



MEMORANDUM

May 24, 2011

TO: CENTER FOR TOBACCO POLICY AND ORGANIZING

FROM: PAUL GOODWIN
Goodwin Simon Strategic Research

RE: Key Findings from Los Angeles County Tobacco Retail Policy Survey

Introduction And Methodology

The Center for Tobacco Policy and Organizing asked Goodwin Simon Strategic Research to conduct a telephone survey of Los Angeles County voters to assess reaction to a proposed local tobacco retailers licensing ordinance, and to various possible provisions (“plug-ins”) that a licensing ordinance might contain.

We completed a total of 561 telephone interviews with Los Angeles County voters between April 20 and May 1, 2011. The margin of error for results in Los Angeles County is plus or minus 4.1% 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 4.1% of the actual population proportions.

Our sample frame included both land lines and wireless numbers. Interviews were conducted in both English and Spanish; about 8% of all interviews were completed in Spanish. To qualify for the sample, a voter had to have participated in the November, 2008 election or one of the more recent statewide elections. Results were weighted slightly by race/ethnicity.

These results reflect findings drawn from a Los Angeles County subset of the full, statewide survey we conducted on this topic. Statewide results are presented in a separate document.

More than Eight in Ten County Voters Support a Local Tobacco Licensing Ordinance

Our survey of Los Angeles County voters shows very strong support for a local retail tobacco licensing ordinance. In fact, fully 85% of the County's voters would support "requiring store owners in your area to get a license if they want to sell cigarette and other tobacco products." Just 14% would oppose such a requirement. Support for such an ordinance in Los Angeles County is very similar to support among voters statewide (83% in support and 14% opposed statewide).

***Question Wording:** Many cities and counties in California require store owners to get a license to sell cigarettes and other tobacco products. To reduce youth smoking, the license requirement imposes strong penalties on stores that sell cigarettes to minors, and also increases enforcement of this law. In general, would you support or oppose requiring store owners in your area to get a license if they want to sell cigarettes and other tobacco products?*

Even among smokers, there is close to three-to-one support for a tobacco licensing ordinance, at 69% in favor and 26% opposed. Among non-smokers, support for a licensing requirement is at 86%, with just 13% opposed. Support among Asian voters in the County is at 88%, among white voters support is at 83%, among Blacks we find 84% in support, and among Latino voters we find 92% in favor.

Nearly Eight in Ten Support Requiring Retailers to Pay a Fee for the License

We also found very little resistance to the idea of charging retailers a fee for a tobacco retail license, with the funds used to enforce the law against selling cigarettes to minors. Seventy-eight percent would support a fee of "a few hundred dollars a year" for the license if the funds were used for this purpose. Only 20% would oppose this fee. These figures are nearly identical to what we found statewide.

***Question Wording:** To get a license to sell tobacco products, store owners would pay a fee of a few hundred dollars a year. Money from that fee would be used to enforce the law against selling cigarettes to minors. Is [this] something you would be inclined to strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?*

Strong support for a fee is bipartisan: 69% of Republican voters in the County, 82% of Democrats, and 84% of nonpartisan voters would favor this fee.

Nearly 90% Support Revoking Tobacco License for Repeated Sales to Minors

An even higher proportion, 87%, would support suspending the tobacco license of any retail store that “repeatedly violates the law against selling cigarettes to minors.” Just 13% would oppose this. Again, these results are nearly identical to what we found statewide.

Question wording: Repeated violations of the law against selling cigarettes to minors would result in the store having its license to sell tobacco products suspended. Is [this] something you would be inclined to strongly support, somewhat support, somewhat oppose, or strongly oppose?

This level of support for a policy proposal, and especially one imposing a fee on a respectable business, is truly unusual and reflective of the deep commitment of California voters to reducing youth smoking.

Thirty-Eight Percent Say It Is Easy for Teens to Buy Cigarettes at Local Retail Stores

One factor that may be associated with support for a licensing ordinance is a belief that it is easy for local teenagers to buy cigarettes at local retail stores. Among voters across the County, 48% said it was easy for teens to buy cigarettes, with 32% who said it was hard and 20% who could not answer. This compares to 45% statewide who said it was easy for teens to buy cigarettes locally, with 31% who said it was hard for them.

Among those supporting the ordinance, 50% say teens have easy access to cigarettes and 31% say it is hard for them to get cigarettes. Among opponents of the ordinance, those figures are 40% easy and 38% hard – so supporters are more likely than opponents to believe that teens can easily buy cigarettes in stores.

Question wording: To begin, how easy or hard do you think it is for teenagers under age 18 to buy cigarettes at local retail stores in your area?

