

Do Russians Oppose Anti-Tobacco Policy?

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Russia is known as a persistent leader in terms of high adult mortality rates among the middle income countries. Unhealthy lifestyle, smoking and excessive alcohol consumption have been confirmed as major causes of the high mortality rates in Russia. Each of these causes are estimated to cost about 10 years of life. While alcoholism receives some attention in public debate (though not that much in policy decisions), the dangers of smoking are often downplayed. This is in a country where 60% of males and 22% of females smoke, cigarettes are very cheap (about 60 euro cents per pack), and smoking prevalence among teenagers is very high: almost 25% of those in the 15-18 age group smoke.

The tobacco industry lobby has used the threat of potential protests by the Russian public as an argument against policies to fight smoking. The New Economic School and Quirk Global Strategies conducted a survey of 1200 adults in December 2010 in order to gauge attitudes of the Russian public towards a national policy for reducing tobacco use. The fieldwork was conducted by Moscow-based ROMIR in 93 urban and rural settlements across the country.

Russians believe that smoking is harmful and that tobacco use is a serious problem

The vast majority of Russians (95%) believe that smoking cigarettes is harmful (72%, including a majority of smokers, say that it is very harmful)¹. In addition, nearly seven out of ten Russians think that smoking and tobacco use is a “very serious” problem in the country.

¹ The margin of error for the sample as a whole is +/- 2.8% at 95% level of confidence. The margin of error for subgroups is higher and varies.

Russians Support the Idea of a National Tobacco Policy to Help Reduce Tobacco Use

The government recently announced a national tobacco control policy. This policy is intended to reduce tobacco use in Russia. In general, do you support or oppose a national tobacco control policy to help reduce tobacco use in the country?

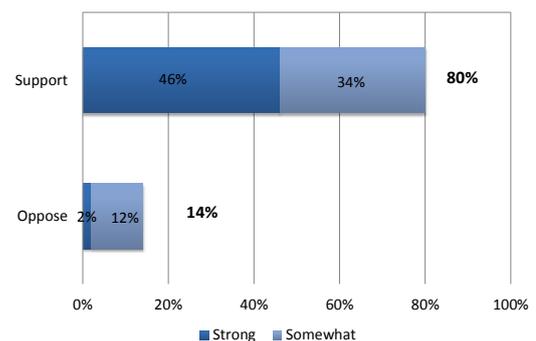


Figure 1. Attitudes towards a national policy to reduce tobacco use.

Eight in ten Russians (80%) support a national tobacco control policy to help reduce tobacco use in the country (see Figure 1). The policy has support across Russia’s demographic and geographic spectrum. Even nearly two-thirds of regular smokers (63%) support a national policy to help reduce tobacco use. Overall, just 14% of Russians oppose the idea.

Increasing the price of tobacco products and tobacco taxes

Most Russians believe that the price of a pack of cigarettes is either about right (40%) or too low (31%). Very few (16%) think that the price of cigarettes is too high. Even among regular smokers, just 20% view the current cost of cigarettes as too high, which is nearly identical to the number of regular smokers who think that cigarettes are too cheap (19%).

There is support for the idea of increasing the price of tobacco products, including raising tax on tobacco, as part of an effort to reduce tobacco use in the country (Figure 2). It was found that 70% of Russians support price increases, and 41% strongly support such increases. The share of respondents who oppose increasing the price of tobacco products is 27%, and very few (7%) are in strong opposition.

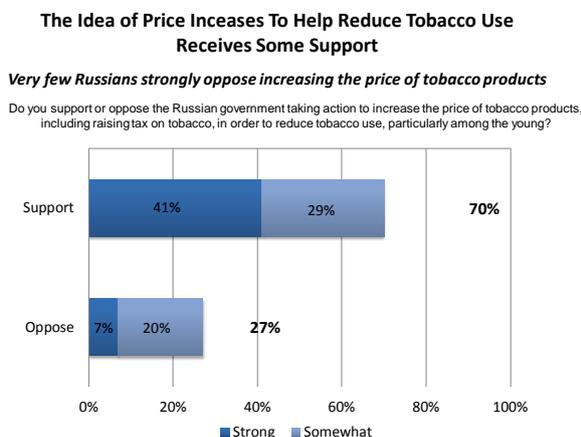


Figure 2. Attitudes towards a price increase.

There is majority support for higher prices for cigarettes in every region of the country, although the level of support varies. The strongest level is in the Southern region (82%), while the Volga (61%) and Ural regions (66%) are less supportive. A slight majority of regular smokers opposes raising prices for

cigarettes (51% against 47% in favor), including tobacco tax increases. However, nearly two-thirds (65%) of the occasional smokers, support the idea.

A majority (54%) of Russians believe that smoking rates will stay the same and 24% believe that smoking rates will decrease after the modest tax increase announced by the Russian Ministry of Health goes into effect. However, a plurality (44%) believes that smoking rates would decrease if cigarette prices tripled to approximately 75-100 rubles per pack.

If the Russian Government did decide to increase the price of tobacco products to approximately 75-100 rubles per pack, fewer than one in ten Russians (9%) would be *very* displeased (a total of 28% indicate that they would be displeased). Indeed, a plurality (38%) of Russians would be pleased with such a significant price increase for cigarettes and another 27% would be apathetic.

Russians support other specific policies to reduce tobacco use

Strong majorities in Russia favor other specific policies to help address tobacco use in the country. These policies include a ban on tobacco advertising (86%), funding tobacco prevention programs (85%), stronger health warnings on cigarette packs (81%), and prohibiting smoking entirely in public places and workplaces, including restaurants and bars (82%).

The latter result is reinforced by the finding that 72% of Russians view the rights of customers and employees to breathe clean air in restaurants and bars as more important than the rights of smokers to smoke and business owners to allow smoking (see Figure 3). Even 53% of regular smokers think the same. It was found that 24% of Russians consider the rights

of smokers to smoke and business owners to allow smoking in restaurants and bars as more important.

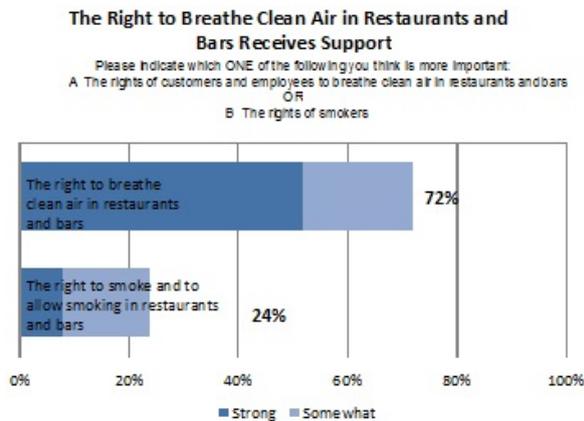


Figure 3. Attitudes towards the right to breathe clean air and the right to smoke in restaurants and bars.

To sum up, the vast majority of Russians think that tobacco use is a serious problem in the country. Accordingly, there is a high level of support for a national policy to reduce tobacco use in Russia. In addition, there is support for the idea of increasing the price of tobacco products, including raising tax on tobacco, as part of an effort to reduce tobacco use in the country.

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Denisova received a Ph.D. degree from Manchester University in the U.K. after she had finished Post-Graduate Program in Economics at the Central Institute of Economics and Mathematics (CEMI), Russian Academy of Sciences (1987 -1990) and had graduated from the Department of Economics at Moscow State University named after Lomonosov (Diploma with Distinction in Economics) in 1987.