

Say NO to Nanny!



The Generational Tobacco Ban

NANNY STATE OF THE NATION



Stop treating adults like children

In April 2023 the then health minister Neil O'Brien declared that raising the age of sale of tobacco was "too big a departure" and the Government wasn't going to pursue it. So imagine our surprise when, six months later, in a remarkable u-turn, prime minister Rishi Sunak announced plans to ban the sale of tobacco to all future generations of adults.

To be clear, a generational smoking ban 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

The policy also marks an extraordinary departure from traditional Conservative values. What does it say, for example, about the principles of choice and personal responsibility that the party has traditionally advocated, or the fact that to get the legislation through parliament it may need the support of Labour MPs who are being whipped to back it?

Prior to a general election in 2024, the Conservative Party has an opportunity to highlight a major difference between it and an interventionist Labour Party. Instead a Conservative prime minister has decided to embrace a policy first adopted by a Labour government in New Zealand, which is now being repealed by the new centre-right coalition government. You couldn't make it up.

Creeping prohibition and illicit trade

The health risks of smoking are well known but it remains a legitimate habit that millions of adults enjoy. Despite that, a Conservative prime minister has chosen to introduce a policy that his immediate predecessor calls “profoundly unconservative”.

In response, Rishi Sunak says, “I don’t think there’s anything unconservative about caring for our children’s health.” He’s right, but he misses the point. The generational ban is not about children because they are already protected, as much as they can be, by the current age restriction on the sale of tobacco.

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

Furthermore, denying future generations of adults the right to legally purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products won’t stop those who want to smoke. Creeping prohibition will simply drive the sale of tobacco underground and into the hands of criminals. It may even make smoking tobacco cool again.

Meanwhile, within 15 years, we will 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 be prohibited, which begs the question: has the prime minister actually thought this through?

If you’re old enough to vote, drive a car, join the army, purchase alcohol, and possess a credit card, you’re old enough to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products.

What the public really thinks

A recent poll found that almost two thirds of adults in Britain think anyone aged 18 or more SHOULD be allowed to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products.

The survey, conducted for Forest by Yonder Consulting on 24-25 January 2024, found that 64% of respondents think that if a person can vote, drive a car, join the army, buy alcohol, and possess a credit card at 18, they should also be allowed to purchase tobacco.

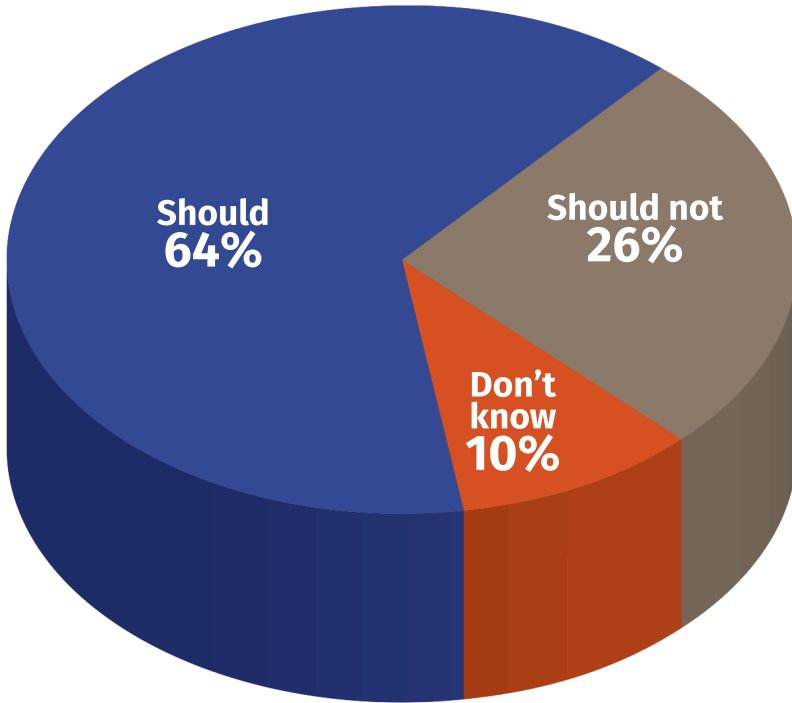
Only a quarter (26%) said they should not be allowed to purchase tobacco products when they are legally an adult at 18, while 10% said 'don't know'.

In a second poll conducted by Yonder for Forest in January 2024, respondents were asked to prioritise a list of ten domestic issues. Improving the health service was the most important priority, followed by tackling crime, and tackling inflation. Other top priorities were tackling illegal immigration, addressing care for the elderly, tackling climate change, tackling the housing shortage, and reforming and improving the education system. Tackling smoking and tackling obesity were bottom of the list.

Given all the problems facing the country, at home and abroad, it beggars belief that a Conservative prime minister has chosen to prioritise raising the age of sale of tobacco (and banning disposable vapes).

A creeping ban on the sale of tobacco will infantilise future generations of adults and create an absurd two-tier society in which some adults can legally purchase tobacco, and others can't.

Do you think that when a person is legally an adult at 18 they should or should not be allowed to purchase cigarettes and other tobacco products?



Source: Yonder Consulting
Sample: 2,000 adults, GB
Fieldwork: 24-25 January 2024



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