

The Minimum Legal Drinking Age: A “political imperative”

In 2015, when the Department of Trade & Industry made public its draft National Liquor Policy (NOTICE 446 OF 2015), one of its proposals was to raise the Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) from 18 to 21 (see Appendix 1). Although the draft document was in theory open to public debate and input, as required, FMF learned that this aspect was a “political imperative” not open to discussion.

FMF media release from 11 August 2015

Unjust to prevent young adults from drinking responsibly until they turn 21. 18 – old enough to marry but not to drink the champagne toast!

The DTI’s draft National Liquor Policy (NLP) proposes that the minimum legal age at which alcohol can be purchased and consumed should be raised from 18 to 21 years. People mature enough to vote, marry whoever they want, choose careers and beliefs, drive cars, enter into contracts, will not be allowed to drink with friends or at a meal or even their wedding. Young people between 18 and 21 years who currently drink legally in licensed premises or buy alcohol in a shop will have to stop doing so or become criminals overnight.

Raising the legal age will merely push under-age binge drinking into less controlled environments, leading to more health and life-endangering behaviour among young people. Environments where they could be surrounded by seasoned seniors who can set a good example and watch them for safety reasons will be denied them.

A 21 year age limit is one of five key proposals* in the draft NLP which violate the rights of an individual’s freedom and return South Africa’s liquor laws to apartheid era racism and discrimination against poorer citizens. The Free Market Foundation (FMF) submits that the proposals have unintended consequences and should be reconsidered. The window for comment closes on August 13.

FMF executive director, Leon Louw, said, “The government obviously thinks a person is mature enough to vote for the ANC but not to buy a drink in a bar. This means a soccer team can play a hard game together but the under 21s will not be allowed to join their team mates in the bar for a beer and match post mortem”.

The FMF submits that it would be anomalous if young people are allowed to make all the big decisions in life but cannot choose to have a drink with a meal or a mate. The current drinking age of 18 has logic and follows international thinking that at 18 a person has reached the age of reason and maturity.

All well-meaning people would want to imbue youngsters with a responsible attitude to drinking at an early age. If the right to consume liquor is deferred to the age of 21, the introduction of responsible behaviour is unwisely delayed.

“In addition, an age limit of 21 will never be properly enforced,” said Louw.

“This proposal will drive youngsters between the ages of 18 and 21 underground to drink illicitly in more dangerous circumstances with less emphasis on responsible drinking. Unlike respectable establishments serving alcohol legally, where responsible drinking is an encouraged culture, young adults will be forced into buying alcohol illegally at more unsavoury establishments”.

This was demonstrated during apartheid when alcohol was prohibited to black South Africans and illegal shebeens became the norm. Alcohol in shebeens was often brewed illicitly and mixed with methylated spirits.

FMF position

The NLP talks about “education and awareness” which the FMF fully supports as the way forward for a free and open society with personal responsibility. Instead, as with banning smoking in public places and other draconian measures against tobacco use, the government is removing freedoms by stealth in the guise of safeguarding the nation’s health. Once lost, individual freedoms cannot easily be regained. These proposals need to be resisted before more freedoms are taken away while the nation sleep-walks into the nanny state.

What Fuels Crime: Alcohol or Corruption?

Evidence does not suggest that the minimum drinking age has an impact on homicides, and we can assume the impact on crime in general would follow a similar pattern – which is no pattern at all. At the extremes are the nine countries with no minimum drinking age an average homicide rate of 3.3 along with another nine countries with a minimum drinking age of 21, but an average homicide rate of 5.4.

In order to gauge the link, or lack of one, between minimum drinking age and crime, we have compared 149 countries for which we could find the minimum drinking age as well as recent – within the last 10 years – homicide statistics.

One of the great problems in comparing crime rates is many people refuse to report crimes for various reasons. Individuals, who themselves may be involved in criminal activity are not prone to report being victimized lest an investigation reveal their own activity. In addition, many individuals feel reporting crime to be a waste of time because of police ineptitude or corruption.

In September 2015 the Institute for Security Studies wrote, of assault victims:

“There is, however, reason to doubt that these figures reflect a real reduction in assault levels. Police statistics for assault are notoriously unreliable because most victims don't report these crimes to the police. Since the victim and perpetrator may be related (such as in a case of domestic violence) victims are often reluctant to disclose assault. The Statistics South Africa National Victims of Crime Survey (NVCS) found that most assault victims knew the perpetrators. The perpetrators were either from the same community (34,2%), a spouse or lover (16,8%) or a relative (9,2%). Less than a quarter were described as unknown or categorised as ‘other’.

Another reason to doubt the accuracy of official assault statistics is the tendency among victims to report assault incidents to the police is declining. The NVCS shows a 7% reduction in the proportion of assault victims who reported the incident to the police, from 52,6% of victims in 2011 to 45,6% of victims in 2013. This may signal a loss of trust in the police or that the police are not recording as many in an attempt to show a decrease in violent crime so they can achieve the targets set for them.”(1)

Rape Crisis says “if all rapes were reported, the figures could be as high 482 000 for the country.” But, most rapes are never reported to police.

“The reasons that so many incidents of rape go unreported to the police include:

- fear of retaliation or intimidation by the perpetrator
- the fact that many survivors lack access to services
- the personal humiliation of being exposed as a victim of rape in a community
- the extreme suffering that goes hand in hand with rape as a psychological trauma
- reluctance to cause pain to loved ones
- the fact that the offender is often known to the victim and frequently a member of the victim's family the possibility of negative financial consequences, particularly if the victim is a child and her family relies on the perpetrator's income to survive.”(2)

Duxitra Mistry, of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation argues that as crime rates escalated conviction rates declined.

“The number of people convicted of crimes dropped from 1,611 per 100,000 of the population in 1972 to 1 145 in 1992 – a drop of 29% in 20 years. While the number of convictions increased – in absolute terms – in the mid 1980s, statistics for the last few years indicate that the number of convictions have reached their lowest point in over forty years.

The conviction rate varies considerably by type of offence. Violent crimes such as murder and rape have some of the lowest conviction rates, 54,5% and 50,4% respectively. Shoplifting, fraud and drug related cases have the highest conviction rates, between 82% and 93%.”(3)

One result of this crime crisis is victims lose confidence in police and fail to report crimes. “In general more than 50% of the respondents who were victims of crime felt the police were not “particularly effective” in controlling crime. Typical comments were that there is no follow up, police displayed negative attitudes and came across as unprofessional. With regard to burglary, rape and homicide there was no follow up with the victims or their families after the investigation had begun. There were inadequate investigations particularly for car theft and assault with a weapon. Negative

attitudes were displayed by police mainly in car theft, robbery and mugging, homicide and assault with a weapon. Unprofessional service from the police was reported by those who had been victims of car hijacking, rape and sexual harassment." CSVR says, "as a result victims will learn not bother to report crimes."



Because of this, the most reliable statistic to use, in regards to crime, is homicides, which tend to be reported everywhere, regardless of low conviction rates. Lacking accurate information on crime in general, for many countries, means having relying on the statistic that is most accurately recorded. We have used World Bank Data for homicide rates and the most recent data for each country. Most data is recent but in a few cases the data could be 3 to 10 years old. We can only work with what we have.

The full list of countries and stats used for them can be found in Appendix 2. Of these countries the average homicide rate is 7.69 per 100,000. But, this average is driving up by a relative few, very high crime countries, of which South Africa is one.

Of these countries 26 either have no minimum drinking age at all, or set it below 18 years of age. Nine have no minimum drinking age. They are: Armenia, Cambodia, Comoros, Denmark, Guinea-Bissau, Morocco, Sierra Leone, Uzbekistan, and Viet Nam

The average homicide rate in these nine countries is 3.33 per 100,000 population. Just two of those countries, Guinea-Bissau and Comoros distort the average otherwise none of them has a homicide rate over 2 per 100,000 population. One would think if there were a correlation between minimum drinking age and crime, particularly violent crime, those countries with no minimum

ages at all, would be among the most violent. Instead, 7 of the 9 are among the least homicidal.

Another 17 countries have minimum drinking ages of 16 or 17. This may not mean that the young person can drink every alcoholic beverage but that some are legally available to them. In some countries spirits are reserved until they are 18, but beer and wine is available. Others allow drinking of alcoholic beverages in restaurants or at home with parents. But, some alcohol is legally available to youths of ages 16 or 17.

