



Regulation of Days of Alcohol Sale

Background

Currently, Indiana state law prohibits the sale of packaged alcohol on Sundays—that is, no alcohol can be sold outside of licensed bars and restaurants (IC7.1-3) on Sunday. While there are few studies directly examining the link between restrictions on days of sale and variables such as crime, drunk driving, and traffic fatalities, there is evidence to suggest that the limitation of access to alcohol through a variety of means is an effective method of curbing excessive consumption and its detrimental effects. Overall, there is currently mixed evidence regarding the impact of this issue.

Current Research

Many studies show that the repeal of Sunday alcohol sales laws leads to increased consumption of alcohol. In an examination of five states before and after Sunday sales bans were lifted, three out of five states showed significant increases in per-capita consumption, although the remaining two states showed no notable change.¹ A study conducted in Sweden offered another interesting look at how days of sale impacted consumption. Prior to 2000, no Saturday alcohol sales were permitted country-wide. In phase I of the experiment, beginning in early 2000, select areas were permitted to sell alcohol on Saturdays. Following the analysis of data from phase I, Saturday alcohol sales were allowed across the entire country. Data revealed that the repeal of this law was correlated with increased alcohol purchase and consumption; however, researchers did not observe any increases in other problems, such as violent crime.² The majority of these findings are consistent with the “availability

hypothesis,” which states that the more alcohol is made available, the more likely it is that people will consume it in excess. This overconsumption can lead to many negative consequences, including increased risk of disease, unintended injuries, and various forms of high-risk behavior.³

While studies examining consumption in connection to days of sale are fairly common, fewer studies have investigated the link between Sunday alcohol sales laws and violent crime. One such study attempted to assess violent crime rates in the state of Virginia before and after Sunday sales laws were repealed. Data collected indicated that minor crimes increased by 5%, and alcohol-related major crimes increased by 10%. However, researchers argued that the cost of this increase in crime was offset by additional revenue generated by alcohol sold on Sundays.⁴ Overall, connections between Sunday sales laws and violent crimes committed do not appear to be well-established by current research.

An additional study conducted in New Mexico demonstrated a strong correlation between Sunday alcohol sales and increased rates of alcohol-related traffic crashes and fatalities. Crashes increased by 19% and fatalities increased by 42% following the 1995 repeal of a state law prohibiting the sale of packaged alcohol on Sundays. Researchers concluded that the repeal of the law was the equivalent of a “public health and safety hazard.”⁵ In response to this data, a Drexel University researcher compared data across 48 states and concluded that the repeal of the Sunday alcohol sales law led to increased crashes and fatalities only in the state of New Mexico.



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Compared to other states in which similar laws were repealed, drivers in New Mexico drive more on average, and the state as a whole has a greater portion of traffic deaths related to alcohol than in other repeal states.⁶ Despite this seemingly contradictory evidence, The Task Force on Community Preventive Services, with the support of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, says that there is “strong evidence” that the maintenance of limits on days of alcohol sale is an effective method for curbing alcohol consumption and its related negative effects.⁷

Community Resources

The state of Indiana currently bans Sunday alcohol sales, but if you believe that overall alcohol availability may be affecting your area in some way, there are resources which can help you determine the impact of this issue on your community.

- Alcohol outlet density is one way of determining alcohol availability in your area. A high number of alcohol outlets may mean that community members have increased access to alcohol, even on Sundays. To determine alcohol outlet density for your county, visit drugs.indiana.edu and click “County Profiles Data” under “Regional Data,” then select “[Alcohol Outlet Density](#).”
- If you believe that alcohol availability may be impacting drunk driving rates in your community, you can learn more about Indiana’s rates of drunk driving [through the CDC](#).
- If you believe that alcohol availability might be influencing crime rates in your area, you can view an overview

of crime rates in Indiana by county on the [FBI’s website](#).

- It may be useful to keep in mind that restrictions on Sunday alcohol sales apply only to packaged alcohol. Thus, sales can still take place at licensed bars and restaurants.
- [The Indiana Youth Survey](#) may have additional useful information in determining the impact of alcohol & other substances in your community.

References

- ¹ Yoruk, B.K. (2013). Legalization of Sunday alcohol sales and alcohol consumption in the United States. *Addiction*, 109(1), 55-61.
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- ³ World Health Organization. (2014). “Is Harmful Use of Alcohol a Public Health Problem?—Online Q&A.”
- ⁴ Heaton, P. (2012). Sunday liquor laws and crime. *Journal of Public Economics*, 96(1-2), 42-52.
- ⁵ McMillan, G.P., & Lapham, S. (2006). Effectiveness of Bans and Laws in Reducing Traffic Deaths Legalized Sunday Packaged Alcohol Sales and Alcohol-Related Traffic Crashes and Crash Fatalities in New Mexico. *American Journal of Public Health*, 96(11), 1944-1948.