

Public support for a smokefree society.



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ash.
action on smoking and health

Summary

As the Tobacco and Vapes Bill nears the end of its journey through Parliament, new data on public attitudes in England reveal widespread support for further Government action to deliver a smokefree society.

- 68% support the Smokefree Generation measure in the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, which will permanently prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone born in 2009 or later. Only 13% oppose it. Support is strong across all groups of voters.
- Among smokers, 52% support the Smokefree Generation proposal compared to 24% who oppose it. Smokers recognise the harms of smoking and want to protect young people from these harms.
- 65% support the goal to make Britain a country where no one smokes (15% oppose). This support holds across society, ranging from 55% in the most deprived areas to 71% in the least deprived areas.
- Only among smokers is there more opposition to the smokefree society goal (39%) than support (35%). However, this varies depending on their desire to quit smoking. Among the 39% of smokers who plan to stop smoking, 48% support the goal of a smokefree society and 25% oppose.
- Despite the extensive media coverage of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, and the introduction of legislation that will make the UK the first country to introduce a generational smoking ban, 45% of surveyed adults feel that the Government is not doing enough to limit smoking, with 31% saying that what they are doing is about right. Only 10% feel that the Government is doing too much.
- Public support for Government action to limit smoking has risen over the last 16 years. Major changes to how tobacco is sold, including plain packaging and the removal of product displays, have only increased public enthusiasm for more action.
- The public support new regulatory measures for tobacco products and vapes including licensing the sale of tobacco products (86% support), printing health warnings on cigarette sticks (68%), and banning the names of sweets, cartoons and bright colours on the packaging of vapes (78%).
- The public also support new restrictions to protect people from secondhand tobacco smoke, including banning smoking in outdoor seating areas of pubs and restaurants (59% support), children's play areas (91%), public transport waiting areas (77%) and parks (56%).
- 75% support the proposal to make tobacco manufacturers pay a levy to Government for measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking. Only 7% oppose this measure.
- Smokers' support for new measures to reduce the harm of smoking has grown over time.

Introduction

A smokefree society is no longer an impossible dream. We may not get there by 2030 – the ambition of a previous government – but the goal is within reach. The Tobacco and Vapes Bill is a major step towards this goal, especially in creating the conditions for a ‘Smokefree Generation,’ but many more steps must follow. Stopping people from starting smoking must go hand in hand with renewed efforts both to support existing smokers to quit and to reduce the harm of tobacco.

This report presents a snapshot of public attitudes towards Government policy on smoking including the Smokefree Generation. It makes plain the extent of public support for a smokefree society and the enthusiasm of the public for further Government action to get us there.

The findings in this report are drawn from a national survey conducted by YouGov for ASH in February and March 2025. The survey was conducted online with 11,103 adults (18+) and data were weighted to provide a representative sample of the adult population in England.

There are also quotes in this report from focus groups with smokers and recent smokers conducted by Bluegrass in September 2024. ASH recognises that we will only make progress towards a smokefree society by listening to smokers and providing the best possible support and medications to enable smokers across society to quit.

Public support for the Smokefree Generation and a smokefree society

The heart of the Tobacco and Vapes Bill is the measure to prohibit the sale of tobacco products to anyone born in 2009 or later. In time, this will create a ‘smokefree generation’ of people who can never legally be sold cigarettes and tobacco.

There is wide public support for the Smokefree Generation proposal: 68% of survey respondents supported it compared to only 13% who opposed it. Even among smokers, there is majority support for the proposal, with 52% expressing support and only 24% opposing.

This support holds across society in England, regardless of age, socio-economic status or political views (Figure 1). The lowest level of support was among Reform voters, but even in this group support for the policy far outweighed opposition (50% vs. 29%).

Figure 1. **Support for the Smokefree Generation by age, social grade and 2024 election vote* (YouGov)**



Survey respondents also supported the goal 'to make Britain a country where no one smokes,' with 65% expressing support and only 15% opposing. Once again, the level of support across English society is striking. For example:

- In the 10% most deprived areas of England, where smoking prevalence is highest, 55% supported the smokefree goal compared to only 19% who opposed it. In the 10% least deprived areas, 71% supported the smokefree goal and 13% opposed it.
- There was little variation by region, with the level of support for the smokefree goal ranging from 63% in the East of England to 67% in the North East.
- Support for the smokefree goal was above 60% in all ethnic groups.