Those countries are: Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cuba, Georgia, Portugal, Cyprus, Germany, Jamaica Lesotho, Austria, Monaco, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Madagascar, San Marino, Switzerland, and Malta.

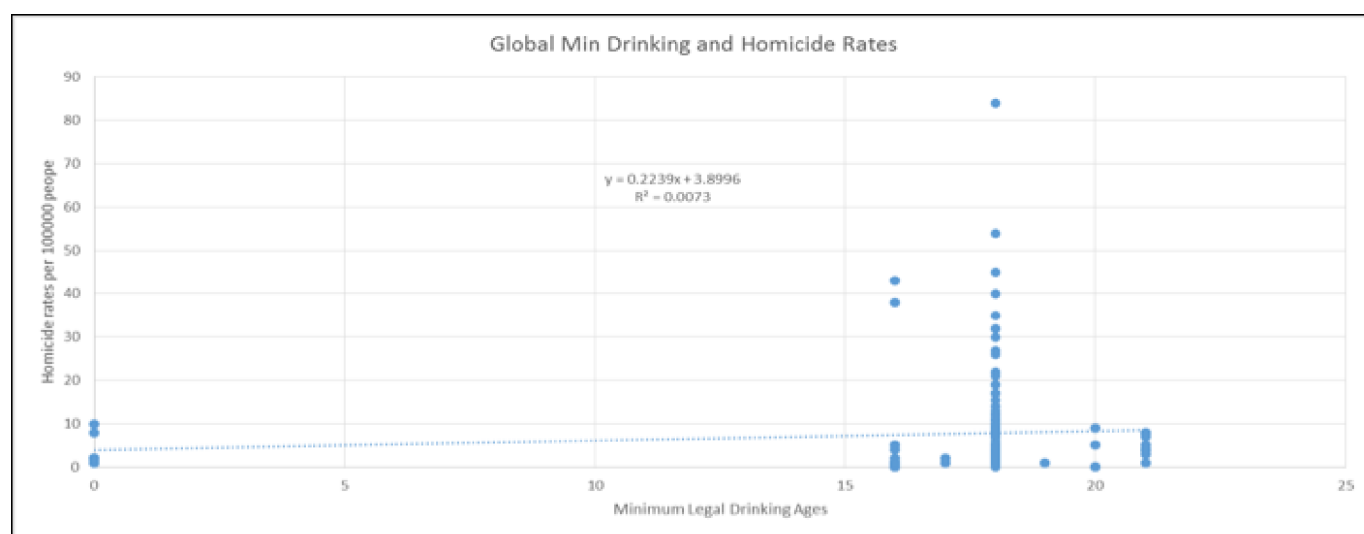
The average homicide rate in these 19 countries is 5.3 per 100,000. Once again, however, just two countries drive the numbers through the roof: Jamaica and Lesotho. Without those two high-crime countries in the mix, the average homicide rate would drop dramatically – to just 1,17 per 100,000. Among the countries with low drinking age minimums are some of the lowest homicide rates on the planet. Four of them effectively have no homicides per year, or numbers so low they are the statistical equivalent of 0 homicides per 100,000 population. They would be Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Monaco and San Marino. These four countries all have a drinking age of 16 and effectively no homicides.

There are 109 countries with drinking ages equal to South Africa's – all at 18. The homicide data shows 62 of them have homicide rates below 5 per 100,000. Just 17 of the countries have homicide rates exceeding 15 per 100,000, while only 8 have homicides rates exceeding 30 per 100,000. Again, a small minority of countries skews the results. They are:

Country	Age	Homicides
Botswana	18	15.4
Namibia	18	17
Panama	18	17
Guyana	18	19
Mexico	18	19
Swaziland	18	21.1
Dominican Republic	18	22
Bahamas	18	26
Brazil	18	27
Trinidad & Tobago	18	30
Colombia	18	32

South Africa	18	32
Guatemala	18	35
El Salvador	18	40
Belize	18	45
Venezuela	18	54
Honduras	18	84

As this scatter chart shows, there is no consistent pattern among the 149 countries. Most countries with drinking ages of 18 have relatively low murder rates while a small number have very high rates. If drinking age was a major factor in crime rates one would expect some sort of pattern with homicides generally decreasing as drinking ages increase. That is not the case.



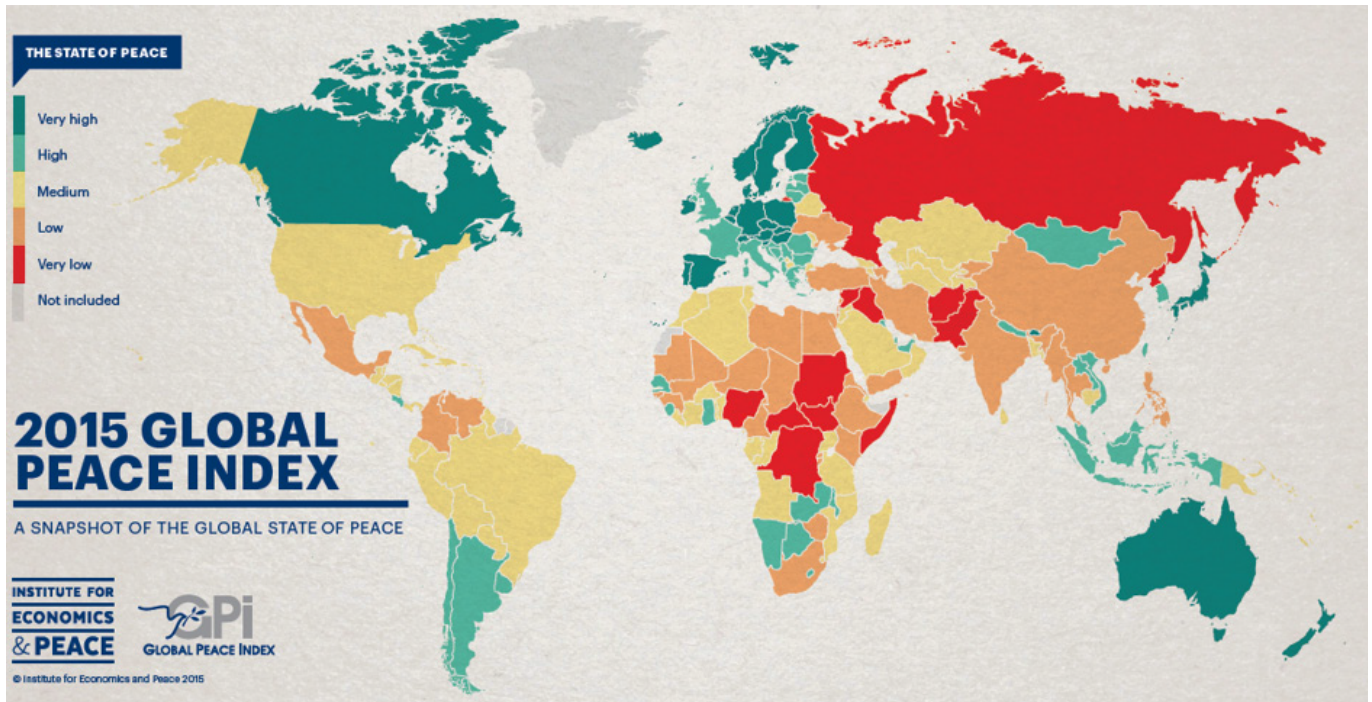
Of the nine countries with no minimum drinking age the average homicide rate was 3.3, while for the 19 countries with ages of 16 or 17 years, the rate jumped to 5.3. For the 109 countries set at 18 the average homicide rate jumped to 8.7. But, in each of these categories the numbers for most countries are much lower than the average, with a handful of countries spectacularly failing to keep murder under control.

For those countries set at 18, two of them have an effective homicide rate of zero; 24 have 1 homicide per 100,000; 10 have rates of 2; 12 are at 3; nine countries are at 4; five are at 5; 23 have homicide rates between 6 and 10; seven are between 11 and 15, five are higher than 15 but

lower than 20; and just 12 have homicide rates above 20 per 100,000. Those 12 countries account for 47% of all homicides in these 109 countries. Without them in the mix the average homicide rate for countries with drinking ages of 18 would drop from 8.7 to 5.19

There are a small number of countries with drinking ages above 18 years. One, South Korea, is set at 19; four are at 20, Iceland, Japan, Paraguay and Thailand; nine are at 21 – Sri Lanka, Samoa, United States, Pakistan, Mongolia, Micronesia, Kazakhstan, Indonesia and Fiji. The homicide rate for countries with a drinking age of 21 is 5.44 per 100,000.

