

# SCHOEN CONSULTING

**TO:** EVERYTOWN FOR GUN SAFETY      **FROM:** DOUGLAS E. SCHOEN  
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**DATE:** NOVEMBER 8, 2019

**RE:** 2019 VIRGINIA GENERAL ASSEMBLY POLLING MEMO

## Summary of Key Findings

Schoen Consulting interviewed 600 randomly sampled swing-district voters in 22 Virginia state House and state Senate Districts who voted in Tuesday's Virginia General Assembly election. The fieldwork was completed on November 5-6, 2019. This research sought to do the following:

- Assess **how candidates' positions on gun violence, as well as gun issues generally, impacted key Virginia General Assembly races,**
- Measure **how gun-issue related media exposure, specifically television advertisements, impacted key Virginia General Assembly races,** and
- Test a **series of anti-Republican messages made during the campaign to determine the STRENGTH of gun-focused attacks relative to other arguments.**

We found that the **gun issues and candidates' positions on guns has become even more important to voters since 2017**, when we polled in Virginia immediately after the gubernatorial election. A candidate's **positions on gun issues ranked first in this poll, whereas it placed third in 2017**, behind jobs and the economy and health care.

<b>Issue</b>	<b>% All 2017 Voters</b>	<b>% All 2019 Voters</b>
<b>Positions on Gun Issues</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>28%</b>
<b>Jobs &amp; Economy</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>24%</b>
<b>Health Care</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>24%</b>

Our key findings are summarized below and further explicated later in this memo:

**Table 2. Key Findings**

**Gun safety issues played a dominant role in the elections, and a plurality of voters (28%) say that a candidate’s positions on gun issues was the most important issue to their vote.**

**Gun issues clearly benefited the Democrats in Virginia, as Democratic candidates won gun issue voters by 66% to 32%.**

**Voters who saw TV ads on candidates’ gun positions voted Democrat by 55% to 43%, and those who said media on candidates’ gun positions was important in determining which candidate to support voted for Democratic candidates by 56% to 43%.**

**Anti-GOP guns issue messages were far more compelling to voters than negative messages attacking Republicans for their ties to Trump and their positions on health care.**

## Impact of Candidates' Positions on Gun Issues

- Our polling determined that **candidates' positions on gun issues were undeniably important** in the election, as **an overwhelming majority of voters say that a candidate's position on guns was important to their vote.**

**Table 3. Importance of Candidates' Position on Gun Issues to Their Vote, Among All Voters**

Position	% All Voters
<b>TOTAL Important</b>	<b>83%</b>
<b>TOTAL NOT Important</b>	<b>14%</b>

- When voters were asked what issue was most important to them when deciding who they would vote for, a **plurality of voters (28%) said a candidate's position on gun issues.**

**Table 4. Most Important Issues Impacting Voters' Decision [open ended]**

Issue	% All Voters
<b>Positions on Gun Issues</b>	<b>28%</b>
Health Care	24%
Jobs & Economy	24%
Women's Issues	14%
Education	12%
Immigration	11%

- The poll found that **gun issues and gun violence prevention clearly benefited Democratic candidates in Virginia, as GUN ISSUE VOTERS** – voters who said that a candidate’s position on gun issues or preventing mass shootings were “most important issues” – **voted for Democratic candidates by more than two-to-one.**

**Table 5. 2019 Virginia Assembly Vote Among Gun Issue Voters**

	<b>% Gun Issue Voters</b>
<b>Voted Democrat</b>	<b>66%</b>
<b>Voted Republican</b>	<b>32%</b>

# Importance of Gun and Public Safety Issues

- Our poll looked specifically at how voters who said that **five distinct gun safety policies were VERY IMPORTANT** to their vote in the election voted.
- We found that **NEARLY THREE QUARTERS** of those who say that **PASSING A STRONG RED FLAG GUN SAFETY LAW** and **STRENGTHENING VIRGINIA’S GUN LAWS** were “**very important**” to their vote, voted Democrat.

Table 6. Issue is Very Important -- General Assembly Vote Among Voters Who Said Gun Safety Issue(s) Were “Very Important”		
“Very Important” Issue	% Voted Democrat	% Voted Republican
Passing a strong Red Flag gun safety law	72%	28%
Strengthening Virginia’s gun laws	71%	29%

## Impact of Media Exposure

- **Our poll found that gun-related communications helped Democratic candidates.**
- A majority of voters (55%) who saw TV ads on the candidates' gun positions voted for Democratic candidates.

**Table 7. Voting Results Among Voters Who Saw Gun-Issue TV Ads**

Position	% Voted Democrat	% Voted Republican
Exposed to Gun-Issue Media via Television Ads	55%	43%

- And of those voters who said that their exposure to media on the candidates' gun positions was important in determining which candidate to support, **56% voted Democrat, while 43% voted Republican.**

**Table 8. Importance of Media Exposure to Vote Among Voters**

Position	% Voted Democrat	% Voted Republican
Exposure to media on the candidates' gun positions was <u>important in determining which candidate to support</u>	56%	43%

## Effectiveness of Anti-GOP Messaging

- Additionally, our poll tested a series of arguments made against Republican candidates during the campaign to determine how convincing each was to voting against Virginia Republicans.
- Notably, the top-testing anti-GOP message was GUN-FOCUSED, and two of the GUN-FOCUSED anti-GOP messages ranked in the top three of the nine messages tested.
- These messages focused on the Republican being backed by special interest groups that oppose common-sense gun safety laws like background checks, and the Republicans' opposition to Red Flag Laws.
- Further, gun-focused messages were much more impactful than anti-Trump messaging.

**Table 9. Top Anti-GOP Messages Among Voters**

Anti-GOP Message	% Convincing	% Not Convincing
<b>[GUNS—BACKGROUND CHECKS]</b> The Republican candidate is supported by special interest groups that oppose common-sense gun safety laws like background checks.	<b>66%</b>	<b>26%</b>
<b>[EDUCATION]</b> The Republican candidate wanted to take millions of taxpayer dollars away from public schools.	<b>64%</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>[GUNS – RED FLAG]</b> The Republican candidate opposed legislation that would give family members or law enforcement the ability to ask a judge to temporarily suspend a person’s access to firearms if there is evidence, they pose a serious threat to themselves or others.	<b>56%</b>	<b>38%</b>
<b>[TRUMP POLICY]</b> The Republican candidate would bring Trump’s agenda here.	<b>51%</b>	<b>40%</b>