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Nationwide public opinion survey on increasing tobacco tax

Press release to report survey results – 29.09.2021

The overwhelming majority of Sri Lankan people – 89.3% - say they would support the government raising tobacco taxes in the upcoming budget to boost government revenue.

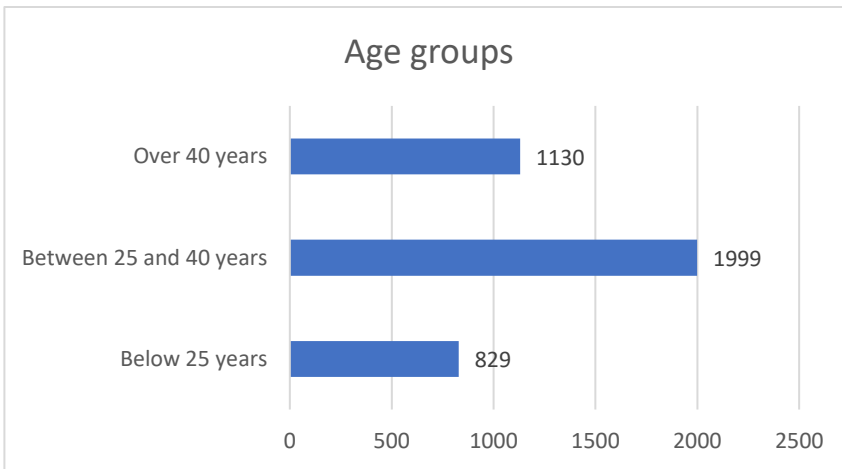
The Alcohol and Drug Information Centre conducted a survey to determine the public opinion regarding increasing tobacco tax through the 2022 budget.

This survey was conducted in all 331 divisional secretariat areas in the 25 districts of Sri Lanka from the 15th to 25th of September 2021.

The sample was selected based on the adult population who were over 20 years of age in each district. Accordingly, information was collected from a sample of 3958 people. The sample represented males, females, different jobs, and various social strata.

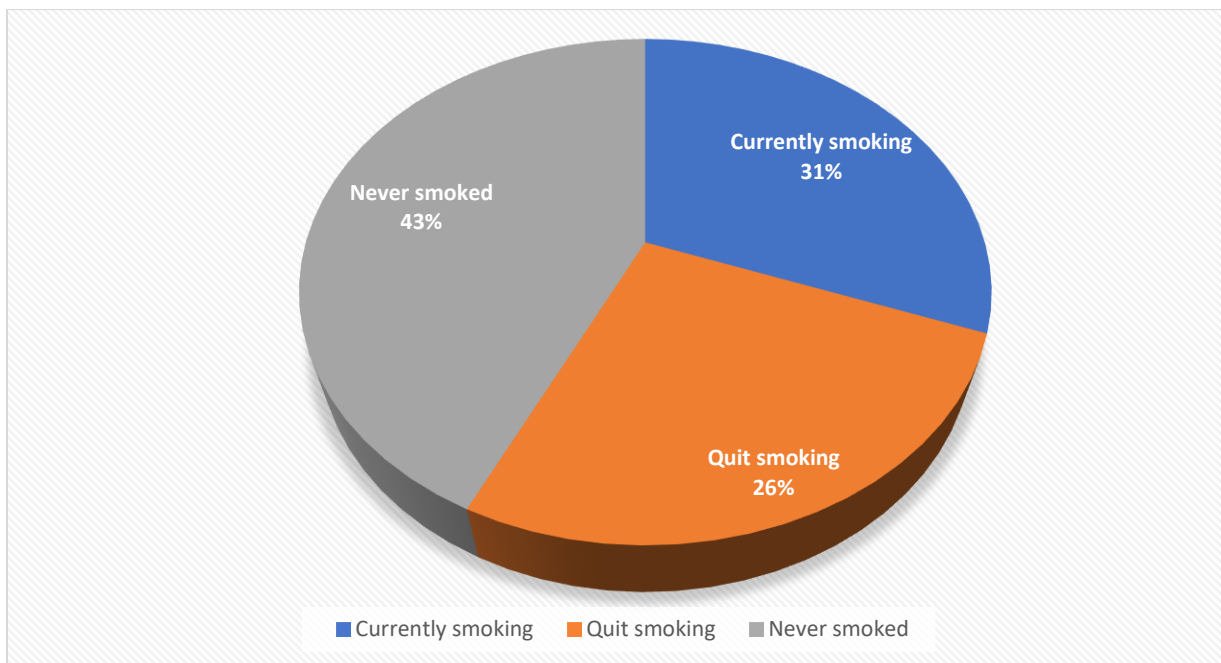
Survey responses were obtained from 981 females and 2977 males.

