



Minimum Legal Drinking Age



Policy Briefing by:
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Agenda

- Introduction

- Why is this a policy Issue worth exploring?

- Development of U.S. Alcohol Policy

- The National Minimum Legal Drinking Age Act of 1984

- The Ongoing 18/21 Debate

- Conclusion

- Policies Needed to Address Drinking Issues

Why is Minimum Legal Drinking Age an Issue?

- Drinking involves issues of freedom, responsibility, parental/personal rights, religion, politics and many other realms of life
- Consequences: DUI, sexual assaults, domestic violence, etc.
- U.S. has the highest drinking age in western civilization but the most drinking-related problems
 - Age 21 policy not effective?
- Some states (South Dakota, Missouri, South Carolina, and Wisconsin) are even considering reducing the minimum legal drinking age

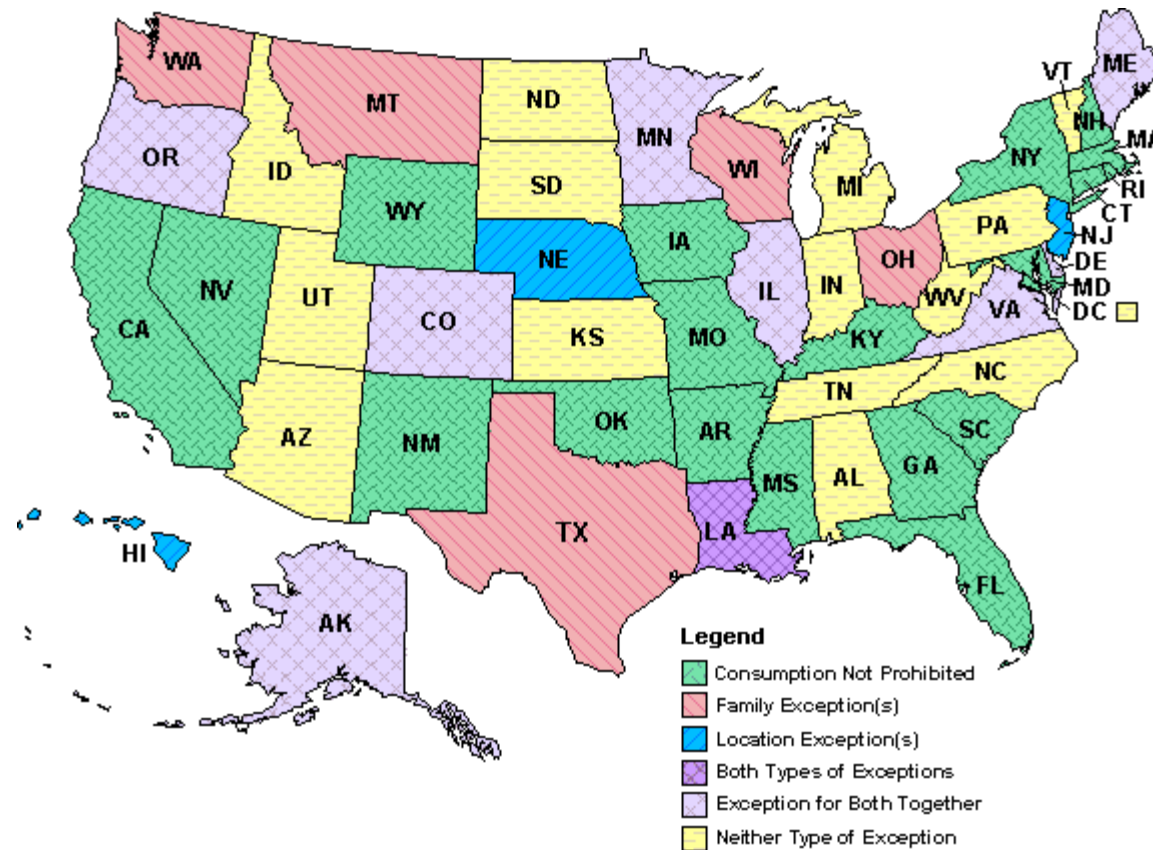
Development of the U.S. Drinking Policy:

- In 1919, the 18th Amendment prohibited the sale of all intoxicating liquors in the United States.
- Following the repeal of the 18th Amendment in 1933, many states began to restrict alcohol consumption and possession to adults only.
 - At the time, age = 21 = minimum age then required for voting in Federal elections.
- In early 1970s, 26th Amendment granted 18-year-olds the right to vote
 - 29 States lowered their minimum drinking ages from 21 to 18
- In the early 1980s, there is increased public concern about youth drinking and research findings linked lower drinking ages with increases in alcohol-related motor vehicle crashes.

