

# **Public Attitudes about Smoking on Airlines**

A Survey Conducted by the American Association for  
Respiratory Care

June 20, 1989

87649025

**PUBLIC ATTITUDES ABOUT SMOKING ON AIRLINES**  
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### Background

The American Association for Respiratory Care has over 27,000 members nationwide. The AARC is the professional membership association for respiratory therapists and technicians and others involved in pulmonary and respiratory-related fields. Respiratory therapy practitioners work with patients in hospitals, the home, and nursing homes. Based in Dallas, Texas, the AARC provides its members with benefits and services to enhance their personal and professional career goals.

The purpose of the AARC is to educate its members on continuing changes on the technical aspects of respiratory care, to promote understanding of this profession among other healthcare professionals, to advance the art and science of respiratory care, and to provide education to the general public about respiratory health promotion and disease prevention.

The AARC, as an advocate of good respiratory health, works to educate patients and the public about hazards and habits affecting their lung health. Many of the AARC's public education efforts have centered around the issue of indoor air pollution, and, specifically, cabin air quality.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In 1989, the American Association for Respiratory Care undertook a major survey effort at airports across the country. Volunteers of the AARC who performed the survey were seeking information about the flying publics' attitude on smoke-free airline flights. Two years ago, in March of 1987, the AARC performed a similar survey to ascertain public opinion of a ban of smoking on all commercial airline flights.

What the AARC found in its 1989 survey effort is that public support, from both smokers and nonsmokers, weighs in favor of a ban of smoking on airlines. A majority of both groups approve of the current ban and would like to see this ban extended permanently. The shift in attitude among smokers is especially dramatic. Nearly 30% more smokers approve of the ban since 1987.

Specifically, these are the major conclusions of the survey:

- \* Of the 27,677 people polled, 84.0% approve of the current ban, 12.2% do not approve, and 3.8% had no opinion.
- \* Approval for an airline smoking ban has increased since a similar 1987 poll.
- \* 81.1% of those polled indicated they would favor a permanent ban under the current two-hour flight guidelines.
- \* Of those people surveyed, 62.7% said they felt the ban should be extended to all flights.
- \* Of respondents who indicated they smoke cigarettes, 58.1% approve of the current ban and 51.7% would favor a permanent ban.

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## METHODOLOGY

The AARC's Airport Public Opinion Poll was conducted at 66 airports in 33 states. To obtain permission to conduct the survey a letter was sent to airport management (see sample in appendix) requesting permission to position volunteers in the terminal to question passers-by. All surveys were conducted April 23-29.

The AARC attempted to eliminate bias as much as possible by providing specific instructions to those conducting the survey. There was no pre-selection of respondents and every attempt was made to choose respondents at random.

Volunteers of the American Association for Respiratory Care who conducted the survey, were asked not to identify their organizational affiliation, as this might bias the results. Instructions provided to the volunteers suggested ways in which they might approach airport patrons. (See "Instructions to Volunteers" in appendix).

To our knowledge there has been no other poll of this magnitude and we believe this is the largest public opinion survey on the issue of airline smoking.

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## SURVEY CONCLUSIONS

### Major Conclusions

The 1989 AARC Public Opinion Poll on Airline Smoking was conducted at airports all across the country during the last week of April. A total of 27,677 people were polled at 66 airports in 33 states. Volunteers of the American Association for Respiratory Care posed five questions to passers-by in airline terminals to ascertain how airline passengers felt about the ban of smoking on flights of two hours or less. Specifically, major points of the study show that:

- \* Of the 27,677 people polled, 84.0% approve of the current ban, 12.2% do not approve, and 3.8% had no opinion.
- \* Approval for an airline smoking ban has increased since a similar 1987 poll.
- \* 81.1% of those polled indicated they would favor a permanent ban under the current two-hour flight guidelines.
- \* Of those people surveyed, 62.7% said they felt the ban should be extended to all flights.
- \* Of respondents who indicated they smoke cigarettes, 58.1% approve of the current ban and 51.7% would favor a permanent ban.

