Outpouring of public support for wider smokefree area policies in New Zealand

Background—New information on public support for new smokefree policies in New Zealand comes from a very large (n=20,792) poll of public opinion. The poll was run on the Stuff website below an article on possible differences between political parties (National and Maori parties), about the nature of the Government’s Smokefree 2025 policy. The article was headed Total smoking ban too difficult – Key.\(^1\)

The poll took one aspect of the ending of tobacco use, smokefree areas. The question asked was: Where should smoking be banned? Six options were provided (only one could be selected). Comments could be made below the article in the Stuff website.

Poll results—As of 26 July 2012 at 12.15 pm, the results (out of n=20,792 votes) were:

- ‘Everywhere’ (i.e., ban everywhere): 8362 votes (40.2%)
- ‘In all public places’: 6838 votes (32.9%)
- ‘Outside bars and offices’: 465 votes (2.2%)
- ‘In cars’: 307 (1.5%)
- ‘In homes with children’ 1552 votes (7.5%) and
- ‘Nowhere’: 3268 votes (15.7%)

In addition, 144 comments were added by viewers below the article in the 29-hour period from 8.40 am 23 July, to 1.47 pm, 24 July, 2012 (the discussion thread appears to have been closed off then).

Discussion—The voters in an online poll such as this are a highly self-selected group. The respondents were by definition limited to those who: (i) have Internet access; (ii) accessed this particular online news source (Stuff); (iii) were interested in the particular article headline enough to at least glance at the article; and then (iv) were motivated enough to click the online voting mechanism.

However, over 20,000 people were motivated to give their view of the single smokefree situation they would most like. One interpretation of the results is that when provided with these six options, 15,200 people (73%) indicated that they wanted either no smoking anywhere, or no smoking in public places (with an extra 11% wanting smokefree cars, sidewalks or homes with children).

There is some other evidence for this level of support for change from New Zealand surveys of the public that were designed with proper scientific rigour. In a 2010 nationally representative survey, 76% (54% of smokers) agreed that ‘smoking should be banned in all outdoor public places where children are likely to go’.\(^2\) In four other such national surveys between 2008 and 2010, between 43 and 57% of respondents...
have agreed with the statement that: ‘cigarettes and tobacco should not be sold in New Zealand in ten years time.’

Majority support for some new smokefree areas also comes from surveys only of smokers. These areas include cars with pre-school children, anywhere in outdoor eating areas, at council-owned playgrounds, and within 5 metres of entrances to public buildings.

Collectively, this picture suggests that both central government and local governments would be supported by most New Zealanders in doing more to develop smokefree areas in their jurisdictions.

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References:


