



To: Interested Parties

From: Global Strategy Group

Date: October 10th, 2019

Re: New Survey Shows Background Checks are Now Litmus Test for Presidential Candidate in Primary & General

A recent poll of 1,404 general election and Democratic primary voters total nationwide, conducted by Global Strategy Group from October 1-7, 2019 on behalf of Giffords, demonstrates that Americans from across the political spectrum agree: Anyone running for president must come out strong and campaign on background checks if they want to win the nearly two-thirds of Democratic primary voters who are still deciding whom to vote for in the primary and the independent voters up for grabs in November 2020. Key findings from the poll include:

Gun violence prevention is a top issue

The majority of primary voters are still up for grabs. While many voters have a current preference, the race remains fluid with 63% of primary voters still considering their options.

And persuadable voters – in both the primary and general election – are casting their ballots based on stronger gun laws and, specifically, background checks.

- A majority (59%) of uncommitted Democratic primary voters, 88% of whom support strengthening our gun laws, rate guns a top priority and 84% say it's important to their vote. Guns as a top issue only trails behind health care (76%) and the environment (68%) in a list of eleven issues.
- More specifically, both these uncommitted primary voters (79%) and general election independent voters (63%) believe "requiring background checks on all gun sales" should be a candidate's top priority. Requiring background checks tops protecting our environment (70% uncommitted primary voters; 47% independents), cutting taxes on the middle class (43% uncommitted primary voters; 42% independents), eliminating tax breaks for corporations (56% uncommitted primary voters; 39% independents), and eight other policies tested.

These voters are more tuned into and supportive of stronger gun laws than ever before. In the wake of Parkland, public polling showed both Democratic primary and general election voters become more and more supportive of stronger gun laws. That trend continues:

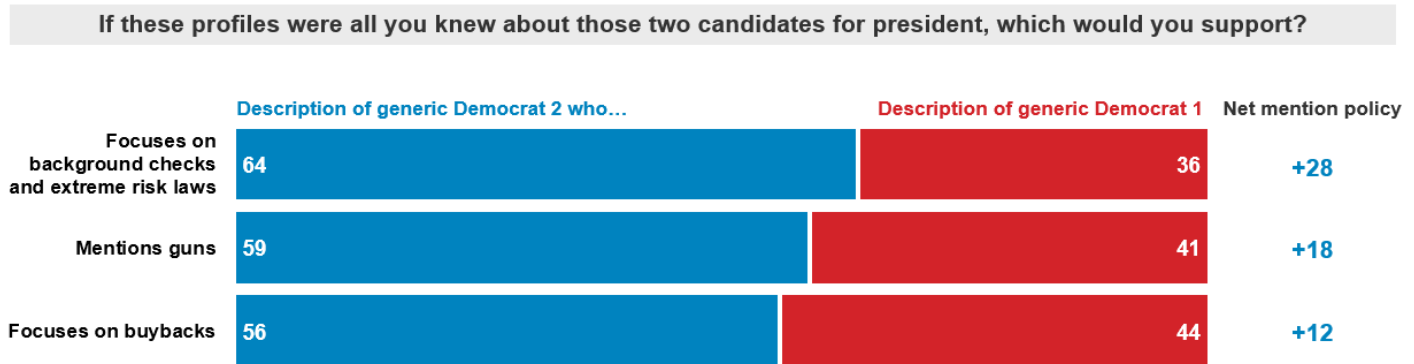
- 78% of uncommitted primary voters and 66% of independents say a candidate's position on gun laws has become more important to them over the last couple years.
- 71% of uncommitted primary voters and 49% of independents report they've become more supportive of stronger gun laws.

Supporting background checks is the key to winning over persuadable voters whereas mandatory buybacks could be dangerous

While voters support a range of gun violence prevention policies, they overwhelmingly prioritize and support background checks. Where some policies divide voters along partisan lines, background checks are a unifying force: Overwhelming majorities of all parties (94% of Democrats, 91% of independents and 87% of Republicans), gun owners (86%), and suburban women (95%) all support background checks.

