



**TO** Interested Parties

**FROM** Lori Weigel, New Bridge Strategy

**RE:** Americans' Views of Alcohol Regulation

**DATE** May 2, 2019

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New Bridge Strategy completed a survey of Americans age 21 and older in March 2019 regarding their views of alcohol regulation in their state.<sup>1</sup> The survey was the latest look at core attitudes on a number of facets of alcohol regulation which have been tracked going back to 2008. We continue to find significant and bipartisan support for state regulation of the alcohol industry, as American adults continue to be satisfied with alcohol regulations in their state. Once introduced to the three-tier system, they say it is working well. American adults want alcohol laws to prioritize public safety over all other aspects.

The specific key findings include:

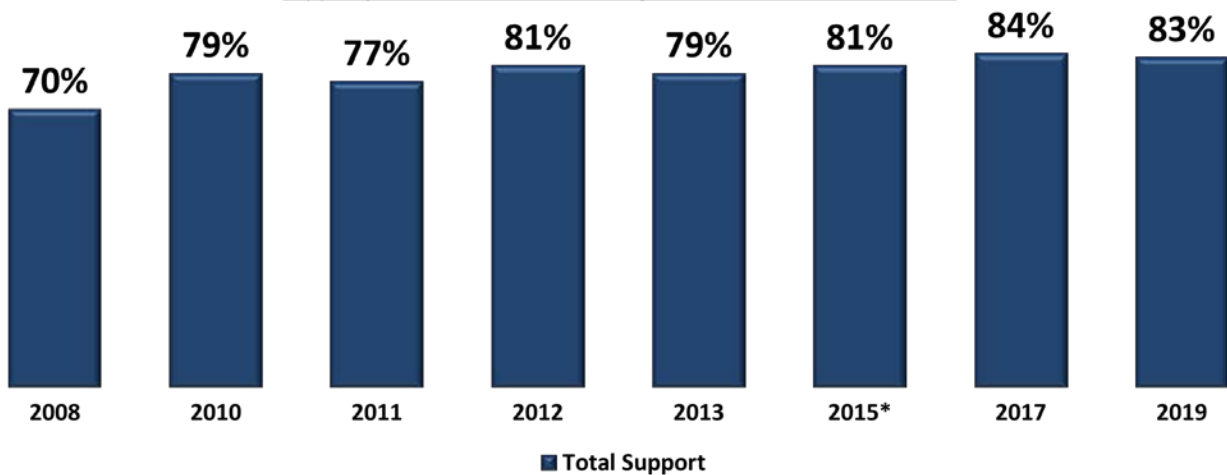
- **There is solid support across party lines for state regulation of alcohol.** Fully 83 percent of Americans indicate support for individual states setting “their own laws and regulations surrounding the sale of alcohol, meaning beer, wine and liquor.” Fully 40 percent strongly support this, while only 17 percent oppose the idea. This is incredibly consistent with past data going back to 2008, as one can see in the following graph.

While government regulation of any kind is often viewed through a partisan lens, we do not see this when it comes to state regulation of alcohol. Support bridges the partisan gap with fully 85 percent of Republicans, 81 percent of Democrats, and 83 percent of independents expressing support for state regulation. Moreover, support for state regulation is strong across the country and with all demographic sub-groups.

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<sup>1</sup> **Methodology:** From March 12-18, 2019, New Bridge Strategy completed 1003 online interviews with adults age 21 and older throughout the United States. Interviews were drawn from online panels, and the sample was drawn proportionally throughout the country and is demographically representative of the adult population in this age group. The confidence interval associated with this sample is +/-3.5% at the 95% confidence level; with varying confidence for population subgroups within the sample (although they will be higher). Due to rounding, not all totals will sum to 100%.

*Support for Individual States Setting Their Own Alcohol Sales Laws*



- **In part, this is due to the fact that alcohol is viewed as a unique product which requires oversight.** Fully 86 percent of respondents say that “it is very important to keep the alcohol industry regulated.” The view that “since alcohol is different than other consumer products, it needs a different set of rules and the state should be regulating it” is nearly on par in agreement (82 percent agree). A solid majority of Americans reject the idea that “alcohol is just like other consumer goods such as toilet paper and tin foil,” with 69 percent disagreeing with this view (only 31 percent agree).
- **Specifically, there is strong support for residency requirements by the states.** There is strong support for a specific requirement that “those who sell or distribute beer, wine and alcohol be a resident of their state in order to obtain a license” (77 percent support, 38 percent strongly support). The state residency requirement has overwhelming support across party lines, with 76 percent of Republicans, 75 percent of Democrats and 78 percent of independents in support. Support exceeds two-thirds support in every region of the country and with every single demographic sub-group examined.
- **More broadly, Americans are satisfied with current alcohol regulations in the state.** In multiple questions throughout the survey, Americans express clear and overwhelming satisfaction with how alcohol is handled in their state, including...
  - 82 percent say they are very (38 percent) or somewhat (44 percent) satisfied with the “existing system for purchasing alcohol” in their state. Only 18 percent register dissatisfaction. This is within margin of error of responses two years ago on this exact question.
  - Only 14 percent view current alcohol regulations in their state as “too restrictive,” while the vast majority say they are “about right” (64 percent) or too lenient (12 percent). Another one-in-ten say they do not know enough to register an opinion. Again, this is very close to the responses we saw in 2017.
  - Nearly nine-of-ten are satisfied with the variety of alcohol products available in their community (87 percent) with almost half (49 percent) saying they are “very” satisfied.
  - Satisfaction is also high with the number of places alcohol can be purchased. Fully seven-in-ten (70 percent) say the number of places where alcohol can be purchased in their community

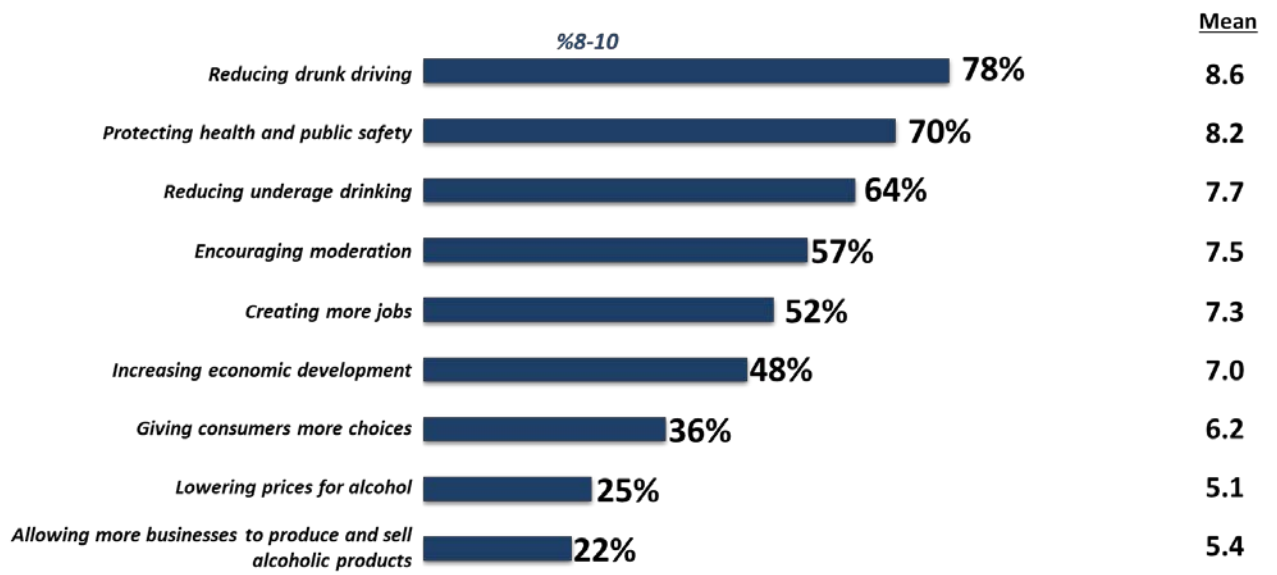
is “about right,” while 19 percent feel there are too many. Only 11 percent say there are not enough.

- Again, throughout this data there are few distinctions, with most Americans holding very similar views. It is especially notable that they are in concurrence along party lines which is rare on many other topics.
- **The three-tier system is viewed positively.** Given that most adults are not completely familiar with the three-tier system, we provided a brief neutral explanation of it as follows: *“As you may know, most states in the U.S. have regulations requiring that producers of alcohol sell their products to licensed local independent distributors, who then sell the alcohol to individual retailers such as bars, grocery, liquor, and packaged goods stores.”* Fully three-quarters (75 percent) say that they view this system as “working well,” and an equal number of 75 percent support individual states regulating alcohol sales under this system. Support over the years has consistently been in the solid majority range, with greater than two-thirds support since 2010.

Again, support is evident across party lines, with 76 percent of Republicans, 77 percent of independents and 73 percent of Democrats supporting states regulating alcohol through this three-tier system.

- **Americans want alcohol laws to prioritize safety.** In a number of key questions in the survey, the public expresses that alcohol-related problems are serious concerns and that health and safety should be at the forefront when lawmakers consider alcohol regulations.
  - Driving under the influence of alcohol is seen as the most serious problem we tested with nine-in-ten (90 percent) characterizing it as an extremely or very serious problem facing our country. It just eclipsed illegal drug abuse (88 percent) and prescription drug abuse (87 percent);
  - “High risk drinking on college campuses,” “binge drinking” and “underage drinking” are also all seen as extremely or very serious problems at nearly the same levels (78 percent, 74 percent and 71 percent, respectively);
  - When asked what are the most important factors that lawmakers should consider when contemplating changes, the public overwhelmingly backs health and safety considerations. As the following graph illustrates, Americans say lawmakers should prioritize “reducing drunk driving” (78 rate it high in importance on a scale where 10 is very important, 0 is not at all important and 5 is a neutral rating), protecting health and public safety” (70 percent) and “reducing underage drinking” (64 percent) over all other factors. Conversely, the factors which are least apt to be seen as very important for lawmakers to consider are “giving consumers more choices” (36 percent), “lowering prices” (25 percent) and “allowing more business to produce and sell alcoholic products” (22 percent).

## Importance of Factors Lawmakers Should Consider in Crafting Alcohol Regulations



- The survey also finds overwhelming support for keeping 21 as the minimum age to purchase alcohol (85 percent support, 61 percent strong support). Support for the minimum age being 21 is overwhelming with all demographic sub-groups, including the youngest respondents, as well as across party lines.