

2025 California Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



Introduction:

California's 2025 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 16 to 20 years old.

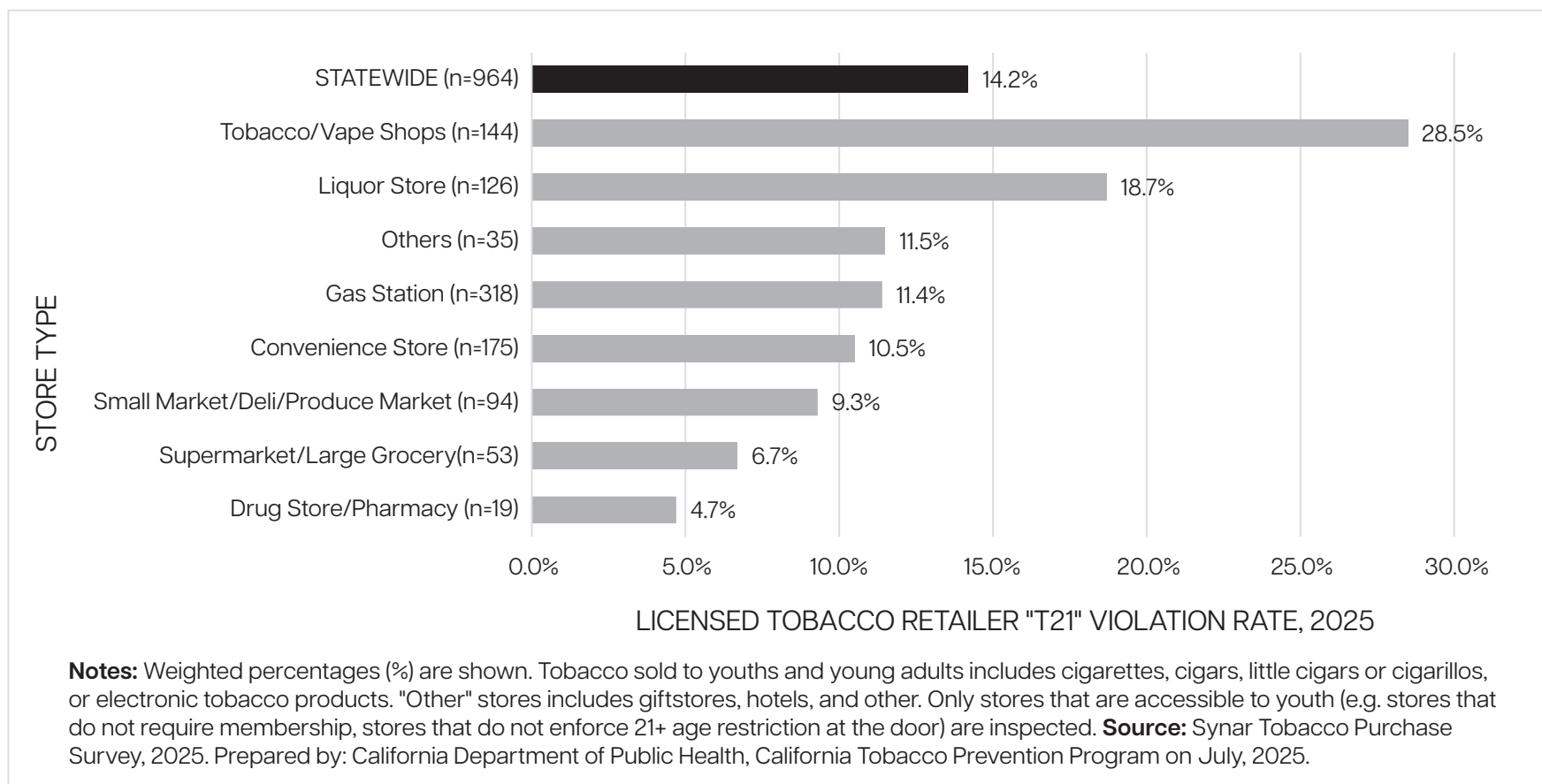
The Federal Synar Regulations require California to conduct a tobacco purchase survey and maintain a compliance rate of no more than 20% plus an allowable margin of error. Failure to maintain compliance with this requirement may result in a reduction of up to 10% of California's Substance Abuse Prevention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

A regionally stratified, random sample of California licensed tobacco retail outlets was sampled. The 2025 STPS began inspections in February 2025 and concluded in June 2025. A total of 964 outlets were successfully surveyed. Decoys primarily attempted to purchase vaping products (n=532, 55.2 percent) and cigarettes (n=411, 42.6 percent). If these products were not available, decoys were able to purchase little cigars/cigarillos, cigars, or smokeless tobacco (n=21, 2.2 percent).