Only among smokers is there a deviation from this pattern of support. Fewer (35%) supported the goal 'to make Britain a country where no one smokes', with slightly more (39%) opposing. Understandably, many smokers do not want to feel they are being forced to quit. Nonetheless, their support for the Smokefree Generation reveals their ambivalence towards their habit. Many smokers wish they had never started and do not want younger members of their families to start.

*Sample not weighted to be representative of voters.

"I do agree with everybody that it's our choice whether we want to smoke or not, but I do think for the future generations - I just think of my kids. I hope my kids never smoke; I don't want them to. I think if smoking is made a bit more difficult for them, they might not end up like me. I'm struggling, I really want to give up, I find it really hard, and I'm on and off. I just don't want that to happen to them." (Female smoker, 43)

Smokers who wanted quit were much more likely to support the smokefree goal. Among the 39% of smokers who had a plan to stop smoking, support for a smokefree country rose to nearly half (48%) and opposition fell to a quarter (25%). The benefits of a smokefree country were articulated by this recent quitter:

"If we're all living in a smoke free world, it will be a case of, well, there wouldn't be that temptation there would there? I'd really like it to have as it would massively help everyone, especially people like me who have quit or who are trying to quit." (Recent quitter, female, 42, medium smoker [now quit], North)

Those who had stopped smoking recently also struggled to see what the downsides of a smokefree country would be:

"No, I really don't think there'd be negatives. The cigarette companies would say otherwise because they would be down on their profits, but from an outsider, no. It would be a cleaner environment, a healthier one, a more stable one in terms of stress. I don't really see the other side. I just see the pros." (Recent quitter, male, 24, light smoker [now quit], South)

Public support for Government action on tobacco

The Tobacco and Vapes Bill is a major step forward towards a smokefree society but there is still much to do to support existing smokers to quit and to reduce the harm of tobacco. Although smoking prevalence has declined to 11.6% in England, millions of people still smoke¹.

The public in England support more Government action to tackle smoking: in 2025, 45% felt that the Government was not doing enough to limit smoking and 31% thought that what they were doing was about right. Only 10% felt that the Government was doing too much.

Among smokers, over half felt that the Government was doing about right (36%) or not enough (20%), with only 29% saying that the Government was doing too much. Although smokers are often defensive about their smoking, they also recognise the costs to their health and to society:

"I don't know the statistics, but if everyone didn't smoke and a whole generation came through, how many NHS appointments would be saved and stuff like that? Financially, I don't know what outweighs what, like the tax that comes in from cigarettes and tobacco. I can't imagine it comes close to the amount of doctors' appointments, hospital appointments, surgeries, and all the stuff that the NHS needs to do." (Male smoker, 41)