### Overall Opinion of Survey Group

The latest statistics show an increased approval of the ban since its implementation. The Association conducted a similar survey in 1987, just prior to passage of the bill instituting a two-year limited ban. That survey, which polled over 33,000 airline passengers, showed that 64% favored a ban of smoking on all commercial airlines. The results of this latest poll show that acceptance of the ban and approval of the concept of smoke-free flights may now rate higher and be considered with greater favor. In the 1987 survey when asked, "Do you favor a ban of smoking on all commercial airlines?" respondents answered in the following fashion:

#### 1987 Survey

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
21,383	9,286	2,573
64.3%	27.9%	7.7%

In the most recent survey when asked, "There is presently a law that is in force for two years that bans smoking on flights of two hours or less. Do you approve of this ban?" respondents answered:

1989 Survey

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
23,249	3,377	1,051
84.0%	12.2%	3.8%

Smoking Profile

Smokers make up 24.5% of those surveyed. Nonsmokers represented 75.0% of the total and .5% of respondents did not answer this question. A recently released Gallup poll indicates that this corresponds with the smoking habits of the public at large. Their survey showed that 27% of the U.S. adult population smokes.

AARC Survey

"Do you smoke cigarettes?"

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No answer</u>
6,781	20,758	138
24.5%	75.0%	.5%

Attitudes of Smokers

Those people who indicated they smoke have developed a higher approval for the smoke-free two-hour flights. The 1987 survey showed that those who indicated they smoke answered the question "Do you favor a ban of smoking on all commercial airlines?" in the following way:

1987 Survey

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
29.8%	61.7%	8.5%

In this latest poll smokers answered the question, "Do you approve of the ban?" as follows:

1989 Survey

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No opinion</u>
3,942	2,477	362
58.1%	36.5%	5.3%

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### Attitudes of Nonsmokers

As might be expected, nonsmokers approved of the ban in greater numbers. According to the survey, 92.8% of nonsmokers approved of the ban, while 4.2% did not and 3.0% had no opinion. Slightly fewer of them favor a permanent ban: 91.1% would favor a permanent ban, 5.5% would not and 3.4% do not know.

Additional information regarding survey findings follows this section of the report.

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## **SURVEY FINDINGS**

Detail on the actual responses to questions asked in the Airport Public Opinion Poll follows. Cross tabulations of questions regarding the respondents' smoking profiles and their answers to questions is also discussed.

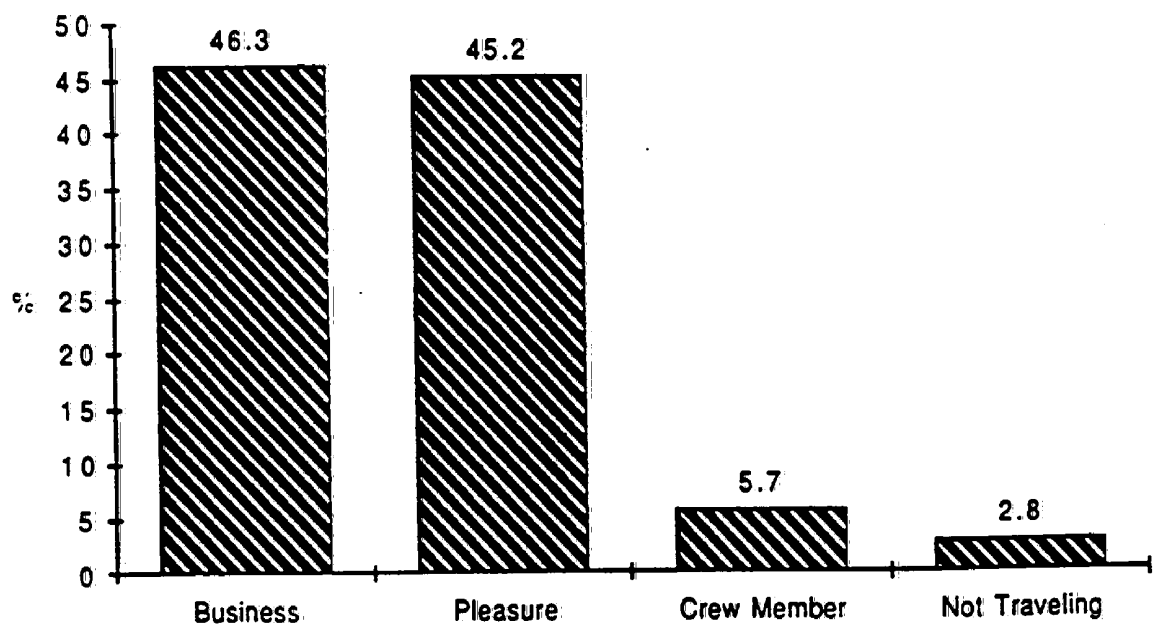
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1. Are you traveling for business or pleasure today?