Results:

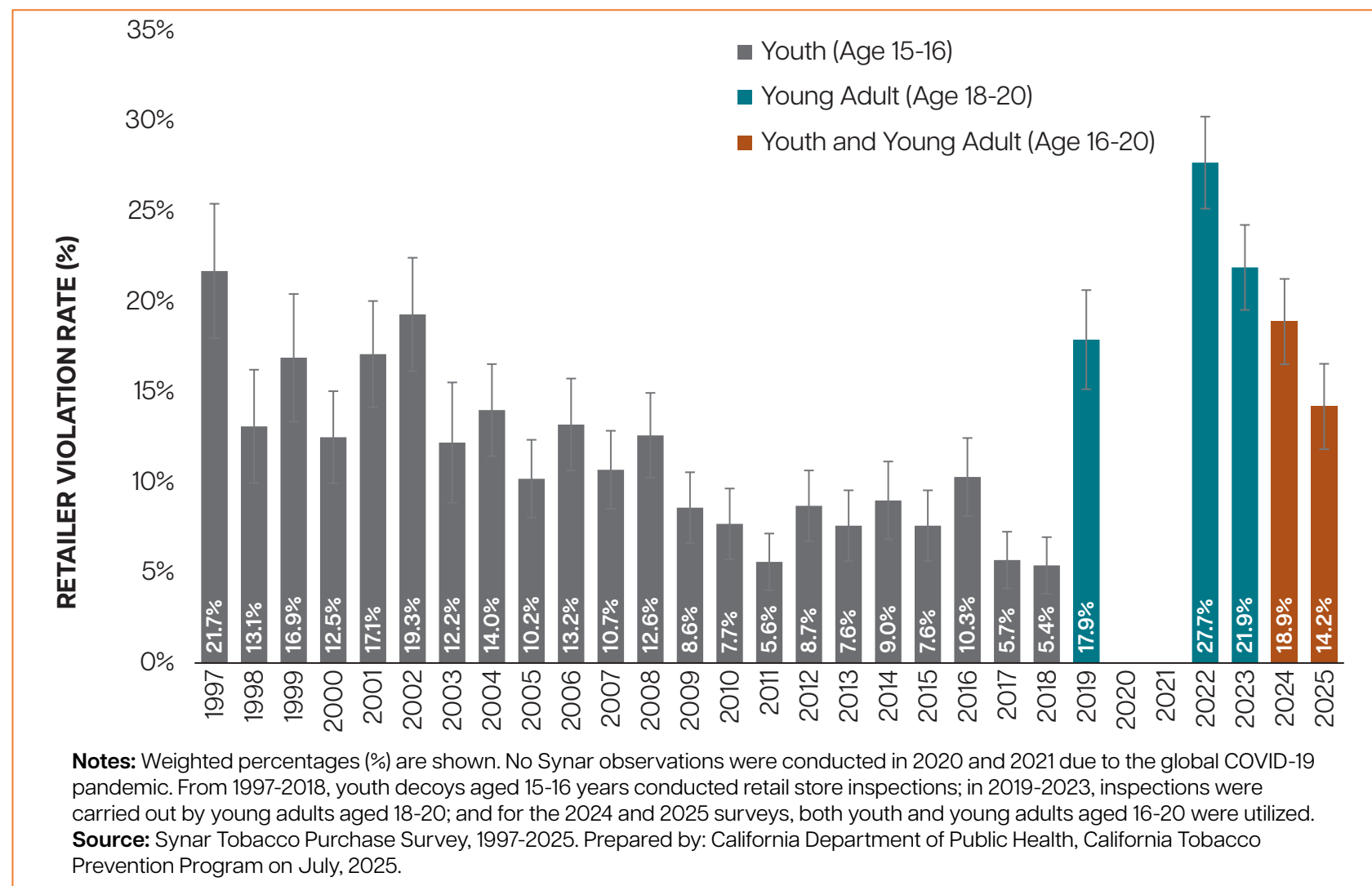
The statewide retailer violation rate was 14.2 percent (Figure 1). Drug stores/pharmacies and supermarket/large grocery stores had the lowest violation rates (4.7 percent and 6.7 percent respectively). Tobacco stores/smoke shops (28.5 percent) and liquor stores (18.7 percent) had higher violation rates than the statewide average

Figure 1. Retailer Violation Rate (%) by Store Type, 2025 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