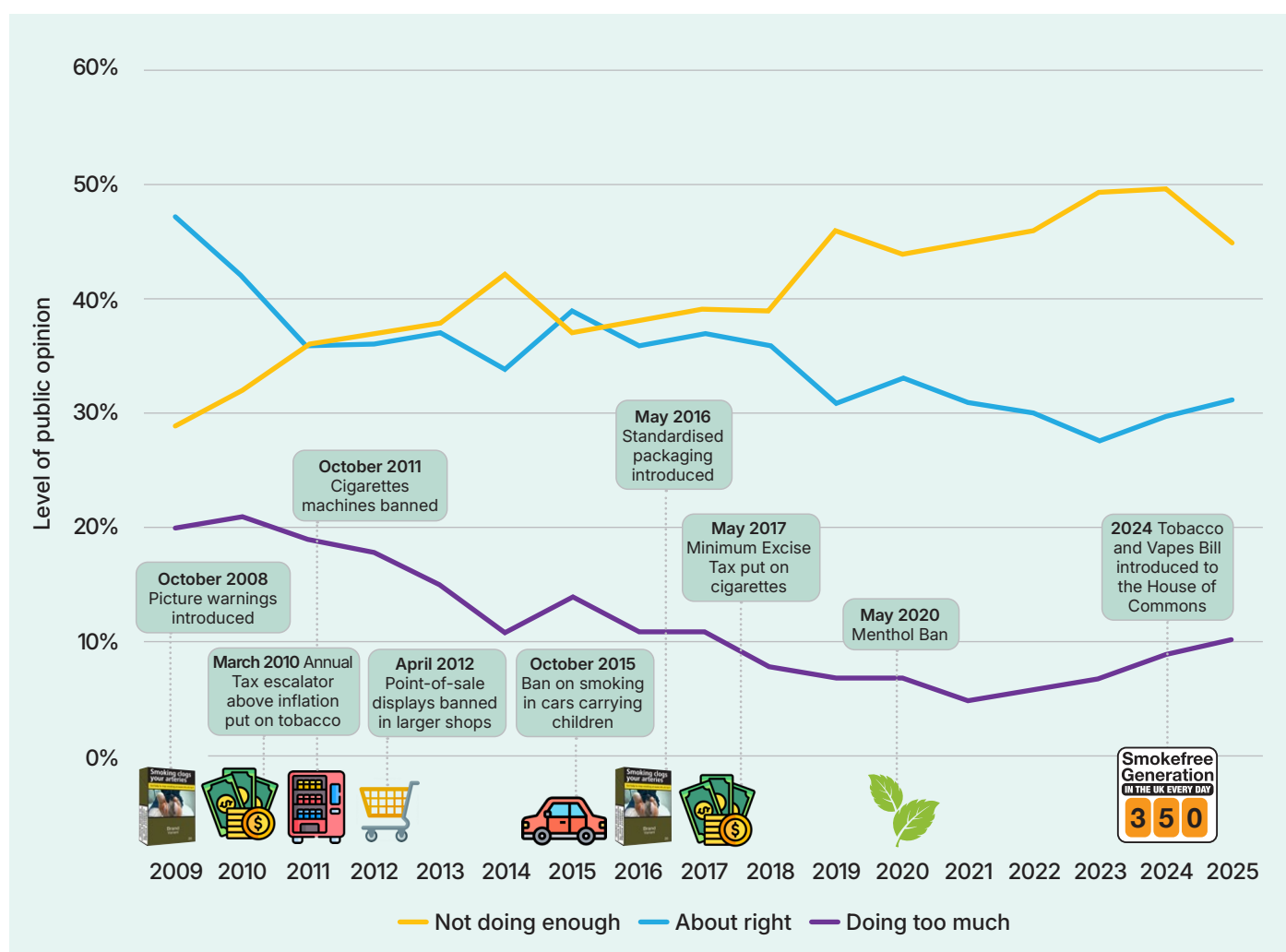
¹ Office for Health Improvement and Disparities, [Smoking profile for England, Statistical commentary, October 2024 update](#).

Over the last year, there has been a small decline in the number of people who think the Government is not doing enough to limit smoking, from 50% to 45%, which may reflect the reality that, in the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, the government is bringing forward world-leading legislation, which has attracted extensive media coverage. However, over the past two decades, major changes to the regulation of smoking have not been followed by reductions in support for Government action. On the contrary, support has grown over this period (Figure 2).

In 2007, smokefree legislation was enacted prohibiting smoking in enclosed public spaces. Then the display of tobacco products on shop counters was banned, first in supermarkets in 2013, then in all shops in 2015. Also in 2015, smoking was banned in cars carrying children. In 2016, standardised plain packaging of tobacco products was introduced, stripping the tobacco industry of its last opportunity to market its products.

This remarkable policy progress has been accompanied both by a decline in smoking and by an increase in public support for Government action. Recognising the dangers of smoking, the public have never said “job done” but have consistently pressed for more action. The same is true today.

Figure 2. **Public opinion of level of government action limit smoking, 2009-2025 (YouGov)**



Public support for new measures to reduce the harm of smoking

A range of new measures is needed to support smokers to quit, prevent the uptake of smoking and vaping among young people, and reduce the harm of tobacco. These include increasing investment in stop smoking services, tightening the regulation of tobacco products and vapes, protecting the public from tobacco smoke, and making tobacco companies pay for the harm they cause.