	Frequency	Percentage
Female	981	24.8
Males	2977	75.2
Total	3958	100.0

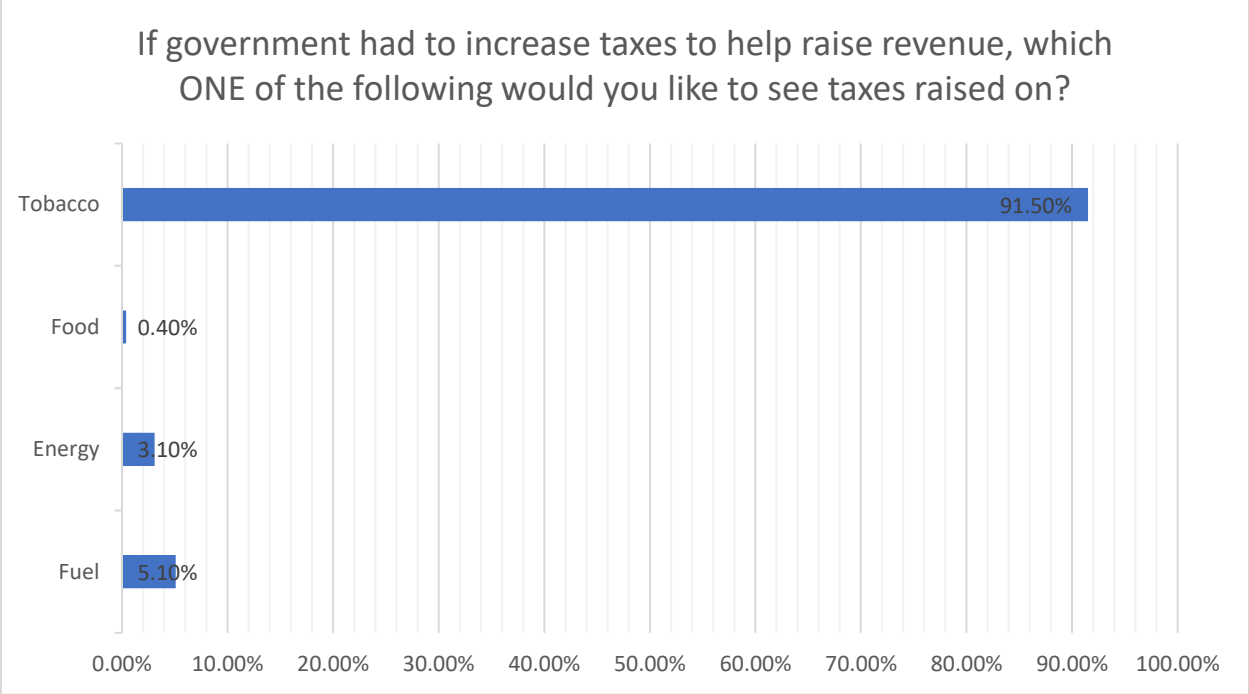


In the sample, 21% of the respondents were between 20 to 25 years, 50% were between 25 to 40 years and 29% were over the age of 40 years.