The National Minimum Legal Drinking Age Act of 1984

- (Title 23 U.S.C. §158) was passed on July 17, 1984 by the United States Congress.
- All states are required to legislate and enforce the age of 21 years as a minimum age for purchasing and publicly possessing alcoholic beverages.
- A state not enforcing the minimum age would be subjected to a 10% decrease in its annual federal highway funding.
- There are certain types of exception by State for persons under age 21 to consume alcohol (eg. with prescription, under parent's supervision for religious purposes, etc.)

Consumption of Alcohol by Persons Under 21: Policy by State



Source: "Exceptions to Minimum Age of 21 for Consumption of Alcohol as of January 1, 2007 " Alcohol Policy Information System.
<http://alcoholpolicy.niaaa.nih.gov/index.asp?Type=BAS_APIS&SEC={0D5C719E-FCE8-4E15-A367-4145C655505F}&DE={E6F19624-0ADC-437F-917D-5E7C9F58B9}>

Pro 21 – Fatalities, Crashes, and DUI Arrests

- In the 48 continental states, lowering the MLPA from 21 to 18 during the 1970s resulted in an 11% increase in DUI fatalities among this age group.
- Arizona lowered age from 21 to 19:
 - DUI accidents increased over 25%
 - DUI fatalities increased more than 35%

Pro 21- Youth Alcohol Consumption Issues

- In raising the MLPA from 18 to 21, states observed:
 - 16% decrease in the rate of vandalism arrests, compared to an average 1.7% increase in states with a constant MLPA of 18.
- Begin drinking at age 18:
 - 16.6% subsequently are classified with alcohol dependence
 - 7.8% with alcohol abuse
 - If a person waits until age-21 before taking their first drink, these risks decrease by over 60%.

If age 18 is so problematic and age 21 is so ideal, then what's the problem?

- It's been over 20 years since the 1984 MLDA act was in place.
- Changes in time, technology, society, & people's behavior.
- MLDA was initially increased from age 18 to age 21 in order to solve the previous issues, but new findings show that this "policy" is no longer effective.

Pro 18

- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services National Survey in 2006
 - 28.3% of youngsters aged 12 to 20 said they'd had a drink in the past month
 - 19% were defined as binge drinkers (had five or more alcoholic beverages within several hours).
- Post 2000 studies in New York, Texas, Arizona & Massachusetts found the law (21) to have no impact on under-age (18-20) students' consumption rates, intoxication, drinking attitudes or drinking problems.

Pro 18 continues...

- Longitudinal study in State University System of Florida:
 - alcohol-related problems increased significantly for those beginning to drink at age 21
 - Magnitude of problem worse than those who began to drink at 18
- East Carolina University Survey age 18-20:
 - 70% planned to drink “secretly”
 - 21% expected to use a false or borrowed identification to obtain alcohol
- ***Reactance motivation:***
 - Age 18-20 wanted to drink because its illegal and its considered a forbidden fruit
 - Age 18 -20 = starts college where everyone else starts drinking
 - Data from 3,375 students at 56 colleges across the country revealed that significantly more under-age students drank compared to those of legal age

Underlying Policy Issue

- Higher legal age hasn't kept young people from consuming alcohol and has instead driven underage consumption underground, particularly on college campuses.
- Prohibition promoted great excess and abusive drinking - youth tended to consume alcohol in large quantities on those occasions when they could obtain it.
- Scientific evidence supports the fact that the early introduction of drinking is the safest way to reduce juvenile alcohol abuse.
 - The rate of youth alcohol abuse in France, Spain, and Argentina is significantly lower than that in US.

Conclusion

- What has proven around the world to work best is a combination of reasonable laws backed by strong social sanctions.
- Instead of focusing on age, should consider promoting consistence policy across different levels
 - Promote **Responsible** drinking
 - Engaging parents, schools, communities, government, social systems, and youth in the process
 - Promoting understanding of underage drinking across environmental, ethnic, cultural, and gender differences
 - Other related issues: teen driving and transportation

Comments?

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