Five Plug-Ins Earn Strong Support for Voters

We also tested plug-ins that could be part of a local retail tobacco licensing ordinance. Three of them were extremely popular with voters, as shown in the table below, with two others earning a strong but somewhat more divided response:

RESPONSE TO PLUG-INS	Support	Oppose
Require tobacco warning signs to be posted	87%	13%
No tobacco sales within 1,000 feet of schools	73%	25%
No tobacco sales where meth pipes are sold	71%	26%
500 foot distance between stores selling tobacco	60%	37%
No sales of individual little cigars	56%	35%

The reaction by voter groups to these plug-ins followed a clear and consistent pattern.

- Support divides by gender, with women more likely to favor the plug-ins than men.
- Support divides by race, with minorities and especially Latinos more likely to support the plug-ins, while white voters (and especially white men and whites under 50) are less likely to favor them.
- Support divides most widely by smoking status, with nonsmokers much more supportive than the 9% in Los Angeles County who told us they are current smokers.

Plug-In 1: 87% Support Tobacco Warning Signs Inside Stores Selling Tobacco

The most popular plug-in we tested would require stores to post tobacco warning signs to be eligible for a license. Fully 87% of County voters would support “requiring any store selling tobacco products to post warning signs about the dangers of tobacco use.” Just 13% opposed this plug-in. Support in Los Angeles County was higher than what we found statewide (82% in favor, 16% opposed).

***Question Wording:** What about requiring any store selling tobacco products to post warning signs about the dangers of tobacco use? These warning signs would include graphic images and written warnings detailing the dangers of tobacco use, and information on how to quit. Would you be inclined to support, or to oppose, requiring stores that sell tobacco products to post warning signs?*

We then tested responses to two possible reasons to require warning signs in stores selling tobacco. After each statement we read, we asked respondents if they felt it was a good reason, or not a good reason, to support this requirement. We also tested responses to possible reasons to NOT require warning signs in stores.

As shown below, both positive statements – one about reducing teen use of tobacco, and one about how such warnings really work in reducing smoking -- were received about equally by respondents. We note also how much more effective the positive statements were than the reasons to not require the signs. Regarding the latter, a concern about excess government intrusion earned a slightly stronger response than concern about infringing on the rights of retailers.

(POSITIVE) Reasons to Require Warning Signs	Good Reason	Not Good
These warning signs would encourage people to quit using tobacco and would help prevent young people from starting	82%	16%
We know that warnings really work in helping people quit using tobacco. So, they should be visible before people buy tobacco products, not just on the package after they buy them	83%	17%
(NEGATIVE) Reasons to Not Require Warning Signs	Good Reason	Not Good
These signs would require retailers to post negative information about the very products they are trying to sell. That is just not right	42%	56%
These warning labels are already on the tobacco packages. Adults can make up their own minds without being forced by government to see even more intrusive information	50%	50%

Plug-In 2: 73% Support Prohibiting the Sale of Tobacco within 1,000 Feet of a School

By nearly a three to one ratio (73% in favor and 25% opposed), County voters support a 1,000 foot buffer zone around schools within which tobacco could not be sold. The results statewide were identical.

Question wording: What if this law prohibited any business located within one thousand feet of a school in your area from selling tobacco products? Does this sound like something you would generally support, or oppose?

We then tested responses to two possible reasons to prohibit stores located within 1,000 feet of a school from selling tobacco. After each statement we read, we asked respondents if they felt it was a good reason, or not a good reason, to support this requirement. We also tested possible reasons to allow stores located near schools to continue selling tobacco products.

As shown below, both positive statements – one about reducing illegal sales to minors, and one about reducing youth smoking -- were about equally influential with voters. The negative statement about excess government involvement was considerably more influential than the statement about the economic impact of such a law.

(POSITIVE) Reasons to Prohibit Tobacco Sales Near Schools	Good Reason	Not Good
Studies show that when cigarettes are sold where children congregate, illegal sales to minors go up. Prohibiting the sale of cigarettes near schools will reduce illegal sales to minors (N = 281)	76%	22%
Studies show that the location of tobacco retailers near schools can lead to higher teen smoking rates. Prohibiting the sales of cigarettes close to schools can reduce youth smoking (N = 280)	80%	18%
(NEGATIVE) Reasons to Continue Allowing Tobacco Sales Near Schools	Good Reason	Not Good
It's wrong for government to tell stores that sell tobacco products where they can and cannot do business. That gives too much power to government	47%	51%
A law like this could hurt the economy - it would cost us jobs during this recession, when we can least afford it	34%	60%

We also found that a solid majority of voters believe this law should apply to existing stores: 58% say that stores currently within 1,000 feet of a school should not be allowed to sell tobacco, with just 35% who say tobacco sales should be allowed in existing stores near schools. The statewide results were nearly identical.

