

Say NO to Nanny!



Treating Adults Like Children

NANNY STATE OF THE NATION



The generation game

Banning the legal sale of tobacco to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009, will:

- infantilise future generations of adults
- create a two-tier society in which some adults can buy tobacco and others can't
- fuel illicit trade in tobacco products
- extend the nanny state into previously uncharted territory

In addition, we will quite quickly face the absurd situation whereby a 30-year-old will be allowed to legally buy tobacco, but his 29-year-old friend or sibling will not.

Let's be clear: the health risks of smoking are very well-known. If adults of any age choose to smoke tobacco that is a matter for them, not politicians or anti-smoking campaigners, however well-intentioned.

When our children reach the age of 18 they are legally adults, and while, as parents, we continue to care about their health, it is ultimately their choice, not ours, how they live their lives and what risks they are willing to take with their own health. As parents we must respect that. The idea that we should dictate our children's lifestyle long after they have grown up is preposterous.

If you are old enough to vote, drive a car, join the army, purchase alcohol and possess a credit card at 18, you are old enough to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products. In the eyes of the law you are legally an adult at 18 and you should be treated like one.

Creeping prohibition and illicit trade

A generational ban on the sale of tobacco is out of all proportion to the scale of the 'problem'. Smoking rates are currently at their lowest since records began, with an increasing number of smokers switching voluntarily to reduced risk products, including e-cigarettes and nicotine pouches, without the need for government intervention or coercion.

For the relatively small number of young people who are still tempted to smoke, outlawing the sale of tobacco to future generations of adults won't stop them. Creeping prohibition will simply drive the sale of tobacco underground, by-passing legitimate retailers and benefitting criminals who don't ask for proof of age when they sell tobacco on the black market.

Far from protecting younger consumers, raising the age of sale will expose many more to illicit and counterfeit tobacco. The biggest benefactor won't be public health but organised crime.

The unsuccessful war on illegal drugs should be enough to warn any government that banning a product doesn't stop people buying, consuming, or supplying it. Legitimate retailers are simply replaced by criminal gangs and other illicit traders.

What we are witnessing is a war not on criminality but on choice and individual freedom. Wouldn't it be ironic if a policy designed to stop young people smoking tobacco ends up making both the product, and the habit, more not less attractive?

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Smoking in outdoor public places

The workplace smoking ban was introduced with the aim of 'protecting' non-smokers from the harm allegedly caused by environmental tobacco smoke. There was never any question however that the workplace legislation should include outdoor areas because no-one, including the anti-smoking industry, seriously believed that smoking in the open air posed a significant risk to the health of non-smokers.

Although the government is reported to have dropped plans to ban smoking outside pubs and other hospitality venues, we share the concerns of the British Beer and Pub Association that the Tobacco and Vapes Bill 'does not specifically exclude the option for the Secretary of State to designate pub gardens, pavements and other spaces used by pubs as smoking-free and vaping-free'.

Smoking outside pubs, cafes, and restaurants is a matter for the owner and the policy should be based on what works best for the business. Further restrictions on smoking could have a significant impact on venues that are already struggling, leading to the loss of even more jobs in the hospitality sector.

We also believe that banning smoking on hospital grounds is fundamentally wrong, and even cruel. In particular, it's outrageous to threaten potentially vulnerable people with fines and other penalties when their only 'crime' is to smoke a cigarette in the open air – a cigarette, furthermore, that may offer a small crumb of comfort when they may be at their lowest ebb.

Denying smokers the opportunity to have a comforting cigarette when they might be at a low ebb is a pathetic, mean-spirited thing to do.

Health inequalities and mental health

It has become common to talk about mental health and health inequalities in relation to smoking. Public health campaigners often associate the latter with a poor choice of lifestyle. Alcohol and obesity are also mentioned in this context and there seems to be an unchallenged consensus that tackling all three should be part of the levelling up process. We see it differently. Reducing smoking rates by forcing people to quit isn't levelling up, it's dumbing down because it treats smokers as if they are stupid or uneducated for smoking in the first place.

Instead of insulting people's intelligence and curtailing their freedoms with further restrictions on the sale of tobacco or where you can light up, government should focus less on 'helping' people stop smoking and more on creating the conditions for them to make 'healthier' choices for themselves (not have 'healthier' choices imposed on them) because it's clear that while many people smoke for pleasure, many also smoke to relieve the stresses that may be caused by their circumstances or their environment.

Instead of punishing adults who smoke with punitive measures designed to force them to quit a habit many enjoy or take comfort from, government should focus on the underlying reasons why a greater proportion of people from lower socio-economic backgrounds become smokers in the first place.

