Keep it local or keep it out? An examination of local alcohol option laws in Murray”

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Background

• According to the KY Dept of Alcoholic Beverage Control (2010):
  – 46 KY Counties remain “dry” = no alcohol sales
  – 33 KY Counties are “wet” = no alcohol restrictions
  – 41 KY Counties are “moist” = allow by the glass purchases or allow alcohol production facilities to sell alcohol on site
Background

• Formerly a dry community, the City of Murray adopted a moist policy in 2000, permitting by-the-glass purchases of alcohol at approved locations.
  – Restaurants that maintain 70% of sales as food
  – Alcohol cannot be served on Sunday
  – Drinks cannot be served after midnight
Background

• In the Fall of 2009, two competing campaigns were launched in Murray
  — “Keep it Local” sought to expand alcohol availability
  — “Keep it Out of Murray” sought to maintain current laws or eliminate all alcohol sales
  — The Keep it Local campaign collected 1,422 signatures, but too many were invalid because of non-resident status (i.e., City of Murray) and a special election did not occur

Keep it Local Campaign

• The “Keep it Local” campaign was created to gather the necessary amount of petition signatures to put packaged alcohol sales to a special election
  — Argued that residents were traveling to other areas to purchase alcohol and also spending money while there
  — Argued packaged alcohol sales would not increase problems and would keep this spending local
Keep it Out of Murray Campaign

• Conversely, the “Keep it Out of Murray” campaign was a counter-movement that opposed packaged alcohol sales
  – Argued that packaged alcohol sales brought increased crime and abuse problems into communities
  – Also gathered signatures to potentially reverse Murray’s moist policy, reverting to dry status

Climate of Controversy

• In addition to the local controversy in Murray concerning packaged alcohol sales, a neighboring county (Trigg Co.) had a wet/dry status vote in the fall of 2009
• News stories in the area detailed the severe friction between churches and members that signed the petition in Trigg County.
• Church members were threatened with excommunication
Spiral of Silence

• The Spiral of Silence Theory has been employed to explore communication about controversial, morally loaded topics
• The Spiral of Silence argues that most humans have an innate fear of social isolation and will not communicate viewpoints in public that they feel will be met with opposition
• Conversely, when perceiving support from others, humans will communicate opinions

The study

• This study applied the spiral of silence to the debate over local alcohol option laws
• Residents were contacted via random phone dialing ($N = 38$), and were debriefed if requested
  – Age ($M = 61.05$, $SD = 18.22$), 26 Female, 12 Male
• Small sample size = short lived issue
Results

- 53% supported keep it local, 39% supported keep it out of Murray, 8% unsure
- Perception differed = 52% believed Murray residents supported Keep it Out of Murray, while 48% believed residents supported Keep it Local
- Small *silent majority* effect
- 58% believed Keep it Local would gain support in the future

Results

- Correlational data indicated that *Keep it Local* supporters:
  - Were younger
  - Did not attend to local news media (e.g., TV, newspaper, online news, radio news)
  - Had a negative fear of social isolation
  - Had high response efficacy (i.e., believed alcohol sales would have minimal negative impact on Murray)
Results

• Correlational data indicated that Keep it Local supporters:
  – Placed less importance on belonging to local church
  – Had high future opinion congruency (i.e., believed others would support their point of view in the future)

Results

• Correlational data indicated that Keep it Out of Murray supporters:
  – Were older
  – Felt church belonging was important
  – Had high issue salience (i.e., felt the issue was very important for the area)
  – Had high current and future opinion congruency (i.e., believed their point of view was currently shared by others and would be in the future)
Results

• Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted to determine which variables were most important in predicting opinion expression.

• Keep it Local:
  – Low importance of church belonging and high response efficacy.

• Keep it Out of Murray:
  – High importance of church belonging, low communication apprehension, high issue salience, high opinion congruency with other church members.

Conclusions

• Does social isolation in “dry” counties lead to an increase in “border drinking”?

• Keep it Local supporters fit the description of Hard Core and Avant Garde supporters (per Spiral of Silence).

• Reference groups play an important role in opinion expression.

• Possible two-step flow of communication.

• Spiral of silence can be used in local issues.