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ENVIRONMENT

# Regulating Single-Use Plastics

Survey shows Floridians favor Home Rule

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In 1987, **Berkeley, CA**, became the first American municipality to restrict the use and sale of polystyrene products (such as plastic foam) within its jurisdiction. Since then, hundreds of local governments throughout the United States have followed suit in an effort to reduce pollution and protect endangered wildlife.

To date, approximately 400 U.S. cities have placed local restrictions and prohibitions on single-use products such as plastic bags, food containers and straws. But not here in the Sunshine State. That's because Florida is one of several states

that maintain a preemptive ban on such ordinances. The state forbids local jurisdictions from establishing their own policies to govern the use and sale of these products. While recent proposals in the state Legislature have sought to reform this policy, preemptive bans such as Florida’s are often buoyed by support from the business community, as well as influential interests in the plastics industry.

In a recent survey conducted at the **University of South Florida**, we asked residents whether the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastic restrictions should be maintained or whether local jurisdictions should have the authority to set their own policies. The survey responses – summarized in this article – show strong support among Floridians for lifting the state’s preemptive ban, including relatively strong bipartisan support among Democrats, Independents and Republicans. As the environmental challenges that accompany Florida’s rapid population growth continue to compound, it appears that most Floridians favor Home Rule and localized policy solutions when it comes to these specific environmental protection efforts.

**FINDINGS EXPLAINED**

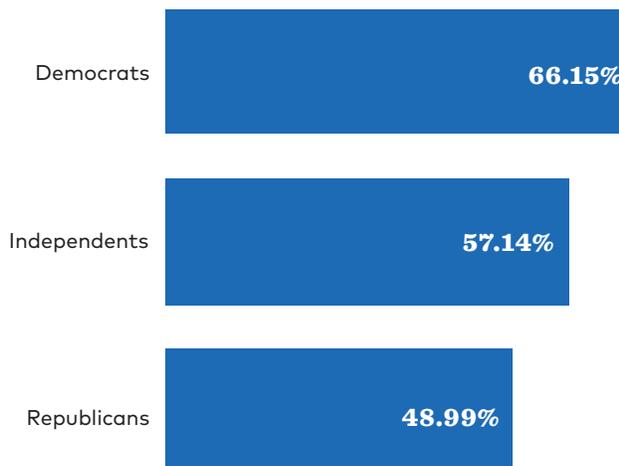
A majority of respondents (56%) said that “it should be up to local governments if they want to enact bans or prohibitions on single-use plastics.” Only a quarter of respondents (25%) said that the state’s preemptive ban should be upheld, while 18% indicated that they were “unsure.” (See Figure 1.) Support for local discretion was relatively high across political affiliations, with 66% of Democrats and 57% of Independents saying that the decision to restrict single-use plastics should be left to local jurisdictions. (See Figure 2.) Republicans were somewhat more split on the issue, though a plurality (49%) said that they, too, would support local discretion in establishing these policies compared with only 35% who favored maintaining the state’s preemptive ban.

**Figure 1. A MAJORITY OF FLORIDIANS OPPOSE THE STATE'S PREEMPTIVE BAN ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS RESTRICTIONS**



Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

**Figure 2. SUPPORT FOR HOME RULE ON SINGLE-USE PLASTICS**



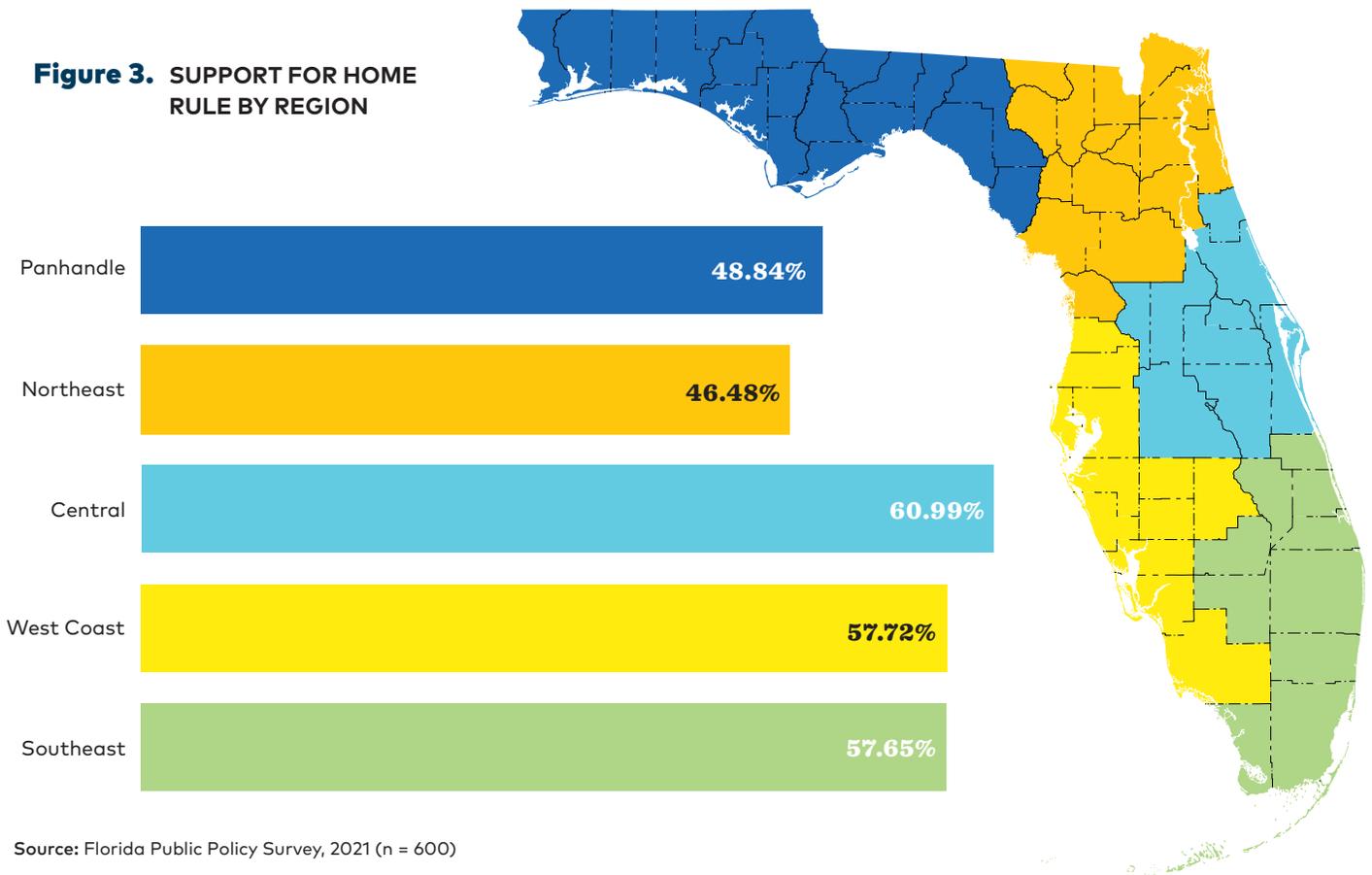
Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

Some minor differences were noted across regions of the state, though a plurality of respondents in each region favored a reversal of the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastics restrictions. (See Figure 3 and map.) Support for local discretion was highest in the Central (61%), West Coast (58%) and Southeastern (58%) regions of the state, while support was slightly below 50% in the Panhandle (49%) and North-eastern regions (46%). These differences are correlated with the observed partisan differences noted above.

**CONCLUSION: MOST FAVOR HOME RULE**

The survey results show that a majority of Floridians favor Home Rule when it comes to setting local environmental policies, such as single-use plastics bans. However, in recent years, Florida has opted instead for state-level mandates that limit the ability of local agencies to craft unique policy solutions to fit the needs and preferences of their communities. Along with the preemptive ban mentioned earlier in the article, the state government in Tallahassee has also adopted “one-size-fits-all” preemptions that limit the ability of local governments and private organizations to adopt individualized policies related to mask mandates and COVID-19 vaccines.

**Figure 3. SUPPORT FOR HOME RULE BY REGION**



Source: Florida Public Policy Survey, 2021 (n = 600)

Our survey results suggest that Floridians might prefer a less heavy-handed approach from Tallahassee. In the case of single-use plastics, a less centralized policymaking environment makes intuitive sense, as the demographic and cultural factors that shape both citizen preferences and patterns of consumption can vary widely across diverse localities. Lifting the state’s preemptive ban on single-use plastic restrictions

would allow local agencies to exercise greater control over the environmental health of their communities while also accounting for the diverse needs and perspectives of the constituents they serve.

Stephen Neely is an Associate Professor at the University of South Florida School of Public Affairs. [QC](#)

**Sources**

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- ▶ Nicol R. Linda Stewart, Mike Grieco push bills to allow local governments to ban single-use plastics. Florida Politics. [bit.ly/3jwMOxL](https://www.floridapolitics.com/story/news/politics/2021/07/29/florida-politics-bills-to-allow-local-governments-to-ban-single-use-plastics/).

**Survey Details**

The survey, which examined a range of conservation and environmental policy issues in the state, was conducted July 15-25, 2021. Respondents were asked to share their opinions on the state’s preemptive ban and whether local governments should be allowed to adopt tighter restrictions on

the sale and consumption of single-use plastics within their own jurisdictions.

The survey was conducted online through Prodege, a leading market research provider. A representative sample of 600 Floridians was contacted using a stratified quota

sampling method. The sample was carefully constructed using balanced quotas (stratified by region of the state) based on age, gender, race, ethnicity and political affiliation. Based on the sample size, the results are reported with a 95% confidence level and a margin of error +/- 4.