

# Advocating for the maintenance of the us drinking age minimums argumentative essa...

[Health & Medicine](#), [Alcoholism](#)



The Prohibition era of the United States, where the consumption and sale of all alcohol was firmly prohibited by the American government and punishable by law, was one of the most volatile eras in its history. Bootleggers and speakeasies made the criminal underworld thrive in America until, due to this activity and the unpopular nature of the law, Prohibition was repealed in 1933. Since then, the minimum drinking age was put into practice to make sure that no one below a certain age was allowed to drink, a declaration that has changed dramatically over time. However, there have been questions as to whether or not the legal drinking age should be lowered from 21 to 18. There is precedent in the history of the legal drinking age, and the debate rages over whether or not it keeps people safe, or whether it just arbitrarily limits the freedoms of individuals who can do more dangerous things legally already. However, given research and the rampant danger that underage drinking presents to lives and health of youngsters, the minimum drinking age for American citizens should remain at 21.

There are many reasons for which the minimum drinking age should remain at 21; for one, research indicates that the establishment of later drinking ages " reduced deaths among adolescents and young adults for various categories of violent death" (Jones et al., 1992). Furthermore, as the primary effect of the depressive effects of alcohol is impaired judgment, it is often better to restrict access to alcohol to more mentally-developed individuals - alcohol " alters the developing brain and causes possibly irreversible damage", lowering the size of the hippocampus (the center of memory and learning in humans) by nearly 10% if exposed to sustained alcohol usage

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(AMA, 2004). In essence, alcohol should be restricted to adults whose brains have been more fully developed with age and growth, in order to prevent the severe health risks that are possible with underage drinking.

Despite the varying degrees to which states determined their minimum drinking ages throughout American history, this all changed with the National Minimum Drinking Age Act of 1984, which stated that all states would set their minimum drinking ages to 21. This was enforced by lowering the federal highway apportionment of each state that did not follow through by ten percent. This amendment came about from the study of drunk driving accidents started by Ronald Reagan's commission and Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD). " The Court argued, in particular, that reducing traffic fatalities among 18-20 year olds was sufficient reason for the federal government to intervene in an arena traditionally reserved to states" (Miron and Tetelbaum, p. 2).

The phenomenon of drunk driving is the major reasoning behind those who seek to have the drinking age minimums remain at 21 - studies have shown that a high legal drinking age lowers the prevalence of fatal injuries among adolescents (Jones et al., p. 112). There is also a spillover effect, as a lower drinking age would permit 18 year olds to grant 15-16 year olds access to alcohol, leading to even higher fatal injuries. The more experience with alcohol one has, the lower the likelihood is to have a fatal injury, suggesting that the higher drinking age leads to fewer injuries. With that in mind, it is absolutely necessary to keep the drinking age at 21, as that will lessen the chance that even younger kids can get alcohol from their 18-year-old peers,

effectively restricting legal alcohol use and abuse to late-college aged peers as opposed to introducing even younger alcohol abusers in high school and lower.

Since the NMDA of 1984, there has been tremendous opposition to the setting of the minimum drinking age to 21. Studies have indicated that binge drinking most often occurs in those under 21, perhaps due to the illegal and taboo nature of underage drinking that is established by the rule. Difficulty in enforcing the 21 age minimums and the subjective unfairness of the bill has led some, including New York assembly members, to push forward bills that would set a drinking age back at 18. These individuals and organizations argue that the 21-year-old drinking age does not do anything to solve dangerous college drinking binges, and only serves to make them worse, compared to many countries in Europe with stricter regulations on alcohol. " Our current laws appear to be counterproductive in terms of personal, academic, social and legal problems among our college youth, perhaps alternative approaches taken from the experience of cultures that have few problems with alcohol need to be explored" (Engs, 2003).

There are those who believe in the lower drinking age; consuming alcohol is considered to be a socially acceptable practice, and many people claim that 18 year olds should be allowed to drink alcohol since they are already allowed to do more dangerous things - like join the military or drive a motor vehicle. " When they have the opportunity to drink, many do so in an irresponsible manner" (Engs, 2003). Lowering the drinking age, it is argued, will more strictly regulate the consumption and sale of alcohol, and permit

underage drinkers to have a legal means of obtaining alcohol. This would free up law enforcement resources allocated to enforcing these higher legal drinking ages, and they would keep underage drinkers from seeking out dangerous alternative options for obtaining alcohol.

Those who wish to lower the LDA seem to suggest that teen drinking continues unabated regardless of the illegality of it, but it moves to less controllable areas. However, these claims can be refuted by research which indicates that many teenagers will refrain from this same rebellious behavior to a greater extent if and when the drinking age keeps alcohol out of their reach - in fact, studies show that it is the judgment-impairing effect of alcohol that has this effect, and not the fact that they have already broken the law - keeping the drinking age of 21 offers a net benefit not just to those who drive, but " delay[s] legal access to alcohol among pre-LDA adolescents, preventing traumatic deaths that occur with legal access" (Jones et al., 1992). The notion of underage alcohol drinking cannot be solved by just one piece of legislation, as it is caused by many different factors, more so than simply the allure of its illegality.

In conclusion, the legal drinking age limit should remain at 21. Research indicates that the maintenance of this minimum will limit the access youths have to alcohol, and will cut down on the number of car accidents and fatal injuries among adolescents. While there are others who believe lowering the drinking age would bring regulation to an already existing problem of youth drinking, research indicates that the regulation of drinking keeps substantially more drinks out of the hands of teenagers than criminalizes

those who still drink, and it reserves the ability to drink until younger minds are more able to make clearer judgments about their safety. In essence, the presumed teen rebellion aspect of underage drinking would not be abated by allowing them to drink; instead, it would endanger their health in dramatic and troubling ways, and merely lower their judgment to the extent where it might endanger their lives.

## References

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