



MEMORANDUM

March 16, 2008

TO: KIMBERLY WEICH REUSCHÉ
The Center For Tobacco Policy And Organizing

FROM: PAUL GOODWIN
Goodwin Simon Victoria Research

RE: Findings from Voter Survey of Rural and Small-Town California on Tobacco Retailer Licensing

BACKGROUND AND METHODOLOGY

The Center for Tobacco Policy and Organizing asked Goodwin Simon Victoria Research to conduct a telephone survey of voters living in rural areas of California as well as small towns. The purpose of the survey was to explore attitudes about local tobacco retailer licensing laws. The survey also explored views on potential smoking restrictions intended to reduce exposure to second-hand smoke.

We completed a total of 945 interviews. The sample was drawn from three regions: the Central Valley, Northern California, and the Sierras. In each region, we completed 315 interviews. The overall results are weighted to reflect the actual proportion of voters in each region relative to the combined total. The results from each individual study area are unweighted.

The margin of error for the study results as a whole is plus or minus 3.1% at a 95% confidence level. That is, if this survey were to be repeated exactly as it was originally conducted, then 95 out of 100 times the responses from the sample (expressed as proportions) would be within 3.1% of the actual population proportions. The margin for error for the results in each study area is plus or minus 5.5% at a 95% confidence level.

The interviewing was conducted March 9-11, 2008 in both English and Spanish. About 5% of the interviews were conducted in Spanish.

We designed a sampling methodology for the purpose of identifying voters who live in areas of the state that can be considered to be rural or who live small towns.

To identify eligible respondents who live in rural areas or small towns, we made several decisions:

- First, we excluded all Bay Area and Southern California counties.
- Second, we excluded any remaining counties with a population density that exceeds 110 people/square mile.
- Third, within the remaining counties, we excluded all places defined by the U.S. Census Bureau as a CDP (Census Designated Place) or CCD (Census County Divisions) of about 25,000 or more.

This left 573,080 voters eligible to be sampled, including 152,801 in the Central Valley area, 217,730 in the North region, and 202,549 in the Sierra region. This represents 46% of the 1.246 million voters in these counties. That is, even in these selected counties, a majority of voters do not live in small towns or rural areas as defined for this study. Moreover, voters eligible for this study account for just 4% of all voters in the state.

We then screened respondents by asking them if they live in an urban area, a suburban area, a small town, or a rural area. Only those who responded with the latter two options were interviewed for this survey.

A list of counties included in the sample is listed below.

County	Region	% of Total Sample	% of Region
Kern County	Central Valley	12%	46%
Kings County	Central Valley	3%	11%
Merced County	Central Valley	5%	18%
San Benito County	Central Valley	1%	2%
Tulare County	Central Valley	6%	23%
Colusa County	North	1%	3%
Del Norte County	North	2%	5%
Glenn County	North	2%	5%
Humboldt County	North	8%	20%
Lake County	North	5%	13%

County	Region	% of Total Sample	% of Region
Mendocino County	North	5%	13%
Shasta County	North	4%	10%
Siskiyou County	North	4%	11%
Tehama County	North	2%	6%
Trinity County	North	1%	3%
Yuba County	North	4%	11%
Alpine County	Sierra	0%*	0%*
Amador County	Sierra	3%	10%
Calaveras County	Sierra	4%	12%
El Dorado County	Sierra	3%	9%
Inyo County	Sierra	2%	4%
Lassen County	Sierra	2%	6%
Mariposa County	Sierra	2%	5%
Modoc County	Sierra	1%	2%
Mono County	Sierra	1%	3%
Nevada County	Sierra	10%	27%
Plumas County	Sierra	2%	6%
Sierra County	Sierra	0%*	1%
Tuolumne County	Sierra	5%	14%

*0% = Less than 0.5%

This report presents results broken out by factors such as age, location, party, and gender only if the differences are both statistically significant using standard significance testing, and are of relevance.

SUMMARY/OVERVIEW

Methodology

Goodwin Simon Victoria Research conducted a telephone survey of 945 registered voters who live in rural areas of California or in small towns. The margin of error for the study as a whole is plus or minus 3.1%. The survey was conducted between March 9 and 11, 2008 in both English and Spanish.

Key Findings

Overwhelming Support Among Voters for Local Tobacco Retailer License (TRL) Laws

- More than 3 of 4 rural and small town voters in California – fully 77% -- would support requiring store owners in their area to get a license to sell cigarettes. This includes 64% who would “strongly” support a license requirement. Only 20% would oppose it.

Table 1: Response to Proposed Tobacco Retailer License Law

	%
Strongly support	64
SW Support	14
TOTAL SUPPORT	78
SW Oppose	8
Strongly Oppose	12
TOTAL OPPOSE	20
Not Sure	3

- This strong support for a license requirement is seen across all three study areas, reaching 83% in the Central Valley area.
- Support for a TRL is higher among women, liberals, parents, Latinos, non-smokers, those under 35, and those in small towns compared to rural areas. This pattern is consistent across most of the relevant questions in the survey.
- Support for a TRL crosses all the usual partisan and ideological divides. For example, 72% of Republicans would favor such a law, along with 82% of Democrats. Among rural men, 72% would favor a TRL law. The point is that support for a TRL law is very strong across all identified voter groups. This does not polarize voters the way that most other issues do in California.