Violence and Heavy Drinking

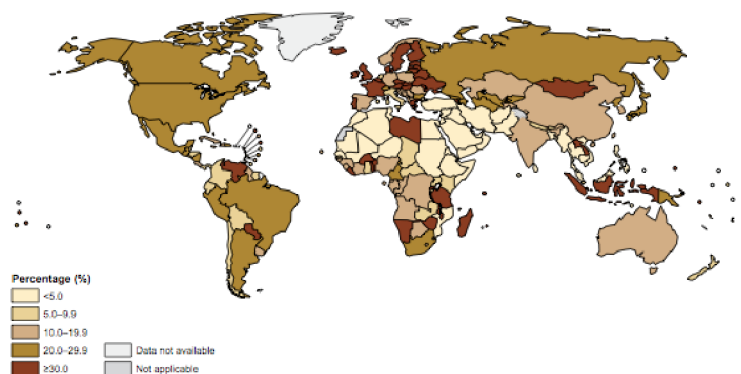


The Global Peace Index measures all forms of conflict, including violent crime. The most peaceful countries are those in deep green. According to their measurement the most peaceful countries on earth are listed below. We have also listed the percentage of drinkers in those countries who engage in heavy episodic drinking according to the World Health Organisation.

Below is a similar map produced by the World Health Organisation measuring the percentage of drinkers in a country who engage in heavy episodic drinking. Oddly, if the theory that alcohol and violence are always linked is true, we find that many of the most peaceful countries on the planet also have some of the highest levels of heavy episodic drinking.

Country	Heavy Episodic Drinking
Canada	23.1%
Iceland	34.9%
Ireland	48.2%
Norway	13.9%
Sweden	34.5%
Finland	53.7%
Denmark	32.2%
Spain	19.6%
Portugal	35.8%
Belgium	41.7%
Netherlands	6.6%
Germany	15.6%
Austria	52.4%
Switzerland	21.1%
Croatia	13.4%
Hungary	32.3%
Slovakia	43.4%
Slovenia	10.8%
Japan	25.3%
Bhutan	6.6%
Australia	13.0%
New Zealand	5.6%
Singapore	8.9%

Figure 7. Prevalence of heavy episodic drinking among current drinkers (%; 15+ years), 2010



The average of rate for heavy drinking among drinkers in the most peaceful countries on earth are 25.76%, ranging from a high of 52.4% in Austria to a low of 5.6% in New Zealand. South Africa, in comparison, has a rate of 25.6%. Twenty-three countries qualify as "most peaceful" according to the Global Peace Index, yet violent, crime-prone South Africa has a heavy drinking rate that is below 10 of the most peaceful countries and comparable with another three of them. Heavy drinking doesn't seem linked to how violent or peaceful is a country.

Corruption and the drunk driving problem

Less than a year ago the Automobile Association called on the South African government to reduce the problems related to alcohol consumption through a greater emphasis on education and enforcement. They said, "the solution does not lie with further regulation, but with enforcement and education. We call on the government to redouble its efforts in these areas to protect innocent road users from becoming victims of drunk drivers." (4)

Instead of enforcement and education, the government offers more regulations and laws.

New regulations seem pointless if old regulations and laws remain unenforced or ineptly enforced. The Sunday Times revealed internal documents showed "at one Durban Central police station alone, 1481 arrests in 2012 led to only 111 convictions – a rate of 7.5%. This excludes thousands of dockets a year opened at other Durban police stations." In Cape Town there were 3,022 arrests for drunk driving in 2012 and 3089 in 2013 but less than 7% of those drivers were convicted for their offense. (5)

The Times not revealed this was happening but offered a plausible scenario that explained why it was happening. "Several senior officials interviewed in different parts of the country – some with direct knowledge of the cases – blamed corruption and chasing arrest quotas with dismal conviction rates." In blunt terms one police official said, "Police officials were being paid to deliberately throw cases." Another police official told the Times, "80% and 90% of all drunken driving cases are thrown out of court or withdrawn because of botched blood samples or straightforward corruption.

There are numerous ways that corrupt police officers can "throw a case" without it being completely obvious it was intentional. They can "forget" to date or time paperwork, they can take sworn statements regard the chain of evidence and misplace them. They can tamper with the blood samples. Another police official told the Times "What they do is put the sample in the microwave or leave it in the boot of the car on a hot day."

This problem with corruption is widely known, not just within the police department, but among the citizens of South Africa as well. News24 reported that among young South Africans of all races, ages 18 to 34, 47% said the police are corrupt and matters are getting worse; 49% said police are also badly trained. Just 26% thought corruption was lessening. News24 said, "perceptions of increasing corruption were uniformly negative across all race groups." (6) Among Indian and Asian youth 72% believe the

police are corrupt, as do 61% of black youth, 62% of coloured youth and 60% of white youth.

This surely bodes badly for new regulations that are specifically targeting the young. The objects of the laws ire, youth between the ages of 18 and 21, are being told they must surrender the

right to drink or they will face the possibility of legal punishment. Yet, few of them believe police are not available for purchase. They are highly unlikely to believe that the law means what it says because they have no confidence in police enforcement of the law.

Such attitudes would seem to suggest that the wisest strategy is not to pass new regulations targeting a highly sceptical subgroup of the population, but to weed out the corruption and actually raise the conviction rate. As long as 7% or less of arrested drunk drivers are ever convicted, it would imply that very few people in South Africa believe the law has any power.

The greatest deterrent laws offer would-be criminals is not the result of stiff penalties, but high conviction rates. The Sentencing Project, in their report Deterrence in Criminal Justice, warned, "the overall deterrent effect of the certainty of punishment is substantially reduced" when most offenders are either never arrested or never convicted. Low convictions rates destroy the deterrent effect of laws – even good laws. "Clearly, enhancing the severity of punishment will have little impact on people who do not believe they will be apprehended for their actions." (7)

Imposing stiffer penalties on drunk drivers, or increasing the number of laws and regulations on



the book, has little impact on individual behaviour, when people do not believe serious law enforcement exists or is likely to exist. According to a poll done by Business Tech, 29% of South Africans said they paid bribe payments to police officers.(8)

One attempt to solicit a bribe was caught on video when Greg Esterhuysen drove through an "Arrive Alive" roadblock on Christmas Day, 2014. In the video, seen by well over 125,000 people on YouTube alone, a traffic officer told Esterhuysen he could pay R200 on the spot or be subjected to a breathalyser test. He refused to pay the bribe and told the officer he wanted his badge number to report the bribe attempt. Esterhuysen was arrested and when he and family members tried to lay charges against the corrupt officer were told they could not do so because he never actually paid the bribe. In court charges against Esterhuysen were withdrawn.(9) The blatant solicitation of a bribe from Esterhuysen is not the only such incident caught on video and posted for the entire world to see.

While it is obvious that corruption can undermine the application of good law – such as that on drunk driving – what is less obvious is how corruption diverts police attention away from "real crimes" and incentivises them to create fraudulent crimes. Corrupt traffic officers are not just letting the guilty go free but threatening the innocent as well.

One especially egregious corrupt practice, which does long term harm to the country, is the targeting of foreign tourists. The Saturday Star reported:

"Predatory traffic officers and police are leading a new crime racket, targeting international tourists by demanding bribes shortly after they arrive in the country through OR Tambo International Airport – or as they depart.

This latest trend has alarmed tourism and crime watchdogs who are warning that similar

sophisticated police gangs are operating on major tourist routes across the country, including in the vicinity of the Kruger National Park, along the Garden Route and on the N4 highway to Mozambique."

Lisa Sheard, of Kruger Lowveld Tourism said, "We've had situations where tourists were pulled out of their cars and threatened. It's absolutely rife... These tourists tell us they're never coming back. Often, they just pay. They don't know that roadside spot fines are illegal. They're intimidated."

