

2023 California Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey

Introduction:

California's 2023 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey (STPS) assessed the retailer violation rate for tobacco sales to youth and young adults under 21 years of age using decoys aged 18 to 20 years old.

The Federal Synar Regulations require California to conduct a tobacco purchase survey and maintain a compliance rate of no more than 20% plus an allowable margin of error. Failure to maintain compliance with this requirement may result in a reduction of up to 10% of California's Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) funds.

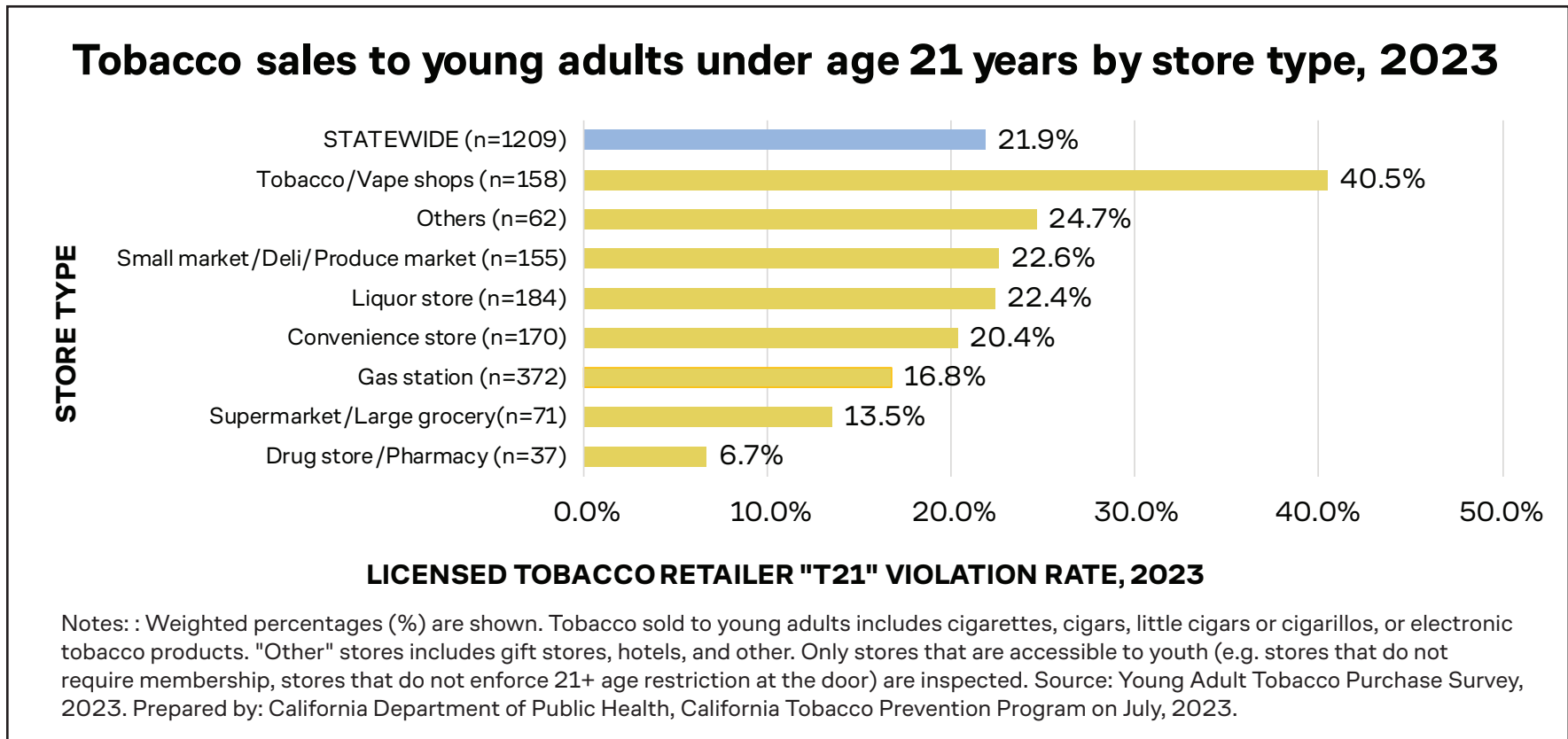
A regionally stratified, random sample of California licensed tobacco retail outlets was sampled from the California Department of Tax and Fee Administration tobacco retailer license list. The 2023 STPS began inspections in February 2023 and concluded in June 2023. 1209 outlets were successfully surveyed. Decoys primarily attempted to purchase either vaping products or cigarettes; however, decoys were allowed to attempt to purchase little cigars/cigarillos, cigars, or smokeless tobacco.

Results:

The statewide retailer violation rate was 21.9% (Figure 1). Drug stores/pharmacies, supermarket/large grocery, gas station, and convenience store had a much lower violation rate than the state average (6.7%, 13.5%, 16.8%, and 20.4% respectively). Liquor store (22.4%), small market/deli/produce market (22.6%), tobacco stores/smoke shops (40.5%), and other stores, like hotels, discount stores, restaurants (24.7%) had a higher retailer violation rate than the statewide average. Although the state's retailer violation rate is above 20%, the state met the SABG requirements as it is within the allowable margin of error.¹

