

Public Support for Alcohol Regulation is Widespread

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An overwhelming majority of Americans support alcohol regulation, believe alcohol distribution should be handled by local companies and not global corporations, and can easily find a wide variety of beer, wine and liquor in their community.

Those are among the results of a recent national survey that emphasizes how strongly the U.S. public backs basic alcohol regulation, and the degree to which public officials who advocate weakening regulations are out of step with most people.

Fully 72 percent of respondents said that since alcohol is different than other consumer products, it needs a different set of rules and the state should be regulating this industry. Only 22 percent said the free market is the best option to regulate any industry, including alcohol. The survey also found that:

76 percent support the rights of states to set their own laws and regulations that require alcohol to be sold under the three-tiered system. Under this system, alcohol is required to go from a licensed manufacturer to a licensed distributor to a licensed retailer, and businesses in each tier are licensed separately and no manufacturer can own or have a financial interest in a retailer.

89 percent agreed that "all alcohol sold in my state should come through a licensed system which effectively tracks the steps it takes from the producer to the consumer."

86 percent agreed that, with the overwhelming majority of alcohol sold in the U.S. manufactured by foreign-owned global corporations, it is more important than ever that states and localities maintain their ability to regulate alcohol.

69 percent agreed with the statement that eliminating the state's rules and regulations around alcohol beverage sales would lead to overconsumption, increased drunk driving accidents and more underage drinking.

Despite frequent calls for deregulation, and last year's initiative that dismantled Washington state's alcohol regulatory system, the survey clearly underscores the value the public places in our nation's regulatory system,

which is designed to foster moderation; prevent sales practices that lead to abuse and fake/tainted alcohol; efficiently collect taxes; and balance prices.

Convenience and availability clearly are not issues for most, with 88 percent saying it is easy in their community for adults to find a wide variety of beer, wine and liquor. In addition, 73 percent oppose extending hours for bars and liquor stores.

Most believe deregulation would result in greater youth alcohol use, with 81 percent responding that parents, police officers and retailers already have difficult challenges with underage drinking and that getting rid of alcohol rules, regulations and safeguards could make the problem worse.

Alcohol is a personal issue for many respondents. More than a third (37 percent) said they or their family had experienced a personal tragedy that was the result of alcohol abuse.

Because of its potential for abuse, alcohol should not be sold like any other commodity, and most survey respondents agree. It's a vital message all of us need to continue championing and that deregulation proponents ought to heed.

The national survey of about 1,000 adults was conducted in July for the nonprofit Center for Alcohol Policy, <http://www.centerforalcoholpolicy.org>.

About the author: Barry Finnemore, a partner with Precision Communications, is a freelance writer and editor who has written extensively on alcohol issues.