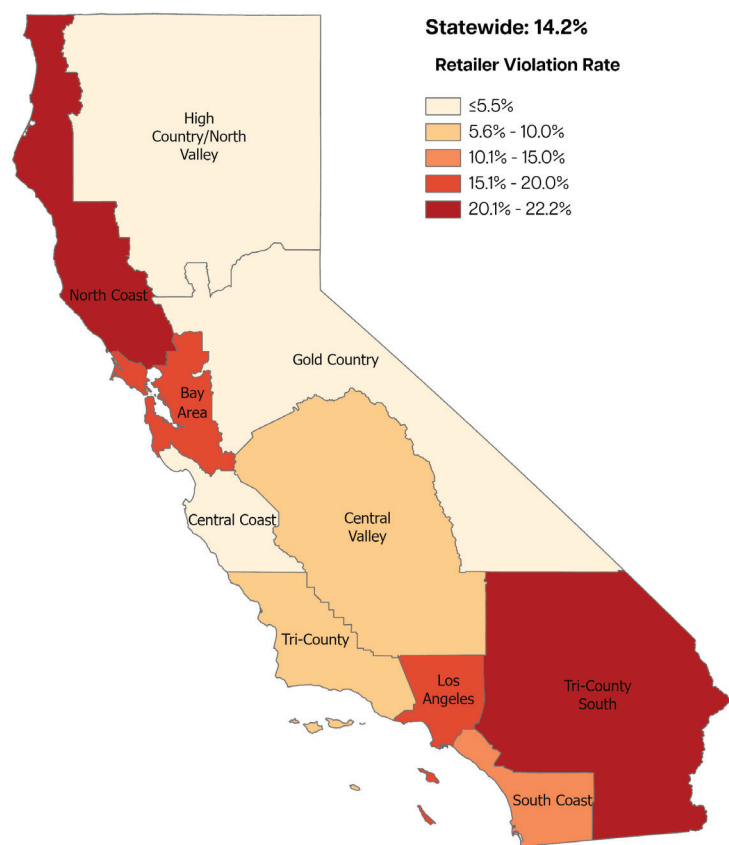
The retailer violation rate for underage sales significantly decreased from 18.9 percent in 2024 to 14.2 percent in 2025 (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Trend in Retailer Violation Rates (%), 1997-2025 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



Categorizing the retailer violation rate by region, it was found that North Coast (22.2 percent) and Tri-County South (20.4 percent) had the highest violation rates compared to other regions (Figure 3). The Central Coast region has the lowest retailer violation rate (4.5%).

Figure 3. Retailer Violation Rate (%) by California Regions, 2025 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey



California Regions	n	Retailer Violation Rate (%)	Counties
Bay Area	143	16.8%	Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara, Solano
Central Coast	22	4.5%	Monterey, San Benito, Santa Cruz
Central Valley	98	9.2%	Fresno, Kern, Kings, Madera, Mariposa, Merced, Tulare
Gold Country	100	5.0%	Alpine, Amador, Calaveras, El Dorado, Inyo, Mono, Nevada, Placer, Sacramento, San Joaquin, Stanislaus, Sutter, Tuolumne, Yolo
High Country/ North Valley	19	5.3%	Butte, Colusa, Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta, Sierra, Siskiyou, Tehama, Trinity, Yuba
Los Angeles	267	18.4%	Los Angeles
North Coast	18	22.2%	Del Norte, Humboldt, Lake, Mendocino, Napa, Sonoma
South Coast	154	12.3%	Orange, San Diego
Tri-County	35	8.6%	San Luis Obispo, Santa Barbara, Ventura
Tri-County South	108	20.4%	Imperial, Riverside, San Bernardino

Posting of age-of-sales signs was also documented in the survey. 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 48.0 percent of retail outlets had STAKE Act signs posted. Stores that did not post STAKE ACT signs (16.8 percent) had a higher violation rate than stores that did post STAKE ACT signs (11.3 percent); the difference is statistically significant. Tri-County region had the highest STAKE Act signage violation rate (65.7 percent) compared to other regions. (Figure 4).

The US Food and Drug Administration requires retail outlets to check the photo identification (ID) of anyone under the age of 30. However, the survey found that 19.8 percent of retail outlets did not follow this requirement. Among retail outlets that did not check photo ID at the time of purchase, the retailer violation rate for underage sales was 59.4 percent. This is significantly higher than the 1.3 percent retailer violation rate for underage sales among retail outlets that did check photo ID at the time of purchase. Bay Area region had the highest photo ID verification violation rate (24.5 percent) compared to other regions. (Figure 4).

Figure 4. Retailer Violation Rate by Type of Violation, 2025 Synar Tobacco Purchase Survey

CALIFORNIA REGION	UNDERAGE SALES	STAKE ACT SIGNAGE VIOLATIONS	PHOTO ID VERIFICATION VIOLATIONS	ANY VIOLATIONS
Bay Area (n=143)	16.8%	53.8%	24.5%	62.5%
Central Coast (n=22)	4.5%	45.5%	13.6%	50.0%
Central Valley (n=98)	9.2%	46.9%	15.3%	49.5%
Gold Country (n=100)	5.0%	53.0%	18.0%	61.0%
High Country/North Valley (n=19)	5.3%	36.8%	10.5%	36.8%
Los Angeles (n=267)	18.4%	53.9%	22.5%	59.5%
North Coast (n=18)	22.2%	61.1%	22.2%	54.5%
South Coast (n=154)	12.3%	43.4%	17.5%	53.5%
Tri-County (n=35)	8.6%	65.7%	11.4%	68.6%
Tri-County South (n=108)	20.4%	49.1%	22.2%	60.7%
OVERALL (n=964)	14.2%	52.0%	19.8%	57.7%

Note: "Any Violation" includes either underage sales, or STAKE Act signage violation, or photo ID verification violation.