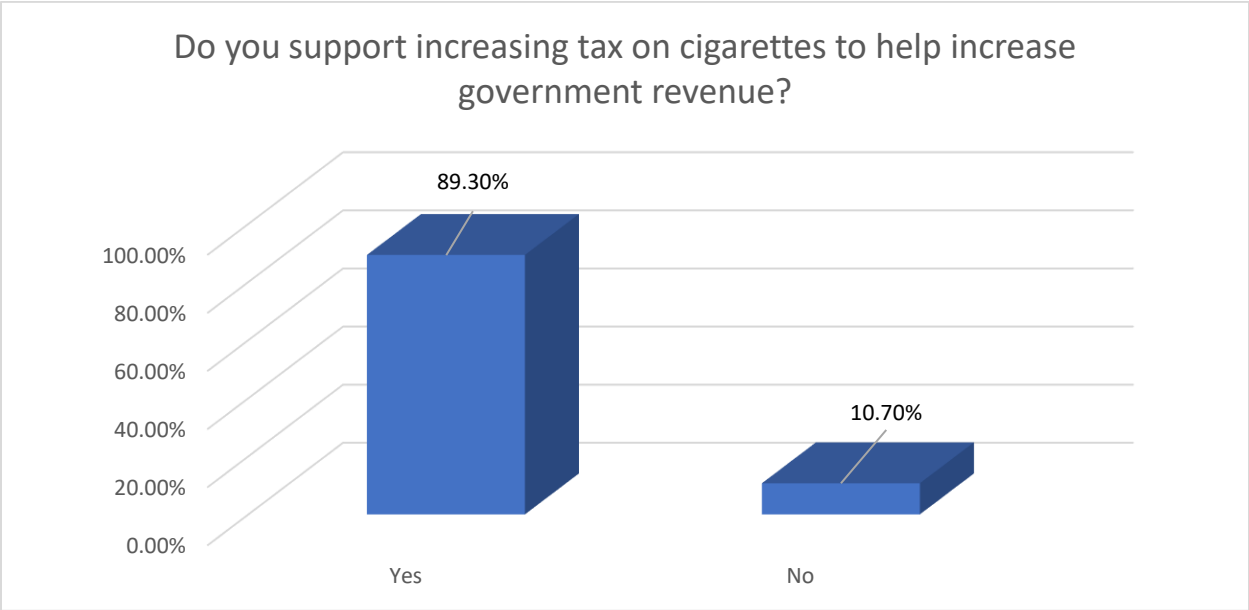
The male respondents of the survey were inquired regarding their tobacco use. Accordingly, 31% of the male respondents currently smoke tobacco, 26% had previously smoked and quit, and 43% had never smoked tobacco in their life.



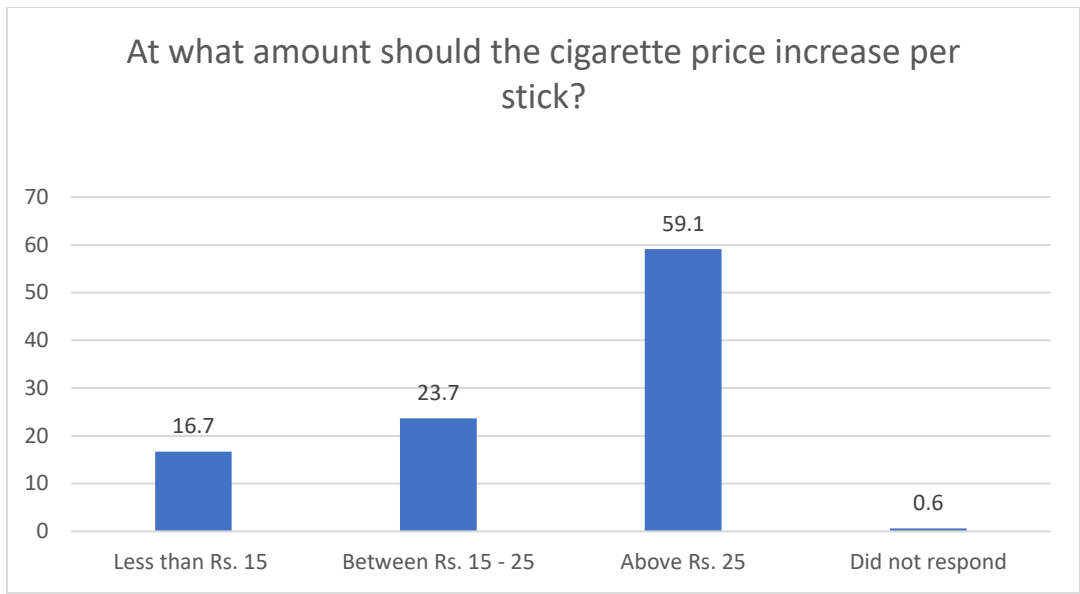
In response to the question, “if the government had to increase taxes to help raise revenue, which one of the following would you like to see taxes raised on: fuel, energy, tobacco, food”, 91.5% responded tax on tobacco should be increased.