Table 1 describes the level of public support for new measures to strengthen the regulation of the sale of tobacco products and vapes, make these products less attractive, and reduce their environmental impact. There is overwhelming public support for these measures, even among smokers: twice as many smokers (46%) supported the proposal to print warnings on cigarette sticks as opposed it (23%). Smokers tend to support tighter regulation of the trade, recognising the harm of the illicit trade and the dangers to children and young people. Three quarters of smokers (75%) supported the introduction of licences to sell tobacco.

"I think that is quite reasonable, and it might help enforce the legal side of it, because it's this whole thing of you are not able to sell cigarettes to someone of a certain age. If you are licensed, then part of that is that you would have to more strictly conform to the sale of tobacco and who you sell it to." (Male smoker, 60)

Some felt the policy might reduce their access to tobacco, but that this could be positive:

"I'm not sure if it would be a good idea or not, but I know it would definitely have an impact. I think it would make it a bit harder to access cigarettes. For me particularly, it might be frustrating at first but long-term it could be a good thing." (Light smoker, female, 19)

Table 1. **Public support for new regulatory measures for tobacco products and vapes (YouGov)**

	Support	Oppose
Require businesses to have a valid licence to sell tobacco, which can be removed if they are caught selling to anyone underage	86%	4%
Print health warnings on cigarette sticks to encourage smokers to quit	68%	8%
Ban names of sweets, cartoons and bright colours on packaging of vapes	78%	6%
Ban advertising and promotion of vapes at the point of sale	77%	5%
Ban cigarette butts that contain plastic to protect the environment	81%	4%

Table 2 describes the level of support for new measures to protect the public from secondhand tobacco smoke by restricting where people can smoke. Despite the media controversy over the proposal to ban smoking in outdoor seating areas of restaurants, pubs and cafes, three fifths of the public (59%) support this proposal. This is not a threat to the income of pub landlords and restaurant owners: many more survey respondents (40%) said they would be more likely to visit pubs and restaurants if smoking was banned in outdoor seating areas than those who said they would be less likely to visit (19%). Smokers inevitably value these spaces (56% opposed a ban) but their presence in these spaces has consequences for non-smokers wanting to use the same spaces:

“I think pub gardens and things like that, they’re just social spaces where people are going to social smoke. I don’t think they should ban it there. I think that’s a bit silly. The bottom line is, it’s outside and you’re amongst other smokers.” (Male smoker, 44)

Although the level of support for new restrictions on smoking varies according to the proposed location of the ban, a majority of the public consistently support these proposals to reduce the harm of secondhand smoke.

Table 2. **Public support for new restrictions on where people can smoke (YouGov)**

