

MEMO

To: Interested Parties
From: RG Strategies – Will Gudelunas and Matt Rodriguez
Date: August 20, 2022
Re: Voter Attitudes on AB 257, the FAST Act

Executive Overview

Millions of Californians go to counter service restaurants every week, the vast majority of whom are price sensitive. As inflationary pressures have increased throughout 2022, restaurants have worked to hold price increases below other food sectors (13.1% for grocery compared to 7.6% for restaurants year over year in July). Support for AB 257 declined ten points since March. Voters expect policymakers to address price increases, not exacerbate them.

Assembly Bill 257

Assembly Bill (AB) 257, authored by Assemblymember Chris Holden (AD-41), would enact the Fast Food Accountability and Standards Recovery Act or FAST Recovery Act. The bill has two focal points:

1. Transfer legislative powers to a council of political appointments to set wage, workplace, and health and safety policy for a subsection of California’s restaurants industry (counter-service restaurants where customers pay first then eat); and,
2. Dismantle the restaurant franchise model in California by forcing corporate ownership of all counter service restaurants.

Research Summary

RG Strategies, led by Democratic strategists Will Gudelunas and Matt Rodriguez, conducted a survey from August 11–17, 2022, with a sample of 800 likely November 2022 California voters. Voters were contacted using a hybrid approach of text messages and telephone calls, administered in both English and Spanish.

Atmosphere

Inflation, housing affordability, and the rising cost of groceries and gas dominate concerns of likely voters. **Ninety percent of voters say that rising costs on essential items are very or somewhat concerning.**

Nearly 7 in 10 Californians frequent an impacted counter service restaurant at least once a week, including 79% of Latino voters and 80% of voters who make less than \$25,000 per year. AB 257 exacerbates voter concerns about price increases for the tens of millions of Californians who visit counter service restaurants regularly.

Findings

Less than one-third (32%) of California voters support AB 257, while 47% oppose the proposed law:

Some California unions are sponsoring a bill in the California Legislature to create a new Food Sector Council made up of political appointees with the power to establish additional wage and labor laws for the counter service industry in California. This law would apply to local restaurants that are individually owned by franchisees and part of restaurant brands with 30 or more locations nationwide, including coffee shops, ice cream and frozen yogurt counters, salad bars, juice and smoothie counters, bakeries, delis, pizzerias, and fast food restaurants.

Seventy-five percent of voters agree that if the Food Sector Council causes prices in counter service restaurants to increase they will frequent these restaurants less often.

Sixty-one percent of voters agree that establishing a Food Sector Council to oversee aspects of the counter service industry will cause restaurants to raise their prices to cover the cost of new regulations and higher wages.

Voters are very receptive to economic statements about AB 257, which they find convincing to oppose the bill, tracking with their financial concerns in the current inflationary environment.

STATEMENTS ABOUT AB 257	TOTAL CONVINCING
This law essentially imposes a restaurant tax that will lead to higher prices at thousands of local food establishments in California right as we're heading into a recession. Grocery prices increased 12% over the past year and restaurant prices increased nearly 8%. Between skyrocketing food and gas prices, working families can't afford to pay another tax every time they eat a meal.	70%
The state legislature estimates that costs would likely reach the tens of millions of dollars on an annual basis and put additional pressures on the courts. Taxpayers shouldn't be on the hook for this expensive policy, especially with opposition from the state's own Department of Finance which stated it's not clear the bill will achieve its goal while raising costs at the same time.	62%
This proposed law strips decision-making authority from our elected representatives by empowering a council of unelected political appointees and special interests with no accountability to voters. This means voters have no say on laws that affect thousands of businesses and employees throughout California.	62%

Conclusion

Popularity of AB 257 dropped throughout the year as voters' economic concerns continued to rise.

Support for AB 257 tracked at 42% in a March 2022 public opinion survey led by RG Strategies and is down a full ten points to 32% in August 2022.