



Public Opinion Research Survey: March 2008

Sierra Region

Survey of California Rural and Small Town Voters

About Local Tobacco Retailer Licensing Ordinances

Background

The sale of tobacco products to minors is a problem in most cities and counties in the state. Illegal sales by retailers contribute to the lifelong addiction of many youth to tobacco. To combat this problem, many California cities and counties have passed or are considering passing a tobacco retailer licensing ordinance.

In March 2008, the Center for Tobacco Policy & Organizing commissioned a survey of 945 California rural and small town voters to gauge the level of support for a licensing ordinance and to identify the unique challenges for getting an ordinance adopted in rural communities. The survey was conducted by Goodwin Simon Victoria Research. Complete survey results are available at www.Center4TobaccoPolicy.org/polling-rural.

The survey was conducted in three regions of California (Central Valley, Sierra and Northern). All regions demonstrate strong support for a tobacco retailer licensing ordinance; however support is especially strong in the Central Valley region. In the Central Valley region 83% of voters surveyed support a licensing ordinance compared to 76% in the Sierra region and 75% in the Northern region. This document summarizes the results for the Sierra region.

Summary of Key Findings

Provisions of a Tobacco Retailer Licensing Ordinance

California rural voters understand the need for a tobacco retailer licensing ordinance and are supportive of a licensing ordinance and the different provisions of such a law:

- 50% feel that it is easy for minors to buy cigarettes at local retail stores
- 76% support requiring store owners to get a license to sell cigarettes
- 66% feel that a fee of \$200 a year for the license is either “too low” or “about right”
- 91% agree that a store owner who repeatedly sells cigarettes to minors should no longer have the right to sell cigarettes
- 84% think that increasing the penalties, such as suspension and revocation of the license, on retailers for each new violation is either too mild or about right as a punishment
- 64% would be more inclined to support a licensing ordinance if it included a provision to not allow stores that sell methamphetamine (meth) pipes to obtain a license. This includes about half of those who earlier in the survey were opposed to a local tobacco license.

Statements For and Against a Tobacco Retailer Licensing Ordinance

Sierra rural voters are receptive to statements in favor of a licensing ordinance. At least 74% of voters thought that all eight arguments given in the survey were important reasons to support a licensing ordinance. The four statements rated as most important are listed below:

- 85% -- There is no more effective way to improve the health of the community than through reducing smoking, especially among teens
- 83% -- A licensing ordinance sends the message that smoking is not okay for minors and that the community is not going to allow it
- 81% -- These laws really work, because communities that have adopted a licensing ordinance have seen sales of cigarettes to minors decrease
- 81% -- If you can stop the easy access of minors to cigarettes then teen smoking can be reduced

Fewer rural voters feel that the reasons against adopting a licensing ordinance are important. The three statements rated as most important are listed below:

- 64% -- It is not fair to blame the store owners, and that teens and parents should be held accountable
- 57% -- A new layer of taxes and bureaucracy is too much
- 53% -- A licensing ordinance could end up punishing everyone by shutting down local small grocery stores in areas where they are few and far between

Secondhand Smoke Exposure

In addition, California rural voters were asked about their support for policies to reduce exposure to secondhand smoke.

- 84% feel that secondhand smoke is harmful
- 74% support a law requiring apartment buildings to offer sections with non-smoking units where all apartments, balconies and patios are smoke free
- 69% support a law prohibiting smoking in outdoor common areas of apartment buildings
- 67% support a law requiring smoking to be restricted at outdoor events such as county fairs and rodeos
- 62% support restricting smoking in downtown areas
- 51% support prohibiting smoking in parks, trails and recreation areas

Demographic Differences

There are important differences in support among different demographic groups. (This data is taken from the statewide, not regional, survey results.)

- Women are more supportive of a licensing ordinance than men (81% compared to 73%)
- 85% of parents are in favor compared to 75% of nonparents. Among parents of teenagers, 89% are in favor compared to 79% of parents of younger kids
- 87% of Latinos are in favor compared to 76% of non-Latinos
- 85% of those under the age of 50 favor licensing retailers, compared to about 74% of those 50 and over

Survey Methodology

This survey was conducted of 945 rural and small town voters in California in March 2008. Rural and small town voters were identified by excluding Bay Area and Southern California counties, excluding counties with a population density exceeding 110 people per square mile and then, from the remaining 29 counties, excluding cities with a population over 25,000.

The rural counties were divided into three regions (Central Valley, Sierra and Northern) with an equal number of voters (315) surveyed in each region. The Sierra region includes Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Inyo, Lassen, Mariposa, Modoc, Mono, Nevada, Plumas, Sierra and Tuolumne counties. Separate Key Findings documents summarize the statewide results and each of the other regional surveys. The margin for error for the results in each regional area is plus or minus 5.5% at a 95% confidence level.