Question wording: What do you think should happen with existing stores that are currently selling tobacco products but are located within one thousand feet of a school? Do you think such stores should continue to be allowed to sell tobacco products? Or do you think they should no longer be allowed to sell tobacco products if they are within one thousand feet of a school?

Plug-In 3: More than Seven in Ten County Voters Say That Stores Selling Meth Pipes Should Not Be Allowed to Sell Tobacco

By nearly a three-to-one margin, voters say that stores that sell meth pipes should not be given a tobacco license. Seventy-one percent say that stores selling meth pipes should be prohibited from selling tobacco products, with 26% who would allow such stores to sell tobacco. Statewide, we found that 66% favored this plug-in with 25% opposed.

Question wording: OK, some stores sell pipes that are used for smoking meth. Should stores in your area that sell these meth pipes be allowed to sell tobacco products as well? Or, should stores that sell meth pipes be prohibited from selling tobacco products?

Plug-in 4: 60% Favor a 500-Foot Distance between Stores Selling Tobacco

We asked voters about requiring stores selling tobacco to be at least 500 feet apart. We found that 60% favored this plug-in, with 37% opposed, very similar to what we found statewide.

Question wording: What about limiting the number of stores that can sell tobacco products in any given area? So stores that sell tobacco products would have to be at least 500 feet apart? Does this sound like something you would be inclined to support, or to oppose?

While this plug-in was very popular among those who favor a tobacco licensing ordinance, opponents of an ordinance really disliked it. That is, among voters who support an ordinance in the County, 63% favored this plug-in and 33% opposed it. But among licensing opponents, 41% favored the plug-in and 58% opposed it, much higher resistance than we found with most of the other plug-ins.

Plug-in 5: 56% Support Prohibiting the Sales of Individual Little Cigars and Cigarillos

A solid majority (56%) of County voters would support a plug-in that prohibited the sales of individual little cigars and cigarillos. Thirty-five percent would oppose this plug-in, with strong opposition in particular from smokers.

Question wording: At present, stores are not allowed to sell individual cigarettes. What about also prohibiting the sale of individual little cigars and cigarillos? Does this sound like something you would be inclined to support, or to oppose?

We then tested the impact of two statements in support of such a prohibition on the sale of little cigars and cigarillos, and two statements opposing a ban. Both positive statements – one about reducing youth smoking and the other about reducing minority smoking rates – earned fairly similar responses. There was only a slight difference in response to the two negative messages: one about this requirement being a burden on consumers and the other about excess government control.

(POSITIVE) Reasons to Prohibit Sales of Individual Cigars/Cigarillos	Good Reason	Not Good
Individual little cigars and cigarillos are inexpensive and marketed to young smokers to hook them on tobacco. Eliminating individual sales would discourage their use among young people and reduce youth smoking	69%	27%
Little cigars and cigarillos are developed and marketed primarily to African Americans and Latinos to get them hooked on tobacco products. Eliminating single sales of these products can help reduce smoking rates among these groups	66%	29%
(NEGATIVE) Reasons to Continue Allowing Sales of Individual Cigars/Cigarillos	Good Reason	Not Good
These products are used less frequently than cigarettes, so requiring them to be bought in packages is a needless hassle for the customer	44%	50%
It is wrong for the government to tell retailers how to sell certain products. This gives the government too much power	49%	48%

Smoking Status

Nine percent of County voters told us that they have smoked tobacco in the past week. This includes 11% of men and 7% of women.

These numbers do seem to track publically available data for all residents of California, as reported by TobaccoFreeCA.com. Those numbers (as of 2006) are slightly higher than what we are finding in this survey, but we would expect smoking rates to be lower among voters given the higher income and education levels of voters compared to the general population.

Conclusions

The two key conclusions from the survey are:

- The idea of a retail tobacco licensing ordinance is very popular with voters across the state, and across all partisan, racial, and other demographic divides. There are also several overwhelmingly popular plug-ins that should be part of every local licensing ordinance.
- The message matters. By placing this licensing ordinance in the context of preventing teen smoking and enforcing laws against sales to minors, advocates can effectively counter any “big government” objections that opponents of a retail tobacco licensing ordinance may raise.

Thus, we expect that the results of this poll will help reassure policymakers throughout the state that support for a tobacco retail licensing ordinance, plus appropriate plug-ins, will make not only for good public health policy, but also for good politics.