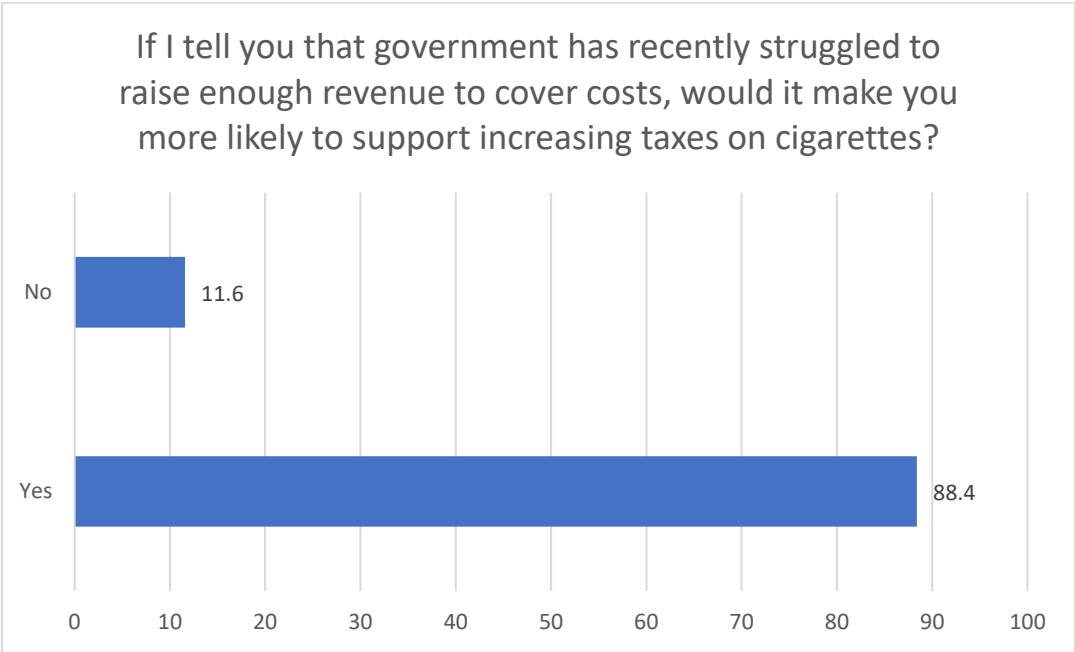
When inquiring survey respondents on whether they would support it if the government proposed increasing tax on cigarettes, 89.3% of respondents agreed to support such a proposal.