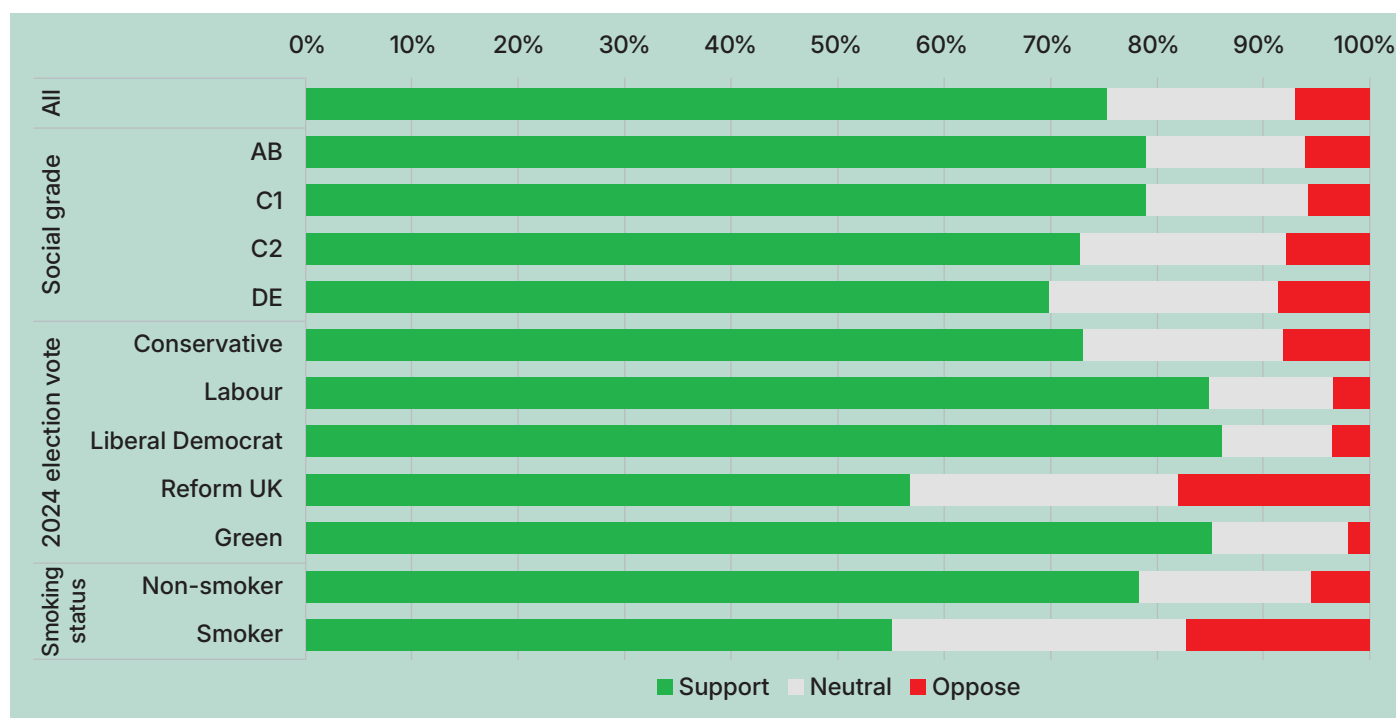
	Support	Oppose
Ban smoking in the outdoor seating areas of all restaurants, pubs and cafes	59%	21%
Ban smoking in all beaches	60%	19%
Ban smoking in all parks	56%	21%
Ban smoking in all children's play areas	91%	3%
Ban smoking on university and college grounds	67%	13%
Ban smoking on further education college grounds	72%	11%
Ban smoking in public transport waiting areas	77%	10%
Ban smoking in school grounds	91%	3%
Ban smoking in hospital grounds	79%	10%
Ban smoking in all cars	63%	17%

To achieve a smokefree future, the Government needs a sustainable funding model that will ensure that smokers from all backgrounds always have access to high quality stop smoking services and medications. This could easily be achieved by imposing a levy on the tobacco companies that make excessive profits from their harmful products. For example, Imperial Tobacco made an estimated 70% profit margin on tobacco sales in the UK in 2019 compared to an average of 15% for other household brands². A polluter pays levy would bring tobacco profits in line with other manufacturers and could raise around £700 million in the first year.

Three quarters (75%) supported the proposal to make tobacco manufacturers pay a levy to Government for measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking. Only 7% opposed this measure. There was majority support for this proposal across English society including 55% of smokers (Figure 3).

