

News Release

For immediate use: Tuesday, June 22, 2010

UNC poll: Growing support in North Carolina to increase state's tobacco tax

CHAPEL HILL – Raising taxes typically is not a popular idea, but the option of increasing cigarette sales tax has been gaining momentum in North Carolina for the past several years. Statewide polls since 2004 have shown a majority of North Carolinians support increasing the sales tax on cigarettes as a means of generating state revenue, especially when the funds are used to support public health programs and to decrease teen smoking rates.

Now, the latest poll conducted by the Survey Research Unit at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill's Gillings School of Global Public Health suggests that nearly half (47.3 percent) of the state's residents favor increasing the tax on a pack of cigarettes from the current 45 cents to the national average of \$1.34.

That level of tax is believed to be the highest ever polled and supported in public opinion surveys in a state that historically has one of the lowest tax rates on tobacco. Majority support was found among nonsmokers (60.3 percent vs. 7.2 percent of smokers), people in higher income brackets (59.3 percent vs. 42.3 percent of residents with annual incomes below \$50,000) and individuals with some post-secondary education (57.9 percent vs. 34.7 percent of people with no formal education beyond high school). Among registered voters, 50 percent supported the tax increase, rising to 51.2 percent among people likely to vote in state and local elections.

The poll also showed that 49.3 percent of adults in the state opposed increasing the cigarette tax to \$1.34 (with 3.4 percent undecided).

The poll was conducted March 9 to April 8, 2010, by the Survey Research Unit, part of the UNC Biostatistics Department. A random sample of telephone numbers, stratified by region and income levels, was used to interview 700 North Carolina adults. The margin of error for the main questions in the poll was approximately plus or minus 5 percent.

The poll also found that 62.4 percent of adults supported a tax increase on other tobacco products, including chewing tobacco, snuff, cigars and loose tobacco, which already are taxed at a lower rate than cigarettes (36.5 percent opposed raising that tax). Like the cigarette tax issue, support was highest among nonsmokers (72 percent vs. smokers 33.7 percent), people with higher incomes (73.5 percent vs. lower incomes 58.4 percent), individuals with some college education (72.4 percent vs. lower education 50.9 percent) and women (69.7 percent vs. men 54.9 percent).

“Other studies have shown that raising the price of tobacco products will reduce their use,” said Robert Agans, Ph.D., the study director at the Survey Research Unit. “We conducted this poll to provide more information to decision-makers about support of North Carolinians for these policy interventions – including tax increases.”

Other surveys that have shown support for increasing the sales tax on cigarettes include Elon University polls conducted in April 2004, February 2005 and February 2009, and by the N.C. Alliance for Health in June 2009.

For more information about the Survey Research Unit and details on this poll , visit <http://sru.sph.unc.edu/>.

For more information about interventions to help prevent and reduce tobacco use, see “The Guide to Community Preventive Services,” supported by the CDC, at www.thecommunityguide.org and “Clinical Practice Guideline: Treating Tobacco Use and Dependence” at http://www.surgeongeneral.gov/tobacco/treating_tobacco_use08.pdf.

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TARHEEL HEALTH POLL
Attitudes and Perceptions on Tobacco Issues