One taxi, one driver – and 112 passengers



Five outstanding warrants against driver

BIG SQUEEZE: Traffic officers were speechless when 113 people – 105 of them children – climbed out of this taxi. Some passengers are still inside

MORE than 100 children from a crèche were squeezed into a taxi registered to carry 26 people, and 28 children were found packed into a bakkie at Khayelitsha in Cape Town yesterday. Traffic officers Jaco Strydom and Vernon Johnson, who stopped the taxi, were speechless when they counted 105 children between the ages of three and six, and eight adults including the driver, crammed into the taxi registered to carry 26 people.

The crèche had hired the bus to take the children to the Mowabisi resort for the day. Mogamat Mustapha, media liaison assistant for Cape Town Traffic Services, said the driver was arrested because he had five outstanding warrants against him. He was fined for driving without a licence, having an expired operator's disc and for overloading.

"The vehicle was taken to the Khayelitsha Traffic Department where it was released to the owner," Mustapha said.

"The City of Cape Town's Social Services Department transported the children and adults back to the crèche. They were disappointed that they had been denied their promised outing, but schools must ensure that the vehicles they use are roadworthy and that the drivers have the necessary licences."

Strydom said hours later, at the same spot, they pulled over a bakkie transporting 38 school children.

The driver ran away and taxis were organised to take the children home. – *Open Correspondent*

THE INDEPENDENT
on Saturday
13 June 2009

French tourist Michael Gentle said he was harassed by corrupt police as he was returning a rental car at Tambo International.

"We were stopped by three cops on the spurious charge of jumping a stop sign. The fine was R500. He then asked: 'So, when do you want to pay?'

"Fortunately, my brother, who lives in South Africa, knew this was code for a bribe. When we asked how much, he replied, 'whatever you want.' With the clock ticking, I decided it wasn't worth arguing, so I handed over R200 in cash.

"The staff of the rental company told us we'd got off lightly – in the previous 20 minutes, six other international tourists had been stung collectively for about R8 000 after being told they would be detained and miss their flight."

One third of all road fatalities are among passengers of vehicles, a large share of whom are passengers in taxis. But few taxi drivers are below 21 years of age. Charlotte Sullivan of South Africans Against Drunk Driving said many passengers never use seat belts. Taxis often pack a taxi with more riders than the minivan can carry safely and seatbelts couldn't be used by everyone, even if they wished to do so. Sullivan said, "Sadly, the biggest problem is lack of law enforcement – people know they can get away with it."

According to Sullivan only 5% of passengers in the rear of a vehicle in South Africa wear seat belts. She said, "It's not rocket science – there are very simple things you can do that work overnight." But, she didn't mention raising the minimum drinking age or passing new regulations. She said death rates can be lowered by actual enforcement of the law. "In the UK, the US and Australia for example, death rates are really low because law enforcement is excellent."

Given that the vast majority of drunk drivers are over the age of 21, increasing the minimum drinking age will have almost no impact on the total death toll. It's as if the purpose of the increased drinking age is NOT to address the pressing problems South Africa faces, but to divert attention away from the lack of policing because of corruption and ineptness.

This is not to say that no effort has been made to end corruption, but it is clearly too little and far too late. The National Traffic Anti-Corruption Unit, reported that an undercover agent of theirs was stopped for speeding and a bribe was solicited from him by a Matlosana traffic officer. They said

it was the "second" such arrest during the "festive season."

But, the problem with anti-corruption efforts is the same as with anti-drunk driving efforts – there isn't enough enforcement. Most corrupt traffic officers clearly believe the odds of being apprehended are so low, and the benefits so lucrative, that they continue with their corrupt practices. Consider the odds of being apprehended for corruption.

In actual cases of drunk driving the driver who paid the bribe is unlikely to pursue the matter against the officer. If he does he opens himself up to further prosecution and gains nothing.

Undercover drivers are unlikely to be very effective. They are one driver among dozens or hundreds in the vicinity of a corrupt officer at any one time. Thus it is unlikely the officer is going to target the undercover driver, odds favour him pulling other people over for his side business of "selling" justice. The odds of picking the undercover driver is like the odds of winning the lottery – highly unlikely. That the NTACU said two such arrests were actually made, in spite of this low odds, may indicate corruption is far more widespread than anyone has realised.

There is good reason for scepticism regarding a plethora of new alcohol regulations in the midst of our massive corruption crisis. Not only do new laws and regulations do nothing to reduce corruption they actually offer corrupt officials and traffic officers new sources of revenue. Instead of making the roads and highways safer places for drivers, these laws make bribery more lucrative for the corrupt.

Experts on violence and alcohol

"A population that drinks daily may have a high rate of cirrhosis and other medical problems but few accidents, fights, homicides, or other violent alcohol-associated traumas..."

Heath, D.B., "Socio-cultural Variants in Alcoholism," pp. 426-440 in Pattison, E.M., and Kaufman, E., eds., *Encyclopaedic Handbook of Alcoholism*, Gardner Press, New York, 1982, pp. 429-430.

"There are also clear and distinct differences in alcohol abuse rates by socioeconomic status. Higher-SES Americans are more likely to drink, but also more likely to drink without problems, than lower-SES Americans. Again, this suggests that lower abstinence rates and higher consumption levels are not themselves the source of drinking problems."

Hilton, M.E., "Demographic Characteristics and the Frequency of Heavy Drinking as Predictors of Self-reported Drinking Problems," *British Journal of Addiction*, 1987, Vol. 82, 913-925.

"Schaefer (1973) examined ethnographic reports about drinking behaviour for a probability sample of 60 small-scale and folk societies. He found that men get drunk either occasionally or often in 46 of these 60 societies. But, he found men involved in drunken brawls in only 24 of the societies. So, in a worldwide sense, it seems that alcohol-related aggressive behaviour – as measured by male involvement in drunken brawls – is about as likely to be present as it is to be absent."

Levinson, D., "Alcohol Use and Aggression in American Subcultures," pp. 306-321 in Room R., and Collins, G., eds., *Alcohol and Disinhibition: Nature and Meaning of the Link* (Research Monograph No. 12), U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Rockville, MD, 1983, p. 306.

"The Camba of Bolivia have gained considerable notoriety in the alcohol literature because more of them drink, they drink more often, and they drink more of the most potent alcoholic beverage in customary usage anywhere in the world, yet they have virtually no social, psychological, or economic problems in connection with drinking.... There is no verbal or sexual aggression, no destruction of property, no drunken homicide or

suicide. On the contrary, drinking is a time for cordiality and easy social interaction that are rare in other times of their lives...."

Heath, D.B., "Alcohol and Aggression," pp. 89-103 in Gottheil, E., et al. *Alcohol, Drug Abuse and Aggression*, Charles C Thomas, Springfield, IL, 1983, p.93.

"In sum, Spain along with other Southern European countries allows its youth early access to alcoholic beverages without the concomitant problems of rowdy behaviour, vandalism, and drunk driving that Americans typically associate with youth drinking."

Pittman, D.J., "Cross Cultural Aspects of Drinking, Alcohol Abuse, and Alcoholism," pp. 1-5 in Waterhouse, A.L., and Rantz, J.M., eds., *Wine in Context: Nutrition, Physiology, Policy* (Proceedings of the Symposium on Wine & Health 1996), American Society for Enology and Viticulture, Davis, CA, 1996, p. 4.

"[Among states in the U.S.], the more proscriptive the norms concerning alcohol consumption [and the lower the overall rate of consumption], the greater the incidence of behaviour that is defined as socially disruptive.... The results of the present study suggest...that societies that fear alcohol soon encounter problems with disruptive alcoholics."

Linsky, A.S., et al., "Stress, Drinking Culture, and Alcohol Problems," pp. 554-575 in Pittman, D.J., and White, H.R., eds., *Society, Culture, and Drinking Patterns Reexamined*, Rutgers Center of Alcohol Studies, New Brunswick, NJ, 1991, pp. 567, 570.



America's failed experiment

One of the realities about minimum drink ages is there is no widespread movement to move toward 21. Most of the world finds 18 quite reasonable and many have it much younger, especially when it comes to the consumption and possession of alcohol.

The European Commission report, *Eyes on Ages*, notes that "the most commonly used age limit in the EU is eighteen years. A few countries use sixteen as an age limit and three other countries use an age limit of 20 years for beverages with higher alcoholic content. While all

Table 1: The reported legal age limits specified per European country for on-premise sales, off-premise sales, consumption and possession in public and private areas.