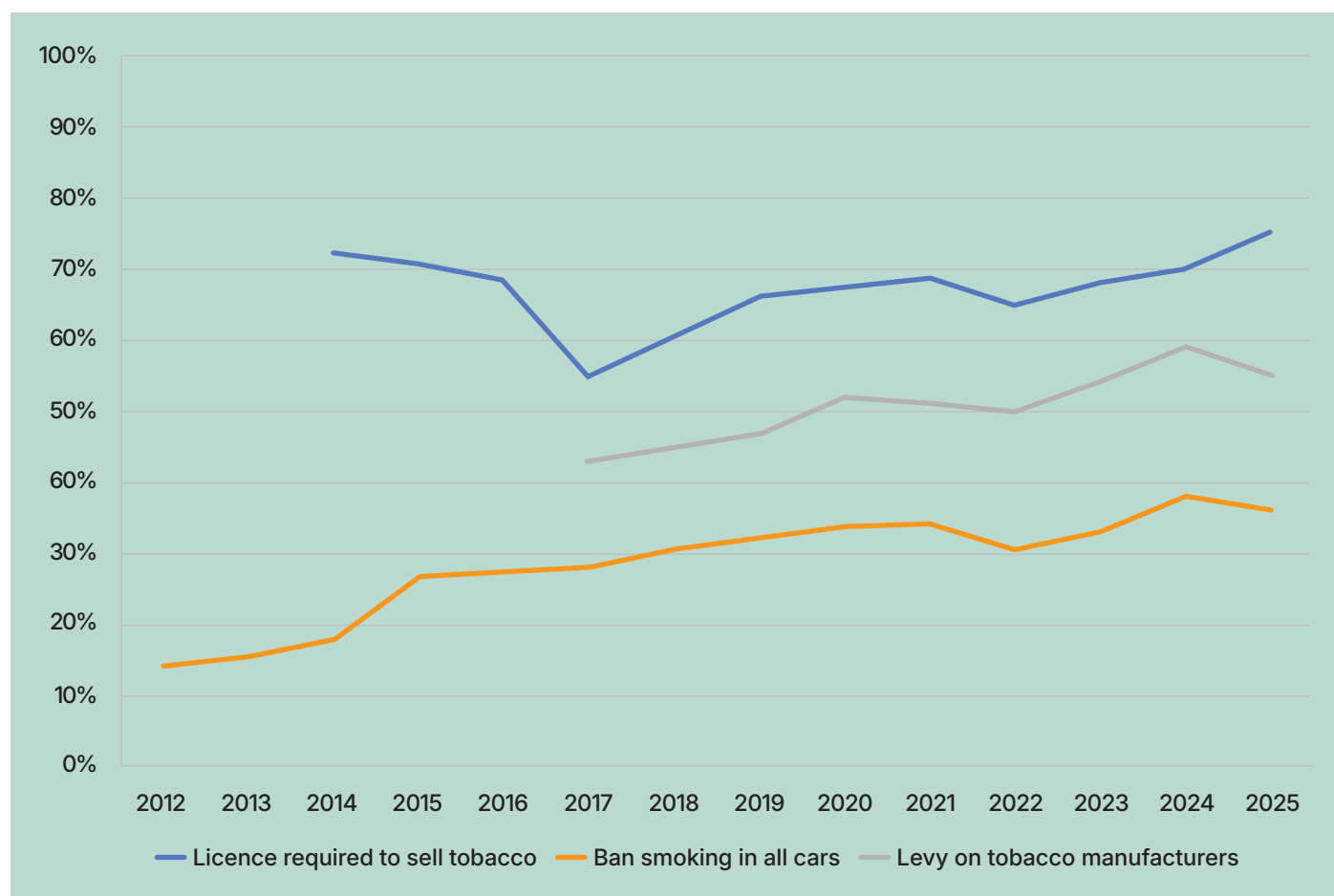
2 Branston JR. *Industry profits continue to drive the tobacco epidemic: A new endgame for tobacco control?* Tobacco Prevention & Cessation. 2021 Jun 10;7:45.

Figure 3. **Public support for proposal to make tobacco manufacturers pay a levy to Government for measures to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking (YouGov)**



Public support for new tobacco control measures does not wane as new measures are introduced. On the contrary, support grows. This is true for smokers as well as non-smokers. Figure 4 describes the trend over time in smokers' support for three of the measures described above: requiring businesses to have a valid licence to sell tobacco which can be removed if they are caught selling to anyone underage, banning smoking in all cars, and making tobacco manufacturers pay a levy to Government for measure to help smokers quit and prevent young people from taking up smoking. There is a clear upwards trend, demonstrating the growing acceptance by smokers of the dangers of their habit and the importance of reducing smoking in society.

Figure 4. **Trend in smokers' support for three proposed new measures (YouGov)**



Conclusion

The findings in this report are from a large, representative sample of the adult population of England. They are consistent with other recent polling by IPPR that found 61% support for extending smoking bans to more public spaces .

The evidence is overwhelming: the great majority of the public in England want to live in a smokefree society and support new Government action to get us there. The All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health has set out a roadmap to a smokefree country . As the Tobacco and Vapes Bill passes into law, the Government must seize the opportunity to build on this success and set out its own roadmap to a future free from the harms of tobacco.

3 IPPR. *The Health Mandate, The voters' verdict on government intervention*, April 2025

4 All Party Parliamentary Group on Smoking and Health, *A Roadmap to a Smokefree Country, No one starts, everyone stops, no profit in tobacco*, April 2025.



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Reference: Office for National Statistics (ONS), released 1 October 2024, ONS website, statistical bulletin, *Adult smoking habits in the UK: 2023*