<u>Business</u>	<u>Pleasure</u>	<u>Crew</u>	<u>No Answer or Not Traveling</u>
12,814	12,510	1,578	775
46.3%	45.2%	5.7%	2.8%

Respondents were asked to identify their reason for flying. On the questionnaire form no provision was made for those people who were polled, but who were not traveling that day. Volunteers performing the poll handwrote this option on their survey form when the person they were polling indicated they were at the airport only to pick-up or drop-off a passenger. No subsequent cross tabulations were done with this question.

Are you traveling for business or pleasure today?



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2. Do you smoke cigarettes?

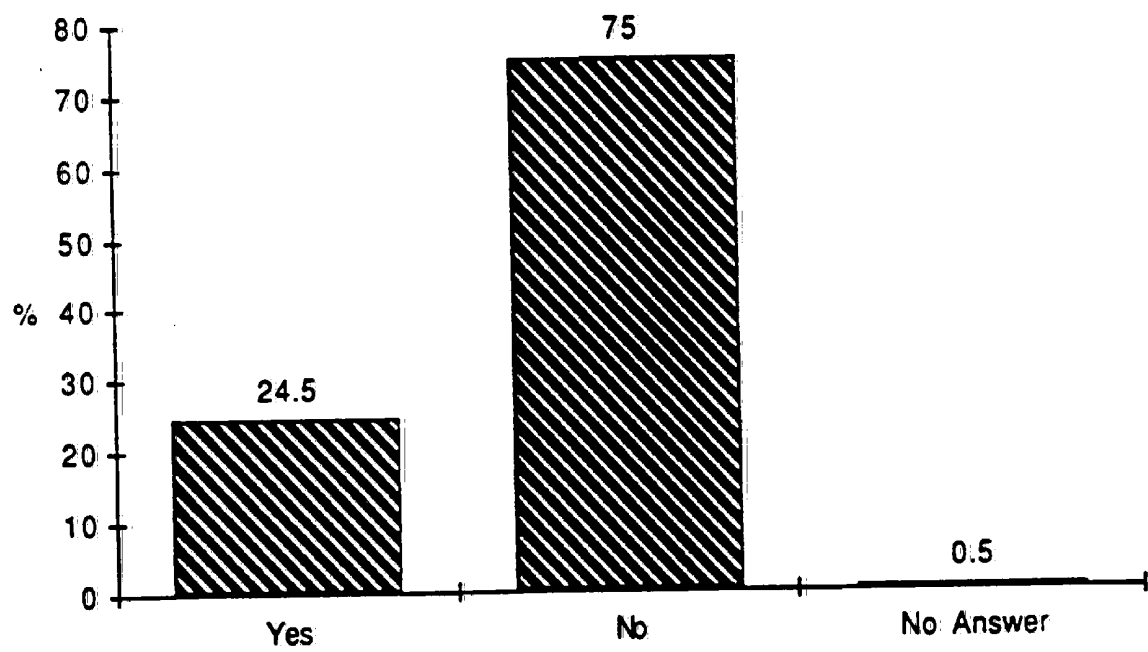
<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Answer</u>
6,781	20,758	138
24.5%	75.0%	.5%

This question helps position the survey respondents in the general population as a whole. According to a recent Gallup poll, 27% of adults indicate that they smoke.

This question was cross-tabulated with questions 3 and 4 in an effort to identify how smokers and nonsmokers felt about the current and the extension of such a ban.

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Do you smoke cigarettes?



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3. There is presently a law that is in force for two years that bans smoking on flights of two hours or less. Do you approve of this ban?

All responses

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
23,249	3,377	1,051
84.0%	12.2%	3.8%

Responses of Smokers

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
3,942	2,477	362
58.1%	36.5%	5.3%