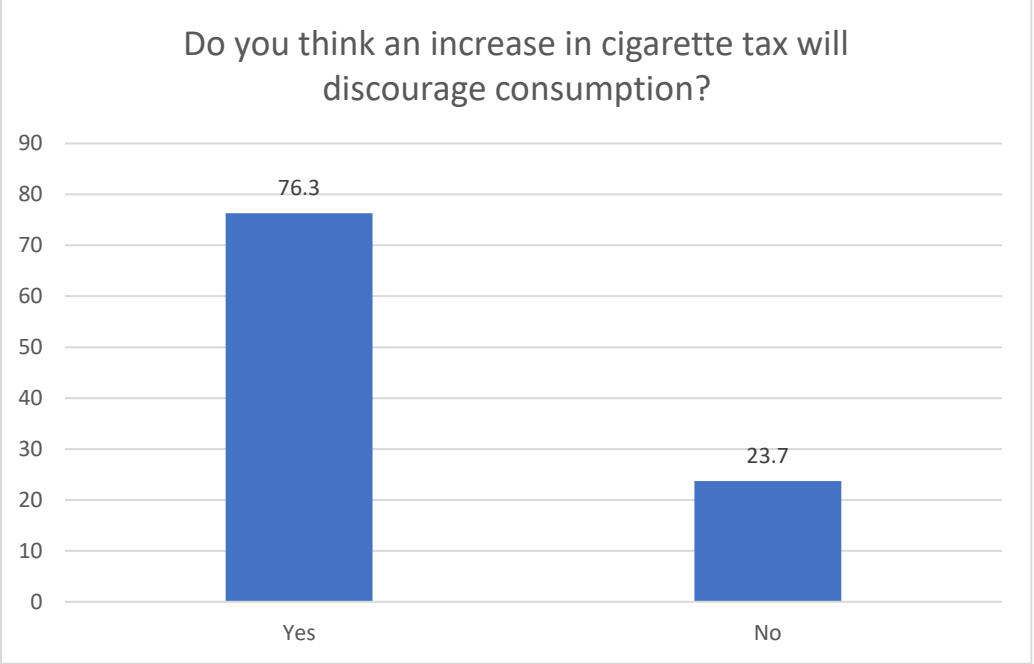
The respondents who supported increasing tax on cigarettes were inquired on how much they think the price of a cigarette should increase. Accordingly, 59.1% of respondents said the price of a cigarette should be increased above Rs. 25. Meanwhile, 23.7% of respondents said the price of a cigarette should be increased between Rs. 15-25. Overall, 82.8% of respondents said the price of a cigarette should be increased by Rs. 15 or above through the upcoming budget.



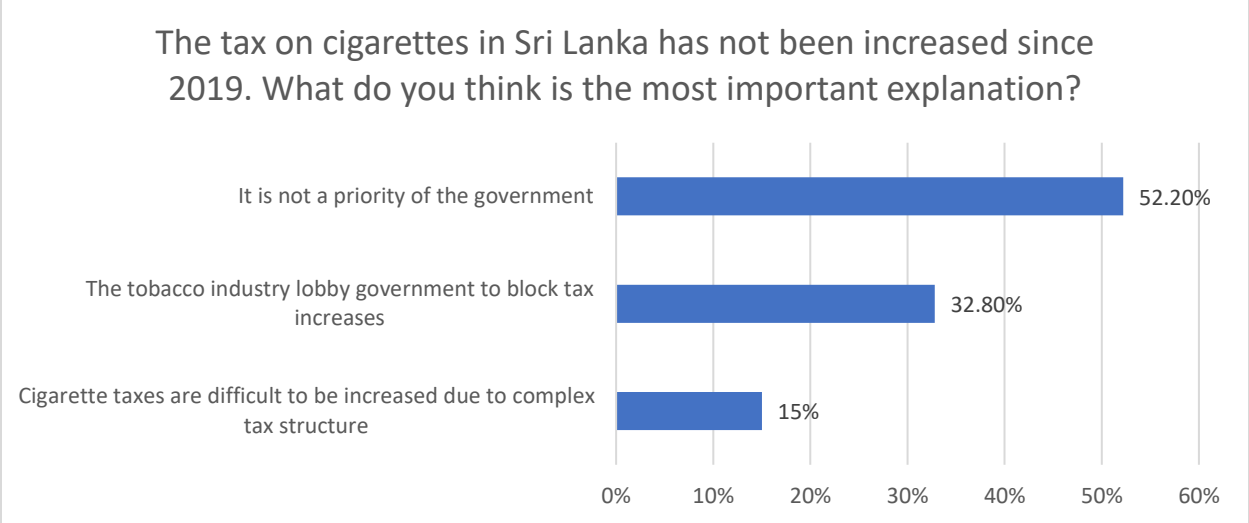
When survey respondents were inquired on whether they would support increasing tax on cigarettes since the government have recently struggled to raise enough revenue to cover costs, 88.4% of respondents agreed to support it.