Country	On-premise		Off-premise		Public				Private				Differentiation ¹	
	Sales		Sales		Consumption		Possession		Consumption		Possession			
	LA	HA	LA	HA	LA	HA	LA	HA	LA	HA	LA	HA	LA	HA
Austria ²	16	16	16	16	16	16	16	16						
Belgium	16	18	16	18									Fermented	Distilled
Bulgaria	18	18	18	18										
Croatia	18	18	18	18										
Cyprus	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17						
Czech Rep.	18	18	18	18										
Denmark	18	18	16	18									<16,5%	≥16,5%
Estonia	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18		
Finland	18	18	18	20	18	20	18	20	18	20	18	20	<22,1%	≥22,1%
France	18	18	18	18										
Germany	16	18	16	18	16 ³	18							Category	Category
Greece	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18						
Hungary	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18						
Ireland	-													
Italy	18	18	18	18										
Latvia	18	18	18	18										
Lithuania	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18		
Luxembourg	16	16	16	16										
Malta	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17						
Netherlands	16	18	16	18	16	16	16	16					<15,0%	≥15,0%
Norway	18	20	18	20									<22,0%	≥22,0%
Poland	18	18	18	18										
Portugal	16	16	16	16	16	16								
Romania	18	18	18	18	18	18								
Slovakia	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18		
Slovenia	18	18	18	18										
Spain	18	18	18	18										
Sweden	18	18	18	20	18	20	18	20	18	20	18	20	<3,5%	≥3,5%
Switzerland	16	18	16	18									Fermented	Distilled
UK	18 ⁴	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	5	5	5	5		

¹ -¹ No data available (Ireland did not deliver data for this report)

¹ When a country has more than one age limit for different alcoholic beverages, a differentiation has been made for Low Alcoholic beverages (LA) and High Alcoholic beverages (HA).

² Represents the age limit of the capital region. Age limits may vary in other regions.

³ Consumption of Low Alcoholic beverages (LA) by fourteen and fifteen year olds is permitted in attendance of the parents.

⁴ A person aged sixteen or seventeen is permitted to drink wine, beer or cider (but not other alcohol) with a meal in a restaurant, hotel or part of a pub set apart for eating meals. A condition is that it has to be purchased by an adult and that the minor is accompanied by an adult.

countries (29) have set age limits for selling alcohol, fewer countries have age limits for possession and consumption.”(10) They note, “Especially in the private domain very few legal age limits have been reported.”(11)

In the European Union we see that eight countries allow 16-year-olds to purchase some alcoholic beverages; two allow 17-year-olds, and the remaining European countries make alcohol purchases available to individuals who are at least 18 years of age. When it comes to public consumption and possession only eight restrict it to individuals 18 or older, while 14 have no age restrictions whatsoever.

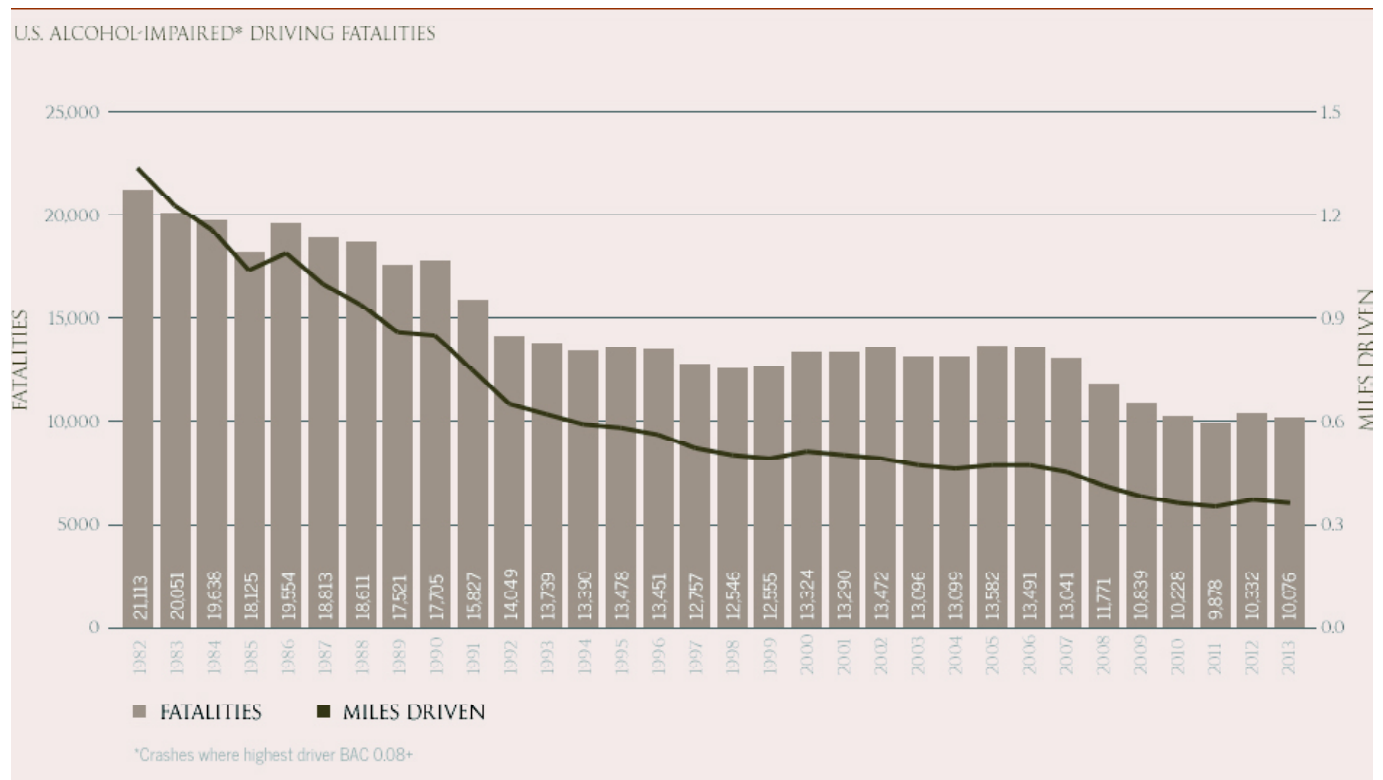
In spite of these lower drinking ages Europe doesn’t suffer from the same problems the United States does. Research from the World Health Organization found that while European 15 and 16 year-old teens drank more often, they got drunk less often than their American cousins. In the U.S. about half of all teen drinking leads to intoxication, whereas in European countries it was often as low as one in ten.(12) Addiction expert Stanton Peele noted WHO’s report Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children, “found these countries had the lowest incidence of drunkenness among 15-year-olds: Macedonia, Israel, France, Italy, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Spain – all of which ranked lower than the United States.” He sarcastically expressed shock: “But, wait a second. All of these cultures readily give alcohol to children.”(13)

No large country, with the exception of the United States, sets it’s minimum drinking age at 21 and the U.S. is an odd duck in that it has always had a strong religiously-motivated Prohibitionist streak and actually banned the consumption of alcohol in 1920. The policy of prohibition was such a disaster its repeal only a few years later, in 1933, was celebrated across the country. But, to this day, Christian fundamentalists remain utterly opposed to drinking alcohol – though they are just as likely “to have consumed enough alcohol to be considered legally drunk”(14) as all other Americans. In other words, their prohibitionist policies don’t even work within their own circles.

Shortly after this new Great Experiment with partial prohibition various government agencies and academics proclaimed the policy was a rousing success – the proof was that the number of traffic deaths for those 18 to 20 had declined when it became illegal for them to drink. That appeared to be the case, provided you didn’t look too carefully.

One inconvenient fact is there was a steady downward trend in traffic fatalities BEFORE the U.S. changed the minimum drinking age. This chart shows the number of alcohol impaired driving fatalities. You can see the downward trend was already in motion before 1984 legislation changed American drinking ages.