% total support (% strongly support) for...	Democratic Primary Voters	Uncommitted Primary Voters	GE Voters	GE Independents
Requiring background checks on all gun sales	97 (90)	98 (92)	91 (76)	91 (74)
Banning gun sales to stalkers/domestic abusers	96 (88)	97 (89)	94 (78)	95 (80)
Funding for gun violence prevention programs	95 (70)	97 (69)	88 (50)	90 (49)
Requiring gun licensing	94 (84)	96 (85)	87 (68)	86 (68)
Extreme risk/red flag laws	94 (77)	95 (79)	87 (62)	89 (63)
Voluntary assault weapon buyback	91 (64)	93 (65)	81 (47)	83 (46)
Banning the sale of assault weapons	89 (81)	93 (86)	76 (58)	76 (54)
Banning gun lobby donations to politicians	86 (68)	85 (67)	66 (44)	69 (43)
Mandatory assault weapon buyback	72 (45)	73 (41)	49 (29)	43 (21)

Democratic candidates for president benefit among primary voters by focusing on background checks and extreme risk protection orders, not the mandatory buyback of assault weapons. When Democratic primary voters are presented with a series of hypothetical profiles for Democratic candidates, they overwhelmingly prefer a Democrat who focuses on background checks (this candidate wins by 28 points). A hypothetical Democratic primary candidate who simply mention guns or focuses on mandatory buybacks has smaller margins of victory – down to 18 and 12 points, respectively.



In fact, background checks – not buybacks – are the key litmus test for uncommitted voters in the primary and general election independents. Majorities of uncommitted primary voters (73%) and general election voters (56%) say they could never vote to nominate a candidate who doesn't support universal background checks, higher than any other traditionally partisan policy stance tested.

% of _____ who say “I would never vote for a candidate for president who doesn’t support this”	Uncommitted Primary Voters	GE Voters	GE Independents
Background checks on all gun sales	73	56	59
Standing up for women’s health choices/abortion rights	64	42	41
Cutting taxes on the middle class	41	47	42
Mandatory assault weapon buyback	33	24	24
Making all public colleges/universities tuition-free	22	19	14
Building a wall at our southern border	9	30	34

Why? Because voters believe background checks are more effective than mandatory buybacks. General and Democratic primary voters alike worry about gun violence, and they know there is more we can do prevent mass shootings. That’s where background checks come in: Both primary and general election voters across all parties believe background checks and an assault weapons ban – not buybacks – are the best way of reducing mass shootings and the policies they’d most like to see candidates talk about.

Select the two proposals that...	...you would most like to see a candidate support for president		...would be most effective for reducing deaths due to mass shootings	
	GE Voters	Democratic Primary Voters	GE Voters	Democratic Primary Voters
Requiring background checks on all gun sales	41	40	39	41
Banning the sale of assault weapons	32	45	36	46
Banning gun sales to stalkers/domestic abusers	23	17	21	20
Requiring gun licensing	19	20	16	14
Extreme risk/red flag laws	15	17	23	22
Banning gun lobby donations to politicians	14	20	9	16
Concealed carry reciprocity	13	7	8	3
Allowing teachers to carry guns	13	5	13	6
Allowing people to openly carry firearms	12	4	13	5
Funding for gun violence prevention programs	8	8	9	8
Mandatory assault weapon buyback	7	12	8	14
Voluntary assault weapon buyback	3	5	3	5

And these voters perceive a candidate who prioritizes background checks as in line with Americans’ opinions. More than two-thirds (69%) of independents and 78% of uncommitted primary voters say supporting universal background checks would generate *more* support in the general election against Donald Trump. **In stark contrast, a plurality of general election voters and a third of Democratic primary voters say supporting buybacks divides Americans and could hurt a candidate in the age of “electability.”**

% that say taking this position in the Democratic primary would give them more support in the general election against Trump	Democratic Primary Voters	Uncommitted Primary Voters	GE Voters	GE Independents
Requiring background checks on all gun sales	77	78	69	69
Mandatory assault weapon buyback	47	44	34	33

Voter skepticism about mandatory buybacks is fueled by the belief that we need to focus on solutions that are proven to work and have broad agreement across party lines. They believe that it is unconscionable that leaders in Washington allow more kids to die from gun violence than on duty police officers or U.S. military members, and feel that it is important to have a debate about how to reduce gun violence. But that's why it's so important to first rely on effective strategies that are proven to work and have near universal appeal.