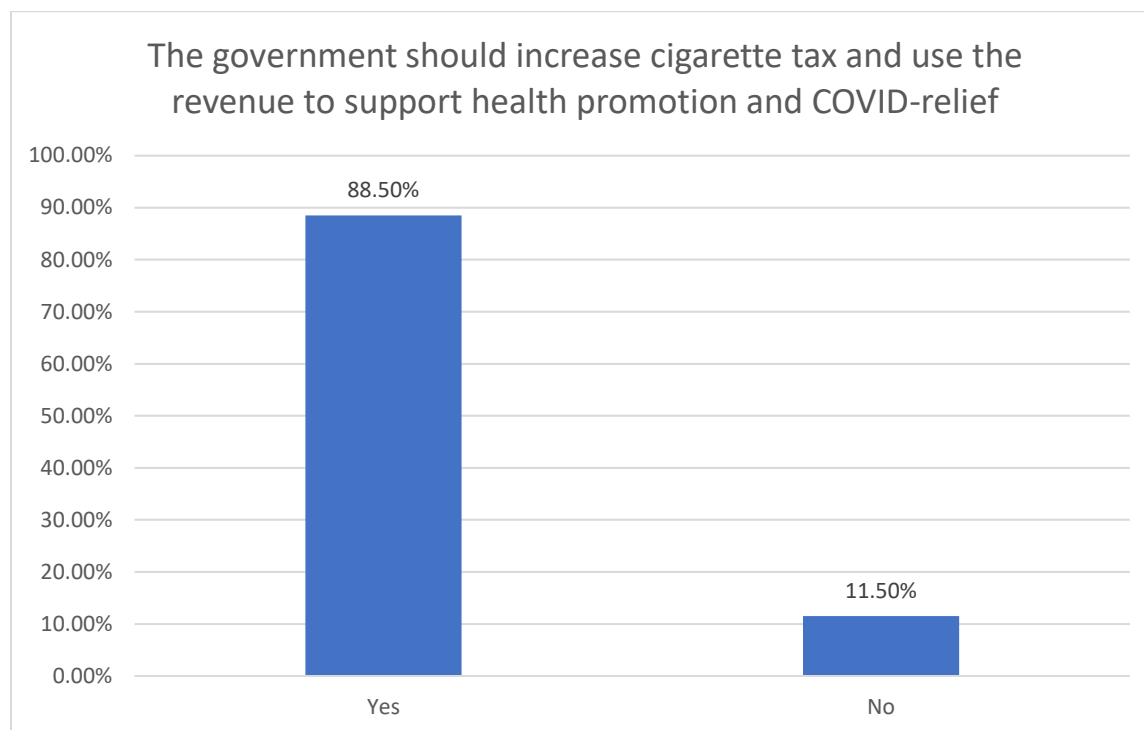
When inquired whether survey respondents thought an increase in cigarette tax will discourage consumption, 76.3% of respondents thought a tax increase would discourage consumption.



The respondents were inquired on their opinion of why they think the government has not increased tax on a non-essential item such as cigarettes over the past two years, despite continuously increasing taxes on essential goods and services. Accordingly, 52.2% of respondents believed increasing tax on cigarettes is not a priority of the government. 32.8% of respondents believe tobacco industry influence seems as another reason for not increasing tobacco tax.



Among the survey respondents 88.5% said the government should increase cigarette tax and use the revenue to support health promotion and COVID-relief.



Analysing the results of this public opinion survey demonstrates that majority of Sri Lankans want tax on cigarettes to be increased and would support the government for such a tax increase.

Public opinion shows that the government should urgently act on increasing tax on cigarettes. The majority of respondents believe that the government does not consider increasing taxes on cigarettes as a priority. Tobacco industry influence seems as another reason for not increasing tobacco tax.

We, the Alcohol and Drug Information Centre (ADIC) estimates that if the government increased tax on cigarettes by Rs. 20 over the past two years the government could have earned around Rs. 100 billion more in revenue.

This survey proves that the opinion of majority of Sri Lankan citizens including those who smoke is that the government must increase tax on cigarettes by at least Rs. 20 in the upcoming budget for 2022 which is to be presented in November 2021. In the context of the present economic crisis in the country tax on cigarettes must be increased to generate more government revenue, provide relief for citizens, and end the loss of revenue caused by flawed cigarette taxation.

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