Christopher Carpenter and Carols Dobkin, in the Journal of Economic Perspectives, said the idea the law caused the decline in fatalities “is not



fully compelling." They note the "decline in deaths due to night-time motor vehicle accidents among 18-20 year-olds is not as abrupt as the decline in the percent of this population that can drink legally. Second, as can be seen in the figure, the number of 18-20 year-olds that die in nighttime accidents was already declining before the drinking age was raised in most states." (15)

Jeffery Miron and Elina Tetelbaum, in their 2009 paper, *Does the Minimum Legal Drinking Age Save Lives*, also noticed trend lines remained constant even as the Minimum Legal Drinking Age (MLDA) changed. They compared the Total Fatality Rate of individuals 15-24 with the rest of the population and reported:

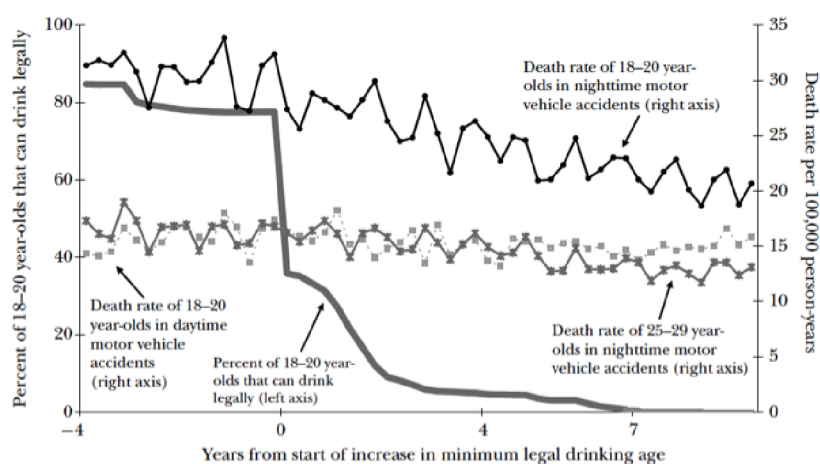
"These two series follow similar patterns over the past ninety years. Both TFRs increased from 1913 to 1969 and then decreased thereafter. This similarity fails to suggest a major impact of the MLDA, which should have affected the 15-24 TFR more than the total TFR. The marked decline in the TFR during this period also contravenes claims of a rapid increase in traffic fatalities after several states decreased their MLDA's between 1970 and 1973. The declines in the total and 15-24 TFR that began around 1969 long precede the adoptions of an MLDA of 21 in the mid-1980s."

They conclude these fatality rates "have been trending downward for decades and have been poorly correlated with MLDA's." Most importantly they point to numerous other factors which explain the decline in traffic fatalities other than a change in drinking age. "Moreover, several others factors likely played a role in this downward movement. These factors include advances in medical technology, advances in car design (air-bags, anti-lock brakes, seat belts, safety glass), and improved education about driving strategies and the risks associated with motor vehicles." (16) Yes, fewer people were dying but cars were safer, seat belts were introduced, there were medical advancements saving more lives.

Dr. Morris Chafetz, who was one of America's leading experts on alcohol abuse, and who was on the Commission which proposed raising the drinking age to 21, called his decision, "the single most regrettable decision of my entire

Figure 1

Deaths due to Motor Vehicle Accidents Recentered around the Time Period in which the Minimum Legal Drinking Age Was Raised back to 21



professional career." He saw the same statistics and admitted, "To be sure, drunk driving fatalities are lower now than they were in 1982. But they are lower in all age groups. And they have declined just as much in Canada, where the age is 18 or 19, as they have in the United States." (17)

Chafetz said the law increased the amount of binge drinking in America which has led to fatalities many ignore. "We cannot overlook [the law's] collateral, off-road damage. The National Institute for Alcoholism and Alcohol Abuse, which I founded in 1970, estimates that 5,000 lives are lost to alcohol each year by those under 21. More than 3,000 of those fatalities occur off our roadways. If we are seriously to measure the effects of this law, we cannot limit our focus." He says piecemeal prohibition drives underage drinkers "underground, into places where life and health are put at ever greater risk. The 600,000 assaults reported annually, the date rapes, the property damage, the emergency room calls do not in general occur in places visible to the public. They are the inevitable result of what happens when laws do not reflect social or cultural reality." His final warning, shortly before his death, was "It is time to liberate ourselves from the tyranny of 'experts,' who invoke 'science' in order to advance a prohibitionist agenda. Prohibition does not work. It has never worked. It is not working among 18-20 year-olds now."

John McCardell, President Emeritus of Middlebury College became a vocal critic of the higher drinking age in the United States because of the detrimental impact it was having, especially on college campuses. He, along with 120 university and college presidents, signed a

statement saying the law mandating a 21 drinking age in the U.S. was not working.

"The drinking age has effectively banished alcohol from public places and public view. But it has done little to reduce drinking. If you were to design the ideal venue for binge drinking, you would not design a student union, a dining hall, a restaurant or any public gathering place. You would instead design a locked dorm room, an off-campus apartment, a farmer's field – in short, a place conducive to clandestine behaviour.

And that is exactly where binge drinking is taking place, in the most risky of environments. Ironically, the more successful a college is in enforcing the law – carding underage drinkers, braceletting those of legal age, limiting quantities, posting campus security – the greater the likelihood that alcohol consumption will simply move to a place out of campus sight and often beyond campus boundaries, effectively placing that behaviour out of reach of campus authority." (18)

S. Georgia Nugent, the Interim President of Wooster College agrees. In the New York Times she wrote about how young people are pushed into riskier behaviour because of the law. "By outlawing moderate use of alcohol in appropriate social contexts and with adult oversight, we have driven more drinking underground, where it has taken the very dangerous form of 'pre-gaming.' The 'under-age' drinker, no longer permitted the occasional beer during a dance party, is now more likely to chug high-octane alcohol in dangerous quantities before heading off to that party. As a result, alcohol use has become more, not less, dangerous." (19)

Camille Paglia, the author and university professor, wrote in Time magazine: "What this cruel 1984 law did is deprive young people of safe spaces where they could happily drink cheap beer, socialize, chat and flirt in a free but controlled public environment. Hence in the 1980s we immediately got the scourge of crude binge drinking at campus fraternity keg parties, cut off from the adult world. Women in that boorish free-for-all were suddenly fighting off date rape." (20) In her own life, "Wine was built into my own Italian-American upbringing, where children were given sips of my grandfather's homemade wine." She said learning how to drink responsibly "is a basic lesson in growing up – as it is in wine-drinking France or in Germany."



On the other side of spectrum Boulder, CO, Police Chief Mark Beckner said, "What we've done is helped create an underground culture that encourages binge-drinking without any oversight or supervision." (21)

Even the National Transportation Safety Board admitted a 21 age limit wasn't working, which they bizarrely told the Florida State Senate, was sufficient reason for keeping the law.

"The fact that a minor, who cannot legally purchase alcohol, has a positive BAC (Blood Alcohol Content) demonstrates that underage drinking and driving remains a problem.

Teenage drivers with a BAC between 0.05 and 0.10 percent are far more likely to be killed in single vehicle crashes than sober drivers or older drivers with similar BAC levels.

Young drivers comprise about 7 percent of licensed drivers but 16 percent of the alcohol-involved drivers in fatal crashes. In 2005, 23 percent of young drivers killed in motor vehicle crashes had an illegal (0.08 percent or greater) BAC. More than 60 percent of youth alcohol-related crash fatalities occurred in rural areas... Because underage drinking and driving remains a problem, Florida needs comprehensive Age 21 laws." (22)

A major flaw in setting a minimum drinking age at 21 is 18 year olds are in all other ways considered legal adults. Judith McMullen, in a research paper from the Marquette University Law School, argues the policy has not been effective and is highly unlikely to be effective in the future.