More than Two of Three Support a License Fee of Several Hundred A Year

- Voters not only support the idea of a local TRL, they also strongly favor the idea of store owners having to pay a fee to cover the cost of enforcing the law against the sale of tobacco to minors.

- Indeed, 66% would have no problem with a fee of \$200 a year for a tobacco license to pay for enforcement of the law. Support for a fee above that level falls sharply.

Nearly All Voters Favor Loss of License for Repeated Sales to Minors

- More than 9 in 10 (91%) believe that the penalty for repeat violations of the law should be losing the right to sell cigarettes.
- In a separate question, we found that only 14% -- fewer than 1 in 7 -- thought this penalty for repeat violators was too harsh. One in four -- 25% -- thought this penalty was too mild.

Nearly 3 in 4 Agree that Self-Policing Won't Work

- Seventy-two percent overall agree that we need a "strong enforcement system" because we "can't trust" store owners to police themselves. Only 25% disagree.

Most Voters Would Support a Meth Pipe Provision

- There is broad support for a provision in TRLs that would prohibit the granting of a license to any store that sold meth pipes or other drug paraphernalia. In fact, 68% overall said that such a provision would make them more likely to support a TRL law. This includes 52% of those who were initially opposed to a TRL law.
- The power of a meth provision stems from the widespread and intense concern about meth abuse among rural and small town voters. Fully 81% rated "reducing teen use of meth" as a "very high" priority for state and local government in California.

Reasons for Support for TRLs: Concern About Teen Smoking and Agreement that Enforcement Will Slow Teen Use of Tobacco

The survey results reveal at least three reasons for the strong support for TRL laws in small towns and rural areas.

- First, we see that many voters are very concerned about teen smoking. Seventy-five percent say that reducing teen smoking should be a high priority for state and local governments. This is similar to the 80% who say that reducing teen drinking should be a priority.

- Second, many voters recognize that teen access have easy access to cigarettes from retail stores. Specifically, 50% say it is easy for minors to buy cigarettes at local retail stores where they live, with 36% who say it is hard for them to buy cigarettes. Supporters of a TRL law are far more likely than opponents to say that it is easy for teenagers to buy cigarettes.
- Third, 75% agree that limiting this access will in fact reduce teen smoking. In other words, voters recognize that illegal sales to teens is a major contributor to teen smoking.

Strongest Pro-TRL Messages Demonstrate Positive Outcomes

The survey tested a battery of eight messages in favor of TRLs, and 70%-85% of voters found them to be important. The most persuasive messages are about outcomes:

- That reducing teen smoking reduces the risk of cancer, heart disease, and lung disease.
- That TRLs really work in reducing teen access to cigarettes, reducing teen sales by nearly 70%.
- That TRLs actually reduce teen smoking.
- That enforcing the law against the sale of cigarettes to minors sends a strong message to teenagers that smoking is not OK.

Messages About Process Are Slightly Less Persuasive.

- Voters were less interested in knowing that urban areas already have such laws, that store owners can afford to pay the fees, and that a TRL requirement would give law enforcement the funding needed to enforce the law.

Strongest Anti-TRL Messages Focus on Blaming Parents and Limiting Government

Roughly half the voters found anti-TRL messages to be important, with the top messages being:

- That we should blame the teenagers and their parents, not the stores. This argument about holding parents accountable has some appeal, especially with more conservative voters.

- That we should not be requiring businesses to pay more taxes and deal with added layers of bureaucracy.

In addition, we find that some voters (39%) will react favorably if opponents say that it's "not fair" to make all store owners pay a fee rather than limiting the fee only to those who are caught violating the law. We also found that 55% agree that it is not fair to punish store owners for selling cigarettes to minors, rather than punishing the clerks who made the sale or the teens themselves who bought the cigarettes.

While this "not fair" argument has the potential for some influence with voters, the power of this argument is far outweighed by the power of pro-TRL arguments. For example, 91% agree that "if a store repeatedly breaks the law by selling cigarettes to minors, then it should no longer have the right to sell cigarettes."

Indeed, it is neither unusual nor unsettling to find that voters have contradictory views on issues. They might agree in theory that it's not fair to blame store owners for the poor behavior of clerks and customers, but in the end they care much more about keeping tobacco away from teenagers. By framing discussion around the need to stop the sale of cigarettes to minors, and by educating voters about the potential for TRLs to reduce teen smoking, supporters of TRLs can win this debate.

Rural and Small Town Voters As Concerned As Other Californians About Second-Hand Smoke/As Supportive of Restrictions on Second-Hand Smoke

In addition to the questions about TRLs, the survey also explored voter attitudes about second-hand smoke and laws to limit second-hand smoke exposure.