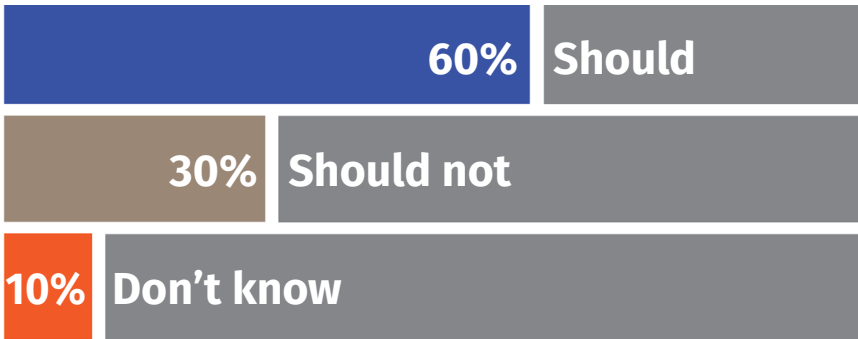


What the public thinks

Public opinion is clear and consistent. Recent polls conducted for Forest by Yonder Consulting asked:

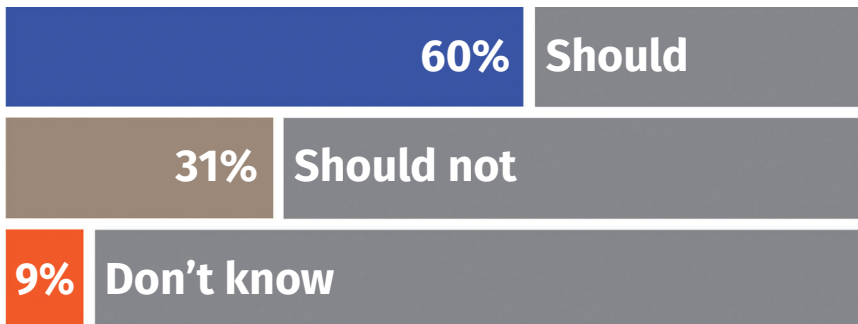
In the UK the age at which you are legally an adult is 18. At that age a person can vote, drive a car, join the army, buy alcohol, and possess a credit card. Do you think that when a person is legally an adult they should or should not also be allowed to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products?

January 2025



Source: Yonder Consulting
Sample: 2,009 adults, GB
Fieldwork: 10-12 January 2025

October 2024

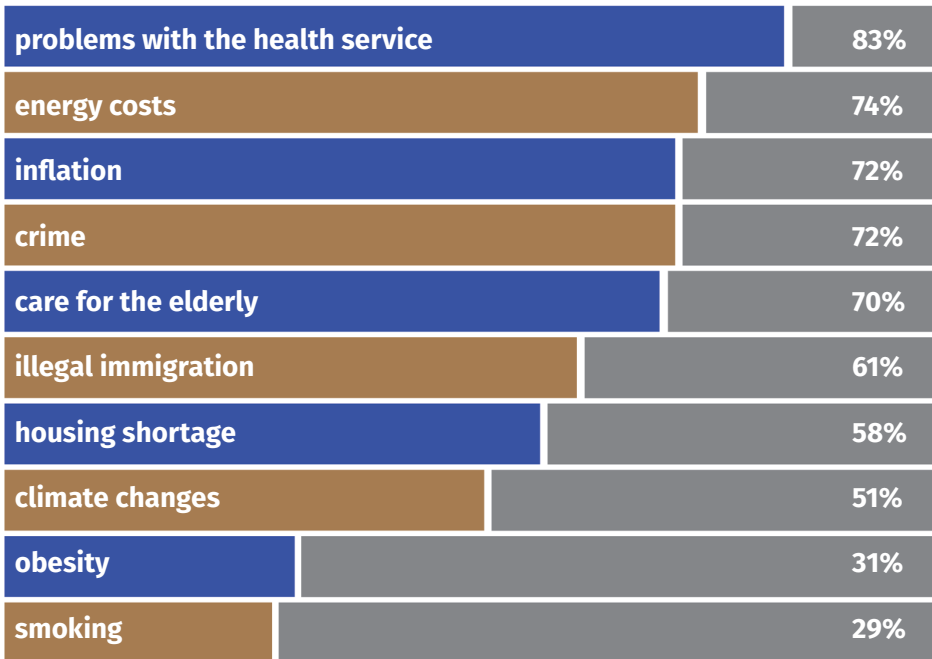


Source: Yonder Consulting
Sample: 2,019 adults, GB
Fieldwork: 16-17 October 2024

Should tackling smoking be a top priority for government?

In another poll conducted by Yonder, respondents were asked to rate ten domestic issues according to how important or not important they are. Fewer than a third (29%) think it's very important that government tackles smoking, compared to tackling problems with the health service (83%), energy costs (74%), inflation (72%), crime (72%), and care for the elderly (70%). Full list:

Thinking about domestic government priorities, how very important do you think it is that the government tackles ...



Source: Yonder Consulting
Sample: 2,067 adults, GB
Fieldwork: 13-14 January 2025

Nanny doesn't always know best

"The Tobacco and Vapes Bill will ban the sale of tobacco to anyone born on or after January 1, 2009, infantilising future generations of adults. Shame on the prime minister and his equally priggish predecessor.

"If we continue on this righteous path to 'good' health we risk creating a society in which, one by one, personal freedoms we once took for granted will be slowly erased on the altar of public health."

Simon Clark
Director, Forest



How it started



How it's going



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