allowing people deemed “mentally incompetent” to buy firearms (72% less likely), or oppose closing the background check loophole (66% less likely). By a 30-point margin they are less likely to support a candidate who favors requiring all colleges and universities to allow people to carry concealed, loaded firearms on their campuses.

6. Americans want the next Congress to make gun violence prevention a high priority, and overwhelmingly support commonsense policies like background checks and red-flag laws that get guns out of the hands of dangerous people.

- Six in ten voters (59%) disapprove of the job their state legislature is doing handling the issue of gun violence, and this figure rises to 70% for the U.S. Congress. Not surprisingly, then, voters want to see officials take more aggressive action next year to address the problem. Fully 72% say that dealing with gun violence should be a high priority for the new Congress when it takes office in January (39% very high). Majorities of Democrats (89%), independents (66%), and Republicans (56%) feel this should be a high priority, as do at least 70% of voters in every region of the country.
- Large majorities of voters express support for five key gun violence prevention proposals, including requiring criminal background checks for all gun sales, laws to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers, and red-flag laws.

Strong Support for Gun Violence Prevention Initiatives		
	Favor	Oppose
Require criminal background checks for all commercial gun sales, so that criminals, terrorists, and other dangerous people cannot avoid a background check simply by buying a gun online or at a gun show	92%	8%
Strengthen laws that help keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers	91%	9%
Pass a red-flag law that lets family members or law enforcement ask a court to temporarily suspend a person’s access to guns when there are clear warning signs they pose a danger to themselves or others	89%	11%
Fund new research into gun violence to provide policymakers and law enforcement with the data and tools they need to address gun crime	81%	19%
Hold the gun industry to the same standard as every other industry by ensuring gun sellers and manufacturers can be held accountable when they act with negligence or disregard to public safety	79%	21%