



MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES

FROM: GLEN BOLGER

RE: KEY FINDINGS - LOUISIANA STATEWIDE SURVEY ON TOBACCO TAXES

DATE: FEBRUARY 10, 2016

Methodology

Public Opinion Strategies conducted a statewide survey of 500 registered voters in Louisiana. The survey was conducted by landline and cell phone, using live interviewers, January 28-31, 2016. Forty percent (40%) of interviews were conducted with cell phone respondents. The margin of error for this survey is ±4.38% in 95 out of 100 cases.

Key Findings

1. ***The state budget shortfall is a very serious issue to Louisiana voters.***

Our recently completed survey shows that voters in the Bayou State are nearly unanimous in their opinion of the state budget issues facing Louisiana. Fully 97% of Louisianans say the state budget shortfall is a serious issue with 83% saying it is a very serious issue.

2. ***Of the potential options available to address the budget shortfall, increasing the state tobacco tax is one proposal on which voters agree.***

We tested several options available to the state legislature to address the budget deficit including tax hikes and spending cuts to Medicaid, college scholarships, road improvements, and the Department of Children and Family Services. While most options were met with intense opposition from voters, increasing the state tobacco tax is painless. In fact, more than seven out of ten (71%) favor increasing the tobacco tax and a majority (56%) *strongly favor* increasing the tobacco tax.

3. ***The state tobacco tax is the tax that voters are the least opposed to increasing.***

We surveyed half of respondents which state tax they were most opposed to increasing, and half which state tax they were least opposed to increasing, and the results were clear in regards to raising the state tobacco tax. Only 8% of respondents said the state tobacco tax was the tax they were most opposed to raising, which was tied for the lowest score of all the tax types tested along with the state alcohol tax. On the other hand, when asked which tax they would be the least opposed to increasing, a clear plurality (29%) indicated the tobacco tax.

4. ***Louisiana voters overwhelmingly support a tobacco tax increase of \$1.25 per pack to close the state budget shortfall and fund health and education programs.***

A large majority (73%) support a proposal to increase the state tobacco tax by \$1.25 per pack, with the revenue dedicated to closing the state budget shortfall and increasing funding for health programs and education programs. Sixty-one percent (61%) even say they *strongly favor* such a proposal. Support for such a proposal pans party lines with 72% of Republicans, 68% of Independents, and 77% of Democrats favoring a \$1.25 per pack increase. Support is also high across ethnic lines with 71% of white voters and 79% of African Americans supporting the proposal.

5. ***Three-quarters of Bayou State voters also favor increasing the tax on non-cigarette tobacco products.***

Support is very high (75%) for increasing the tax on non-cigarette tobacco products, such as cigars, e-cigarettes, and smokeless tobacco at the same rate as the cigarette tax. Again, a significant majority not only favors the measure, but *strongly favors* (62%) including non-cigarette tobacco product in a tobacco tax increase.

6. ***Voters say they would reward a candidate for political office who supported a \$1.25 per pack increase.***

Supporting a \$1.25 tobacco tax increase is good politics. Seventy-one percent (71%) of Louisiana voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate for political office if they supported a \$1.25 tobacco tax increase. This sentiment crosses party lines, with a majority of Republicans (64%), Independents (60%), and Democrats (80%) saying that a vote to increase the state tobacco tax would boost a legislator's chance of receiving their vote come election day.

The Bottom Line

In a year of tough decisions in Baton Rouge, a decision on increasing tobacco taxes is a painless one. Voters of all partisan stripes and ethnic backgrounds favor increasing the state tobacco tax by \$1.25 in order to close the budget shortfall and fund health and education programs. There is also strong consensus that non-cigarette tobacco products should be included in any tobacco tax increase. Compounding the positive data is the revelation that voters say they would be more likely to support a candidate who is in favor of increasing the state's tobacco tax, making this a win-win not only for the citizens of Louisiana, but for legislators of both parties as well.