Indicate how compelling you find each statement that a candidate who opposes a mandatory assault weapon buyback program might make (top 2):

Democratic Primary Voters GE Voters
 % total compelling (% very compelling)

88 (61)	81 (44)	[Proven To Work] There is something wrong with Washington when our "leaders" allow more school-age children in the U.S. to die from gun violence than on-duty police officers or U.S. military members. A public safety threat of this scale requires solutions that address the problem from all angles, and it's good we're finally having a real debate on what to do about gun violence. To do that, we must focus on the policies that, if passed, are proven to work. Again and again, studies have shown that the most effective way to reduce gun violence would be background checks on all gun sales that keeps guns out of the hands of dangerous people.
87 (51)	79 (40)	[Partisan Agreement] We absolutely must do more to keep these guns out of the hands of those who would do us harm. After decades of inaction on this issue, we have to start with the things we all agree on like background checks. Americans – Democrats and Republicans, gun owners and non-gun owners alike – overwhelmingly support background checks on all gun sales.

Global Strategy Group conducted an online survey of 1,000 likely 2020 general election voters and 404 likely 2020 Democratic presidential primary voters between October 1st – October 7th, 2019. Respondents were recruited via a voter file-matched online panel. Care has been taken to ensure the demographic divisions of the expected electorate are properly represented based on historical turnout.

Appendix: Candidate profiles

Democratic Primary Candidate 1 – With Guns: Candidate X is running for president because they believe that, by bringing all Americans together, we can address our greatest challenges and work to rebuild the middle class. Candidate X will focus on making sure that every person has the skills they need to get ahead, will protect and build on the Affordable Care Act so that all Americans have access to high-quality, affordable health care, take steps to tackle climate change, and take on the NRA to protect kids and communities from gun violence. None of these are easy tasks, but Candidate X knows that it's possible if Democrats and Republicans work together.

Democratic Primary Candidate 2 – Mentions Guns; No Policies: Candidate Y is running for president because they believe that, for too long, the richest 1% and corporate special interests have dominated our politics so that regular Americans haven't gotten a fair shake. Candidate Y will fight to build an America that works for everyone, starting with implementing Medicare-For-All because health care is a right and no one should have to worry about being able to afford high-quality health care, ending tax giveaways for corporations, taking on climate change with an ambitious Green New Deal, and taking on the NRA to protect kids and communities from gun violence.

Democratic Primary Candidate 2 – Prioritizes Guns; Background Checks: Candidate Y is running for president because they believe that, for too long, the richest 1% and corporate special interests like the NRA have dominated our politics so that regular Americans haven't gotten a fair shake. Candidate Y will fight to build an America that protects and works for everyone - an America that prioritizes our kids and communities over the profits of the corporate gun lobby. And when Candidate Y says "never again" in response to mass shootings they'll mean it because they won't just talk, they will put it all on the line to pass universal background checks and an extreme risk law, sometimes referred to as a red flag law, that keep guns out of the hands of dangerous people. And Candidate Y will implement Medicare-For-All because health care is a right and no one should have to worry about being able to afford high-quality health care, end tax giveaways for corporations, and take on climate change with an ambitious Green New Deal.

Democratic Primary Candidate 2 – Prioritizes Guns; With Buybacks: Candidate Y is running for president because they believe that, for too long, the richest 1% and corporate special interests like the NRA have dominated our politics so that regular Americans haven't gotten a fair shake. Candidate Y will fight to build an America that protects and works for everyone - an America that prioritizes our kids and communities over the profits of the corporate gun lobby. And when Candidate Y says "never again" in response to mass shootings, they'll mean it because where others believe it is enough to just ban assault weapons, they know we need to do more to get these guns off our streets. That's why Candidate Y will institute a mandatory buyback program - requiring gun owners to sell their assault weapons back to the government; if they do not, they'd be in violation of the law and subject to penalties. And Candidate Y will implement Medicare-For-All because health care is a right and no one should have to worry about being able to afford high-quality health care, end tax giveaways for corporations, and take on climate change with an ambitious Green New Deal.