- Two of three rural and small town voters say that second-hand smoke is "very harmful," similar to the findings from most of our previous surveys across the state. For example, among California renters in 2004 we found that 63% said second-hand smoke was very harmful.
- As we saw with renters statewide, rural and small town voters are very likely to support restrictions on smoking in apartment buildings as a way of reducing exposure to second-hand smoke. Specifically:
 - 75% support no-smoking sections in apartment buildings
 - 68% support a ban on smoking in outdoor common areas.

- 70% would support prohibiting smoking at outdoor events such as county fairs.
- 66% would support prohibiting smoking in the downtown area of their town except for designated smoking areas.
- 55% would support prohibiting smoking in outdoor public areas such as parks and trails.

Reported Smoking Levels Comparable to Other Statewide Results

- We found that 21% of small town and rural voters said they had a smoker in the household, and 16% said they personally had smoked in the past week. About 29% of all voters said they used to smoke in the past.
- For comparison, our 2004 statewide survey of renters found that 27% said they had a smoker in the household, with 22% who said they had smoked in the past week. Twenty-three percent said they were former smokers.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The survey results are certainly very encouraging for supporters of TRL laws. Despite concerns that the presumed more conservative/libertarian views of small town and rural Californians would preclude support for TRLs, in fact we find support among these voters to be quite strong at close to 80%. In fact, this result is quite similar to what was found in a survey of all California adults conducted in 2006 for the State Department of Health Services.

The main reasons for the strong support for TRLs among small town and rural voters seem to be:

- Concern about teen smoking is high
- Many (half) believe that teens have easy access to cigarettes at local stores
- Most believe that if you can cut out the legal sales of cigarettes, you can reduce teen smoking.

This latter point is not one to be taken for granted. Voters might have felt that eliminating illegal sales to minors would not have much effect on teen smoking since they could get it from older friends. Fortunately, voters do believe that by turning off the direct flow of cigarettes to minors, overall smoking levels among teens will decline.

But it is not just with TRL issues where we see strong support for smoking restrictions among these voters. We also find close to 70% who favor restrictions on smoking in apartment buildings, and also restrictions on outdoor smoking in downtown areas of nearby towns.

It is remarkable that these policy proposals, which seemed so far-sighted and even radical just a few years ago, are so easily accepted by voters even in the most distant – and conservative -- corners of the state. Support for limiting smoking in public areas is popular across not only geographic divides, but also the usual partisan and ideological chasms that separate the electorate on most issues. We found almost no difference by party or ideology when it comes to support for such smoking restrictions.

The one big divide that remains is between smokers and non-smokers. This divide is shallow when it comes to TRLs, but is quite deep when it comes to smoking restrictions. For example, 71% of non-smokers favor no-smoking areas in apartment buildings, compared to 41% of smokers. Among non-smokers, 70% favor making downtown areas no-smoking zones compared to just 45% of smokers.

Fortunately, the gap is much smaller when looking at former smokers compared to those who never smoked. While former smokers are slightly less sympathetic to smoking restrictions compared to those who never smoked, they are still strongly in favor of most of the restrictions.

There are some divides that appear when it comes to attitudes about TRLs, other than whether or not one currently smokes. For example, women are more supportive of TRLs than men, and small town voters are more supportive than rural voters. We also see more support among Latinos, those under 35, parents, liberals, and those in the Central Valley area. Support is weaker among Northern area men and Northern Republicans, among rural men, and among those age 50-64. But even in these groups we find very strong levels of support, even if they are slightly below those in other voter groups.

Voters not only support the concept of TRLs, but they are generally fine with an accompanying fee of \$200 a year. Support seems to erode at higher levels, but certainly there is very little resistance at the \$200/year figure.

Nor is there much concern about sending teens along with undercover law enforcement officers to buy cigarettes as a way of identifying violators of the law.

There are, however, some arguments against TRLs that are likely to be effective if used by opponents. These fall into two areas:

- First, that it's not fair to blame store owners for the problem. Voters may not really recognize that clerks will sell to minors only if their bosses agree to turn a blind eye to the situation. Many voters also feel that the parents should be held responsible if their kids try to buy cigarettes illegally. Words like "fairness" and "responsibility" and even "accountability" are very powerful in the conservative as well as the liberal lexicon. Allowing the other side to capture the high ground with the use of these words would be a mistake.
- Second, that small business owners should not be hassled by more government regulation and taxation.

To counter these points, TRL supporters need to focus on several key thoughts:

- First, that we all have a responsibility to prevent teen smoking. Parents, teens, and store owners all need to be held accountable for doing the right thing.
- Second, that TRLs are in fact a really effective way to reduce illegal sales of cigarettes to minors. When stores are licensed and laws are being enforced, sales of tobacco to minors decline by up to 70%.
- Third, that TRLs really make a difference in reducing teen smoking. When sales to teens go down, smoking goes down.
- Fourth, that TRLs help protect the health of our children. When teen smoking goes down, so does lung cancer, heart disease, and lung disease. Few steps that we can take will be more effective in protecting our children.