Table 1. Do you support or oppose legislation that would increase the North Carolina cigarette tax to \$1.34 per pack?							
Respondent Demographics	Total Respondents	Support		Oppose		Don't Know	
		Estimated %	CI(95%)*	Estimated %	CI(95%)*	Estimated %	CI(95%)*
Total	682	47.3	(42.6-51.9)	49.3	(44.7-54.0)	3.4	(2.2-5.3)
Gender							
Male	269	44.3	(37.4-51.4)	53.5	(46.4-60.5)	2.2	(0.8-5.6)
Female	412	50.1	(44.1-56.2)	45.4	(39.4-51.4)	4.5	(2.7-7.4)
Race							
White	526	47.9	(42.5-53.3)	48.8	(43.4-54.2)	3.4	(2.0-5.6)
Nonwhite	155	45.6	(36.7-54.8)	50.9	(41.8-59.9)	3.5	(1.3-8.8)
Education							
High School or Less	262	34.7	(28.2-41.8)	63.1	(56.0-69.7)	2.2	(1.0-4.6)
Some Post HS and Above	416	57.9	(51.7-63.9)	38.1	(32.2-44.3)	4.0	(2.2-7.2)
Household Income							
Less than \$50,000 per year	385	42.2	(36.1-48.6)	54.2	(47.9-60.5)	3.6	(2.0-6.4)
Greater than \$50,000 per year	231	59.3	(51.5-66.7)	37.2	(30.0-45.0)	3.5	(1.5-7.8)
Registered Voter							
Yes	607	50.0	(45.0-55.0)	46.4	(41.4-51.4)	3.6	(2.3-5.8)
No	75	30.5	(19.5-44.4)	67.6	(53.8-78.9)	1.9	(0.4-8.9)
Voting History							
Likely to Vote in state or local elections	559	51.2	(46.1-56.4)	45.2	(40.1-50.4)	3.6	(2.1-5.9)
Unlikely to Vote in state or local elections	123	34.2	(24.8-45.1)	62.9	(52.1-72.6)	2.8	(1.0-7.9)
Smoker							
Yes	145	7.2	(3.9-13.1)	91.7	(85.4-95.4)	1.1	(0.1-7.2)
No	537	60.3	(55.1-65.3)	35.5	(30.7-40.7)	4.2	(2.6-6.6)

* Interpretation of CI(95%): We are 95% certain that the actual % for all adults of this type is somewhere between the lower and upper values in the indicated range.

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Table 2. In North Carolina, other tobacco products, such as snuff, chewing tobacco, cigars, and loose tobacco are taxed at a much lower rate than cigarettes. Would you support or oppose taxing these products at a higher rate?

Respondent Demographics	Total Respondents	Support		Oppose		Don't Know	
		Estimated %	CI(95%)*	Estimated %	CI(95%)*	Estimated %	CI(95%)*
Total	652	62.4	(57.6-66.9)	36.5	(32.0-41.2)	1.1	(0.5-2.9)
Gender							
Male	263	54.9	(47.6-62.0)	44.0	(37.0-51.3)	1.1	(0.2-6.2)
Female	388	69.7	(63.7-75.1)	29.2	(23.9-35.2)	1.1	(0.5-2.5)
Race							
White	502	64.5	(58.9-69.7)	34.8	(29.6-40.3)	0.7	(0.3-1.7)
Nonwhite	149	56.9	(47.4-65.8)	41.1	(32.3-50.5)	2.1	(0.4-10.7)
Education							
High School or Less	252	50.9	(43.7-58.2)	47.3	(40.1-54.6)	1.8	(0.5-6.1)
Some Post HS and Above	397	72.4	(66.1-77.9)	27.1	(21.6-33.4)	0.5	(0.2-1.8)
Household Income							
Less than \$50,000 per year	366	58.4	(51.9-64.7)	40.8	(34.6-47.3)	0.8	(0.3-1.9)
Greater than \$50,000 per year	223	73.5	(65.9-79.9)	26.0	(19.6-33.5)	0.5	(0.1-2.5)
Registered Voter							
Yes	579	64.1	(59.1-68.9)	34.7	(29.9-39.7)	1.2	(0.4-3.3)
No	73	52.0	(38.4-65.2)	47.2	(34.0-60.8)	0.8	(0.2-3.2)
Voting History							
Likely to Vote in state or local elections	533	65.5	(60.2-70.3)	33.9	(29.1-39.1)	0.6	(0.2-1.6)
Unlikely to Vote in state or local elections	119	52.5	(41.6-63.1)	44.7	(34.3-55.7)	2.8	(0.7-11.3)
Smoker							
Yes	143	33.7	(24.9-43.8)	64.1	(53.9-73.2)	2.2	(0.4-11.4)
No	509	72.0	(66.9-76.6)	27.2	(22.6-32.3)	0.8	(0.4-1.7)

* Interpretation of CI(95%): We are 95% certain that the actual % for all adults of this type is somewhere between the lower and upper values in the indicated range.