

Jana Lokajčková

M.A. Dissertation Evaluation

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*Minimum Legal Drinking Age in the U.S.: A Reasonable Exception to Age of Majority?*

Jana Lokajčková has produced a work dealing with the issue of the legal drinking age in the United States, which is 21. Though this matter is certainly a legitimate research topic, I wonder whether the Institute of International Studies is the best place to pursue such a theme. Apart from this fact, I am impressed by the amount of research that Jana has done. The work itself contains an Introduction, four main chapters, and a Conclusion.

In the Introduction, Jana clearly spells out the goal of her work, which is to analyze the minimum legal drinking age from the perspective of policies aimed at controlling drunk driving. She informs the reader of the purpose of each chapter and her analysis of the literature is more than sufficient.

Chapter 1 bears the title “Drinking and Driving in the United States.” As Jana correctly points out, the social and cultural background is important. The first section delves into why driving is nearly universal in the United States. Jana addresses the issue of two kinds of drivers licenses and clearly emphasizes that driving ages differ between individual states. She also addresses the multiple reasons for the decline in fatalities on the road, which include the low speed limit (which has been increased in recent years, but remains low), safety issues, stricter technical controls of vehicles, and advances in emergency medical care. In the second section, Jana discusses drinking in the United States. Drinking indeed decreased in the 1980s and 1990s, but increased from the late 1990s. Though about a third of Americans do not drink alcohol, America has enough alcoholics (at least by medical definition). Underage drinking and binge drinking are discussed in detail. The third section examines the issue of drinking and driving. Included are a number of statistics and charts. The chapter concludes by stating

that the United States has more drink-related accidents than Western Europe (Western Europe has greater consumption of alcohol per capita) and those under 21 often are involved in those accidents. As those under 21 do not represent the largest group of culprits behind the wheel, this indicates, according to Jana, that the legally-mandated drinking age of 21 has not brought greater safety on the roads.

Chapter 2 deals with the legal aspects of the drinking age. The first section briefly describes the historical background. After the repeal of Prohibition, states pretty much could decide for themselves about the drinking age. After the 1960s and the lowering of the voting age to 18 in 1970, a number of states began lowering the drinking age to 18 as well. In the 1970s, this was linked to a greater number of traffic accidents in the 18-21 age group. The second section addresses the Federal Uniform Drinking Age Act. After Ronald Reagan won the presidency, the push was on to raise the drinking age back to 21 for safety reasons. In 1984, the National Minimum Drinking Act was enacted and, by threatening to withhold federal funds for the construction of highways, the federal government coerced states to raise their respective drinking age to 21. A thorough analysis of the main legal challenges is presented by Jana and I find the presentation excellent.

Chapter 3 discusses studies on what really is effective in reducing the number of traffic accidents. The first section cites a number of key studies indicating that fatalities on the roads decreased among all groups of drivers, whereas incidences of teen drinking barely went down thanks to the 21 drinking age. The second section addresses what actually might help reduce “driving under the influence” fatalities. Limits to blood alcohol concentration levels are scrutinized in detail. Also, legal threats such as license revocation and threats of apprehension to all guilty souls, regardless of age group, seem more effective.

Chapter 4 addresses both federal law enforcement and national action groups against drunk driving. She mentions the various agencies and independent initiatives formed to deal

with the problem. According to Jana, this can lead to a change in public attitude brought about by raising overall awareness of the penalties. The chapter is properly conceived.

In the Conclusion, Jana recapitulates her main point, which is that raising the drinking age to 21 has not resulted in a decrease in drunk driving. Basically, in her opinion, adoption of other law enforcement measures might be more effective.

This is a well-written work. The only minor criticism I have has to do with language. I believe that many of the grammatical errors could have been corrected prior to submission Jana given the text to a native English speaker. However, I recommend an **excellent mark**.

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