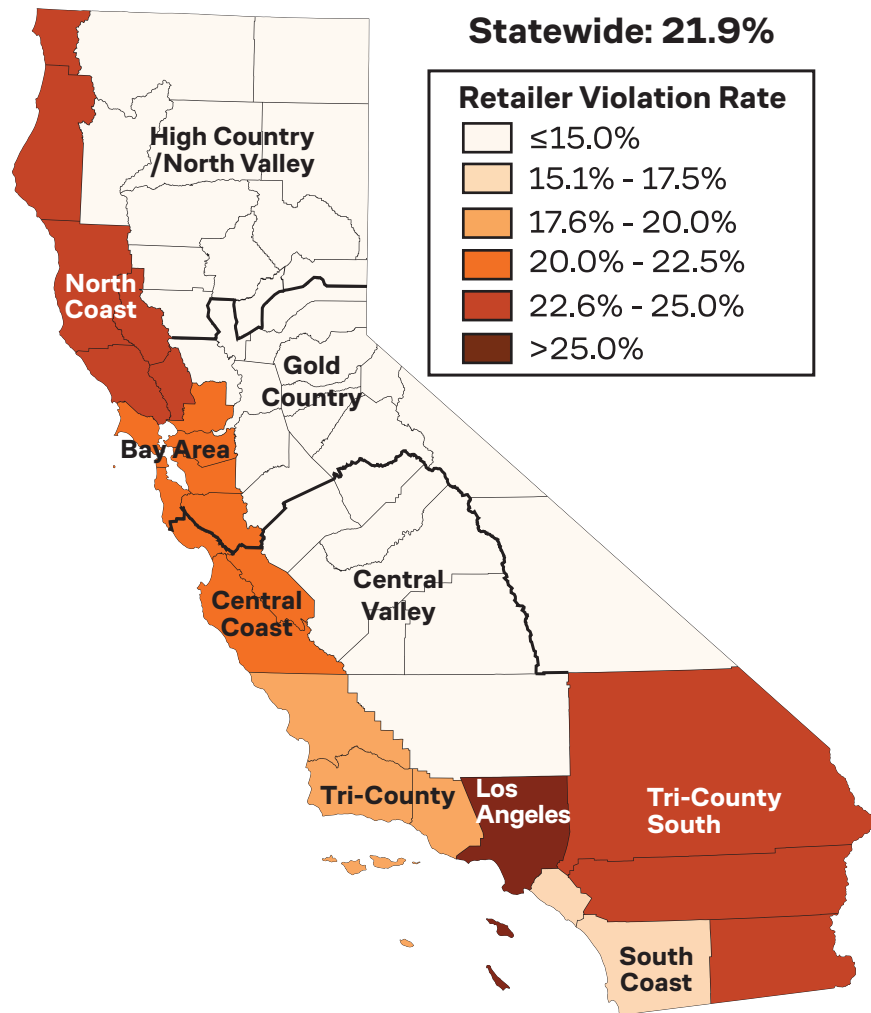
¹ The allowable margin of error based on California's 2023 data is 1.97%. Therefore, California will comply with the Synar regulation if the weighted retailer violation rate is below 21.97%. This is calculated by adding the compliance rate target of 20% and the allowable margin of error.

Figure 1. Retailer Violation Rate (%) by Store Type, 2023 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



Categorizing the retailer violation rate by region, it was found that Los Angeles had the highest retailer violation rate of 33.0% compared to other regions (Figure 2). Central Valley region has the lowest retailer violation rate (11.9%).

Figure 2. Retailer Violation Rate (%) by Region, 2023 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



California Regions	n	Retailer Violation Rate (%)	Counties
Bay Area	166	22.3%	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano
Central Coast	24	20.8%	Monterey, San Benito, Santa Cruz
Central Valley	134	11.9%	Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Tulare
Gold Country	131	14.5%	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Inyo, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tuolumne, Yolo
High Country/ North Valley	36	13.8%	Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity, Yuba
Los Angeles	324	33.0%	Los Angeles
North Coast	22	22.7%	Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma
South Coast	176	15.9%	Orange, San Diego
Tri County	55	20.0%	San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura
Tri County South	141	22.7%	Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino

Notes: Weighted percentages (%) are shown.
 Source: Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey, 2023. Prepared by: California Department of Public Health, California Tobacco Prevention Program on July 2023.

Posting age-of-sales signs was also documented in the STPS. The Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement (STAKE) Act requires tobacco retail outlets to post at the point of sale a minimum age-of-sale signage with the State’s 1-800-5 ASK-4-ID toll-free reporting number. Only 50.7% of retail outlets had the STAKE Act signs posted at the point of sale. Stores that did not post STAKE ACT signs at the point of sale (23.8%) had a slightly higher retailer violation rate than stores that did not (20.1%). The US Food and Drug Administration requires retail outlets to check ID of anyone under the age of 30. The STPS found that 29.0% of retail outlets did not follow this requirement. Among the retail outlets that did not check ID at the time of purchase, the retailer violation rate for underage sales was 67.9%. This is significantly higher than the 3.1% retailer violation rate for underage sales among retail outlets that did check ID at the time of purchase. Any type of retailer violation was highest in Central Coast and North Coast regions (Table 1).

Table 1. Retailer Violation Rate (%) by type of violation, 2023 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey

California Regions	Underage Sales	STAKE Act Signage Violations	Photo ID Verification Violations	Any Violations
Bay Area	22.3%	34.9%	28.9%	51.8%
Central Coast	20.8%	75.0%	29.2%	80.0%
Central Valley	11.9%	44.0%	20.9%	55.1%
Gold Country	14.5%	54.2%	22.9%	57.7%
High Country/North Valley	13.8%	60.5%	16.4%	64.7%
Los Angeles	33.0%	57.4%	38.0%	72.7%
North Coast	22.7%	81.8%	31.8%	80.0%
South Coast	15.9%	48.3%	27.8%	60.1%
Tri-County	20.0%	32.7%	23.6%	47.3%
Tri-County South	22.7%	42.6%	28.4%	58.5%
OVERALL	21.9%	49.3%	29.0%	61.7%