"This failure is partly due to the fact that parents, who are key players in the control of minors, no longer have legally enforceable control

over offspring who have attained the age of majority. The failure of policy is also due to the fact that an outright ban on drinking by young adults is philosophically different from policies governing analogous decisions that may be made by adults in our society. Whereas adults may make questionable decisions in areas such as education, health, or smoking, decisions about alcohol are uniquely restricted. Due to this dichotomy, I believe that prohibition of alcohol use by young adults will never be widely effective, no matter how desirable a teetotaler young adult population might be.”(23)

One advocate of MLDA21 oddly argued that the policy was working. He told the New York Times:

“Alcohol consumption jumps sharply exactly at age 21 and remains elevated (i.e., more than a one-time birthday-related drinking celebration). Deaths jump sharply exactly at age 21 by about 9 percent and remain elevated. Arrests jump sharply exactly at age 21 and remain elevated. And hospitalizations jump sharply exactly at age 21 and remain elevated... Numerous policies and proposals have been put forth to address the troubling profile of excessive alcohol use by young people. Many of these need more research to demonstrate their effectiveness on a broad population-wide scale, but a minimum legal drinking age of 21 is not one of them.”(24)



This admission, however, raises an important point about all those “lives” that it is claimed are saved. Previously there was a jump in traffic accidents for those turning 18. When drinking was legal at 18 there was jump in fatalities. Now, this proponent says it happens at 21. But, is it really a success to shift the problem from 18 to 21? If new drinkers have an escalated death rate – largely because they are inexperienced with alcohol and still learning how to handle it – then there will be

a jump in death rates no matter where the age is set. That’s something Peter Asch and David Levy raised in Regulation magazine in 1987. They said the decline in deaths may be only temporary and did not “constitute persuasive evidence that higher drinking ages make the roads safer. The reality is that higher drinking ages may simply be moving the problem around, rather than solving it.”(25)

They criticized the claim that lives were being saved because studies being done, in the hopes of justifying the policy, focused “on short-term effects” and ignored that “states that lower the drinking age undergo a temporary bulge in the population of inexperienced drinkers. By the same token, states that raise the drinking age see a temporary decline in this high-risk group. Evaluations that are confined to relatively short-term experience following a change in the drinking age may therefore exhibit safety patterns that are unlikely to persist over time.”

They suggest the problem is that “inexperience in drinking creates a driving risk that is, at least partially independent of age. Put most simply, this ‘drinking experience’ hypothesis states that new drinkers are dangerous drivers, whether they are 18, 21, or (conceivably) 30.”

Professors Thomas Dee and William Evans, in a paper for the American Economic Review, drew some similar conclusions.

“Alcohol use and driving (while either drunk or sober) are both activities where experiential learning is likely to be important. The potential impact of learning-by-doing raises some important and often overlooked questions about the overall efficacy of the countrywide movement to a higher MLDA. A seemingly implicit assumption in most studies of teen traffic safety is that the increased MLDA unambiguously saved lives by delaying alcohol availability until young adulthood when alcohol would be consumed responsibly. However, this perspective may overstate the gains to higher MLDA if young drivers learn about the responsible use of alcohol largely through their own experiences and those of their peers. More specifically, the existence of learning-by-doing raises the disturbing possibility that policies, which keep teens away from alcohol, may to some degree simply shift the attendant mortality risks to young adulthood.”(26)

As Dee and Evans note, both drinking and driving are “activities where experiential learning

is likely to be important." New drivers are dangerous drivers and new drinkers are dangerous drinkers, their age is less important than their experience. This raises the possibility that one solution to the problem is to have a drinking age minimum that is below the driving age minimum. Let these new drinkers first learn how to handle their alcohol before letting them drive thousands of pounds of metal at high speeds. CNN reported:

"Abigail A. Baird, associate professor of psychology at Vassar College, has spent her career trying to understand what happens with the typical adolescent brain.

Baird argues that if anything, in terms of biology, the age limits on driving and drinking should be flipped.

'If I were queen for the day, I would move the drinking age to 18 and maybe not let them drive until they were 21, at least not with other people besides your parents in the car,' Baird said.

She likes the idea of graduated driver's license laws that slowly let young drivers have more responsibility as they get more practice in the car. This is based on the theory that they will learn how to avoid accidents as they gain experience.

The statistics back her up. Before states introduced graduated licensing systems during the first six months of solo driving, newly licensed drivers were about eight times more likely to be involved in fatal crashes than more experienced drivers.

'We all know adolescents are obsessed with learning from their peers. ... Adolescents learn based on experience. They are not good at learning abstractly; that's what changes a lot between 18 and 21. When you get older, you can learn from reading stories about people and by really feeling for other people.'

Baird believes that society could use the way young people learn, to help them learn how to drink responsibly at an earlier age. If drinking were less of a clandestine affair, perhaps a teen's peers could model more appropriate behaviour for younger participants. She says it's important to learn how to behave around alcohol." (27)

Raising the drinking age to 21 still leaves the real problem in place, new drinkers allowed to drink and drive who have no experience in handling alcohol. Experience in driving reduces accidents. Experience with drinking also lowers risks and problems associated with drinking. Most countries are careful to insist new drivers learn

how to drive before handing them a license. But, the neo-Prohibitionist policies of MLDA21 send new drinkers in bars with no experience at all. Their driving experience helps somewhat, but the problems arising from their first exposure to alcohol destroys many of those benefits.

The European model allows young people to learn how to drink before they are allowed to drive. More importantly they are allowed to drink in environments where they experience alcohol under the guidance of adults – one of the reasons that binge drinking is more of an American problem than a European one. This would suggest that it is wiser to allow drinking alcohol under parental guidance at the dinner table and in restaurants in the early teens while reserving driving rights until the 18. Anthropology professor Dwight Heath, considered the world's leading expert on the anthropology of alcohol said, "In general, the younger people start to drink the safer they are." Heath argues that when young people are introduced to alcohol by their parents it "has no mystique. It's no big deal. By contrast, where it's banned until age 21, there's something of the 'forbidden fruit' syndrome." (28)

Give the young person time to experience alcohol before handing them car keys.

While we have concentrated on the one significant case of where the MLDA was raised from 18 to 21 it might be useful to also look at a recent example where New Zealand lowered the drinking age from 20 to 18. Surely the data from this experiment has to be considered in any debate as well.

Steven Stillman, of the University of Otago, and Stefan Boes of the University of Lucerne, working with the University of Bonn's Institute for the Study of Labour, looked at what happened after New Zealand liberalised alcohol policies in 1999, which included reducing the drinking age. New Zealand



also followed the European model “which allows underage individuals to consume alcohol publicly if purchased by their parents.” They concluded: “Our main findings are that lowering the legal drinking age did not appear to have led to, on average, an increase in alcohol consumption or binge drinking among 15-17 or 18-19 year-olds. However, there is evidence that the law change led to a significant increase in alcohol-related hospital admission rates for 18-19 year-olds, as well as for 15-17 year-olds. While these increases are large in relative magnitude, they are small in the absolute number of affected teenagers. Finally, we find no evidence for an increase in alcohol-related vehicular accidents at the time of the law change for any teenagers... Overall, our results support the argument that the legal

drinking age can be lowered without leading to large increases in detrimental outcomes for youth.”(29)



Summation

The two main arguments that we addressed in this paper were the issues of drunk driving and the association of crime and violence with alcohol. What we saw is that statistically the evidence didn't support a neo-Prohibitionist viewpoint. This could well be the reason that only a small handful of countries have set a drinking age above 18 and many of the most successful and peaceful countries in the world have lower drinking ages.

The United States is the only large country to try this experiment – just as they were the only large country to impose total Prohibition of alcohol as well. Neither experiment turned out as they hoped. The prime justification used in the U.S. was this would reduce driving fatalities. But the downward trend in fatalities continued pretty much as it had been doing. It did not appear that reducing the minimum drinking age had increased the decline. And, hundreds of university presidents began complaining that the lower age created problem drinking on campuses, as they had never seen before. Various states have debated ignoring the federal government and returning to 18 as the minimum drinking age.

It is our contention that violence, crime and drunk driving are all problems of policing. While South Africa's drinking age has not changed the quality of police services has changed. The reduction in quality of police protection and law enforcement has been followed by a rise in the problems for which alcohol is now being blamed.

Yet, in the past, the drinking age was still 18 and these problems did not exist at levels seen today. What has changed is the quality of police services and the alcohol industry is being used as a scapegoat while the politicians continue to ignore problems with policing.

There are other problems with the drive to increase the drinking age, which are not directly prone to statistical analysis. They are arguments about the nature of a free society and individual human rights.

For instance, there is a problem of holding one class of individuals responsible for the actions of the whole body of citizens. Most drunk drivers are not 18, 19 or 20 years old. Yet, the new law would repeal a long-standing right for this one class of citizens, because the whole body of citizens has acted badly. Not only is scapegoating of the alcohol industry taking place but young South Africans are being particularly held out for punitive action by the government. Instead of holding police responsible for their failure to enforce the law, the government is singling out young South Africans.

It is a serious matter when government strips one class of citizens of a long-standing right. It is not one that should be taken lightly or easily. And, if taken at all, it should be taken after all other efforts to solve the problem are exhausted. But, the other efforts have not been taken. As the Automobile Association said, “the solution does

NOT lie with further regulation, but with enforcement and education.” They demanded that government “redouble its efforts in these areas.”

Instead, government is choosing the easy path, pass more regulations, scapegoating young drivers and brewers, and creating a slew of new laws that will face the same lack of enforcement that helped create the problem. If old laws and regulations were facing slack enforcement then new laws and regulations won’t solve the problem. And, to the degree that corruption was a problem, new laws and regulations only increase the means by which corrupt law enforcement can extort funds from the public. The new regulations only give corrupt officers more opportunities.

There is no justification in using state power to protect individuals from themselves. But, it is proper to use such power to protect the rights of individuals from infringement by others. This does justify common sense regulations about road usage and it justifies the criminalization of violence or harm done to others, whether under the influence of alcohol or done cold sober.

But, the misuse of alcohol, like the misuse of motor vehicles, is what should be criminalized, not the alcohol itself. Some people who drink become violent, and it is criminal no matter their age. All such individuals should be held responsible but not all drinkers. Most consumers of alcohol do not act violently, most are not criminals, and most do not drive drunk. The actions of the few who do would not justify taking punitive measures against ALL consumers of alcohol. But, if it would not be justified for all consumers, it is not justified for just those in one specific age group.

Holding only citizens 18-20 responsible for the crisis is selective injustice against one class of citizens. It is no more justified that using the concept of “race guilt” or to claim all men are responsible for the rape epidemic. Crimes are committed by individuals, not by age groups, races, or members of various religions. Singling out the young alone is just another form of prejudice, detrimental to individual rights and the rule of law.

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Appendix 1: Extracts from the National Liquor Policy

1.6.5 Further, the national minimum legal age at which alcohol can be purchased and consumed should be raised from eighteen (18) to twenty one (21) years. The licensees, manager or any other person dispensing liquor at the premises must take steps to ensure verification of the age of any person who appears to be under the age of 21 by requesting an identity document, passport or driver's license in order to verify the person's age before any liquor may be sold or supplied to them. It should be an offense therefore for such persons to sell liquor to persons under the age of 21 and for persons under the age of 21 to provide false evidence of their age in order to access liquor or enter a liquor premise;

4.1.1.10 Many countries have set their minimum drinking age at eighteen (18). However, European countries such as Belgium, France and Italy have set sixteen (16) years as a minimum drinking age. The minimum drinking age at United State, Ukraine, South Korea and Malaysia is twenty one (21); and twenty (20) in Japan. It is clear that minimum drinking age in the Asian countries is above 18 years. The issue of imposing an age limit is a prerogative of each state.

4.1.1.11 However, it is suasive to conclude that the minimum drinking age above or in combination with other factors have a deterrent effect in consumption and or purchase of liquor.

4.1.1.12 There is tangible evidence that changes in minimum drinking age laws do have substantial effects on youth drinking and alcohol-related harm, for example, road traffic accidents. Many studies have found that raising the minimum drinking age from 18 to 21 years decrease single vehicle night time crashes involving young drivers by 11% to 16% at all levels of crash severity (National Youth Development Agency: 2012). Changes in the minimum drinking age are related

to changes in other alcohol related injury admissions to hospitals and injury fatalities. A study in Denmark where a minimum 15 year age limit was introduced for off-premise purchases found that there was an effect in reducing teenagers' drinking including the drinking of the above (15 years) as well as below the age limit was affected.

4.1.1.13 From the above, it is clear that age limit has an impact independently and or cumulatively with other factors on the reduction on increase of drinking. Other factors include but not limited to excise tax on alcohol; national maximum legal blood alcohol concentration when driving a vehicle; restrictions for on/ off-premise sales of beverages (time, hours and days) or places selling liquor (petrol stations); and legally binding regulations on alcohol advertising, sponsorship or sales promotion.

4.1.1.14 In view of the above, it is recommended that the age limit of 21 should be imposed as an attempt to curb the rampant drinking patterns by the youth. This age restriction will pass the constitutional test as other countries are also doing this.

4.1.1.20.5 Review of the national minimum legal drinking age from 18 to 21 years. The licensees, manager or any other person dispensing liquor at the premises must take steps to ensure verification of the age of any person who appears to be under the age of 21 by requesting an identity document, passport or driver's license in order to verify the person's age before any liquor may be sold or supplied to them. It should be an offense therefore for such persons to sell liquor to persons under the age of 21 and for persons under the age of 21 to provide false evidence of their age in order to access liquor or enter a liquor premise.

Appendix 2: Country data

Armenia	0	2	Colombia	18	32
Cambodia	0	2	Congo (Democratic Republic of the)	18	13
Comoros	0	8	Costa Rica	18	8
Denmark	0	1	Croatia	18	1
Guinea-Bissau	0	10	Czech Republic	18	1
Morocco	0	1	Dominican Republic	18	22
Sierra Leone	0	2	Ecuador	18	12
Uzbekistan	0	2	Egypt	18	3
Viet Nam	0	2	El Salvador	18	40
Belgium	16	2	Equatorial Guinea	18	4
Bosnia and Herzegovina	16	1	Eritrea	18	8
Cuba	16	5	Estonia	18	4
Georgia	16	4	Ethiopia	18	8
Germany	16	1	Finland	18	2
Jamaica	16	43	France	18	1
Lesotho	16	38	Gabon	18	9
Liechtenstein	16	0	Gambia	18	10
Luxembourg	16	0	Ghana	18	2
Madagascar	16	1	Greece	18	1
Monaco	16	0	Guatemala	18	35
Portugal	16	1	Guinea	18	9
San Marino	16	0	Guyana	18	19
Switzerland	16	1	Honduras	18	84
Austria	16	1	Hungary	18	3
Cyprus	17	1	India	18	3
Malta	17	2	Ireland	18	1
Albania	18	4	Israel	18	2
Algeria	18	1	Italy	18	1
Andorra	18	0	Kenya	18	7
Angola	18	11	Kyrgyzstan	18	5
Argentina	18	7	Latvia	18	3
Australia	18	1	Lebanon	18	5
Azerbaijan	18	2	Liberia	18	3
Bahamas	18	26	Lithuania	18	7
Bahrain	18	1	Macedonia	18	1
Barbados	18	8	Malawi	18	2
Belarus	18	4	Malaysia	18	2
Belize	18	45	Mauritius	18	3
Bolivia	18	12	Mexico	18	19
Botswana	18	15.4	Republic of Moldova	18	5
Brazil	18	27	Montenegro	18	2
Bulgaria	18	2	Mozambique	18	4
Burundi	18	4	Myanmar	18	3
Cameroon	18	3	Namibia	18	17
Canada	18	1	Nepal	18	3
Cape Verde	18	8	Netherlands	18	1
Central African Republic	18	14	New Zealand	18	1
Chad	18	9	Nicaragua	18	11
Chile	18	3	Niger	18	5
China	18	1	Nigeria	18	10

Norway	18	1	Turkey	18	4
Panama	18	17	Turkmenistan	18	4
Papua New Guinea	18	10	Uganda	18	11
Peru	18	7	Ukraine	18	4
Philippines	18	9	United Kingdom and Northern Ireland	18	1
Poland	18	1	Uruguay	18	8
Romania	18	2	Vanuatu	18	3
Russian Federation	18	9	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	18	54
Rwanda	18	5	Zambia	18	6
Senegal	18	8	Zimbabwe	18	8
Serbia	18	1	Korea (Republic of)	19	1
Seychelles	18	2	Iceland	20	0
Singapore	18	0	Japan	20	0
Slovakia	18	1	Paraguay	20	9
Slovenia	18	1	Thailand	20	5
South Africa	18	32	Fiji	21	3
Spain	18	1	Indonesia	21	1
Suriname	18	9	Kazakhstan	21	8
Swaziland	18	21.1	Micronesia (Federated States of)	21	5
Sweden	18	1	Mongolia	21	7
Tajikistan	18	1	Pakistan	21	8
Togo	18	9	Samoa	21	9
Tonga	18	1	Sri Lanka	21	4
Trinidad and Tobago	18	30	United States of America	21	4
Tunisia	18	3			