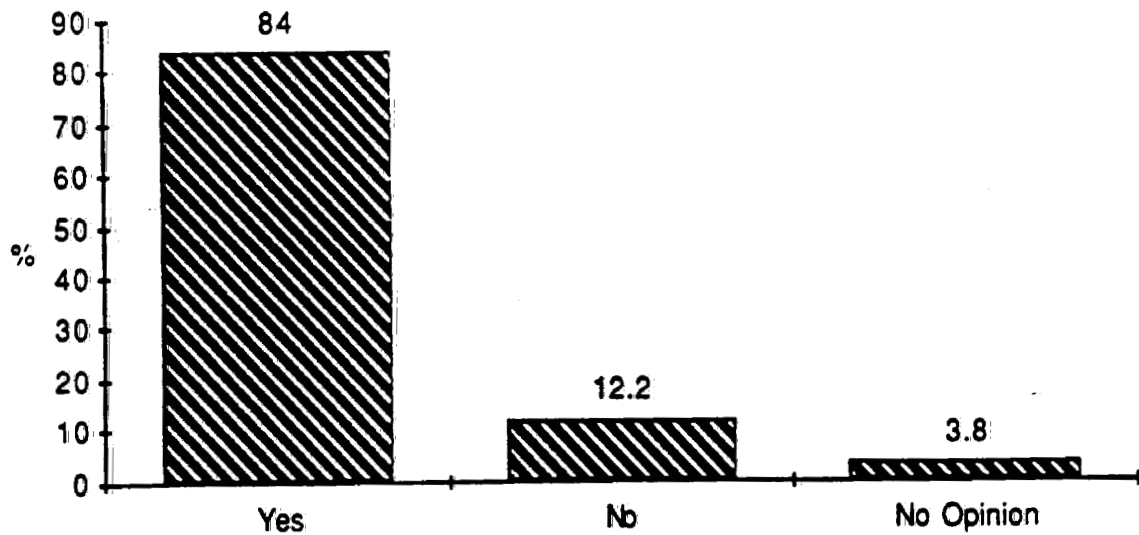
Responses of Nonsmokers

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
19,263	872	623
92.8%	4.2%	3.0%

Overall responses indicate that airline passengers are much more comfortable about the ban since its implementation. In the 1987 survey, approximately 64% of respondents favored such a ban, versus the 84% who responded favorably on this survey.

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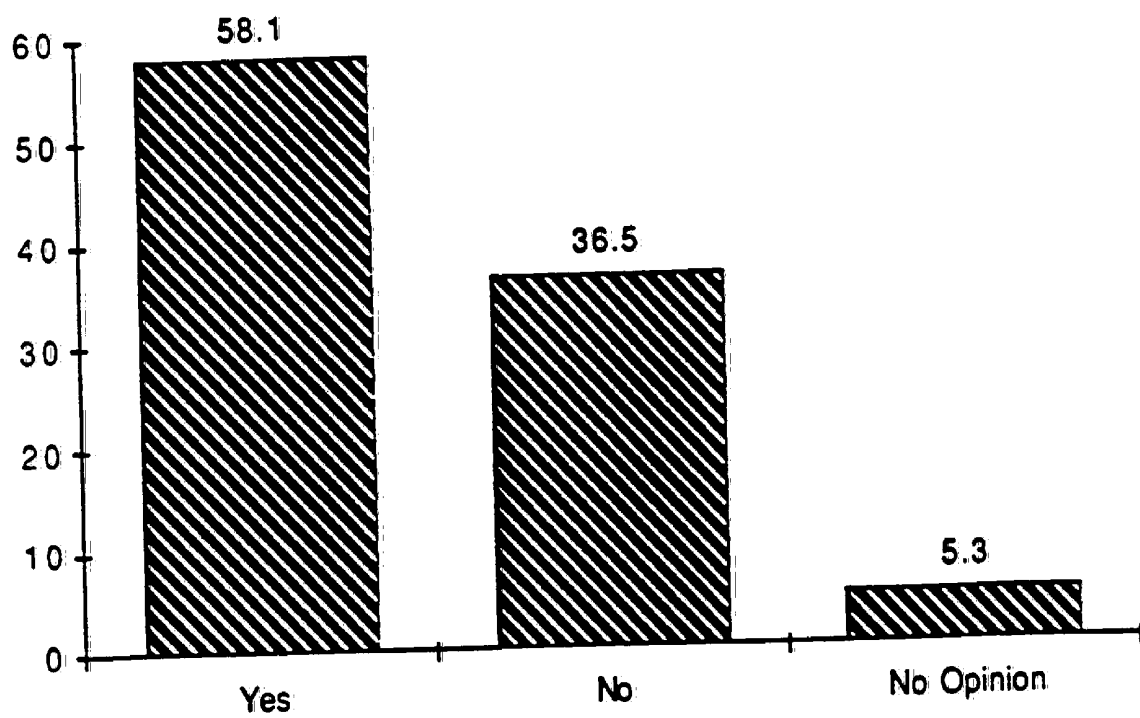
There is presently a law that is in force for two years that bans smoking on flights of two hours or less. Do you approve of this ban?



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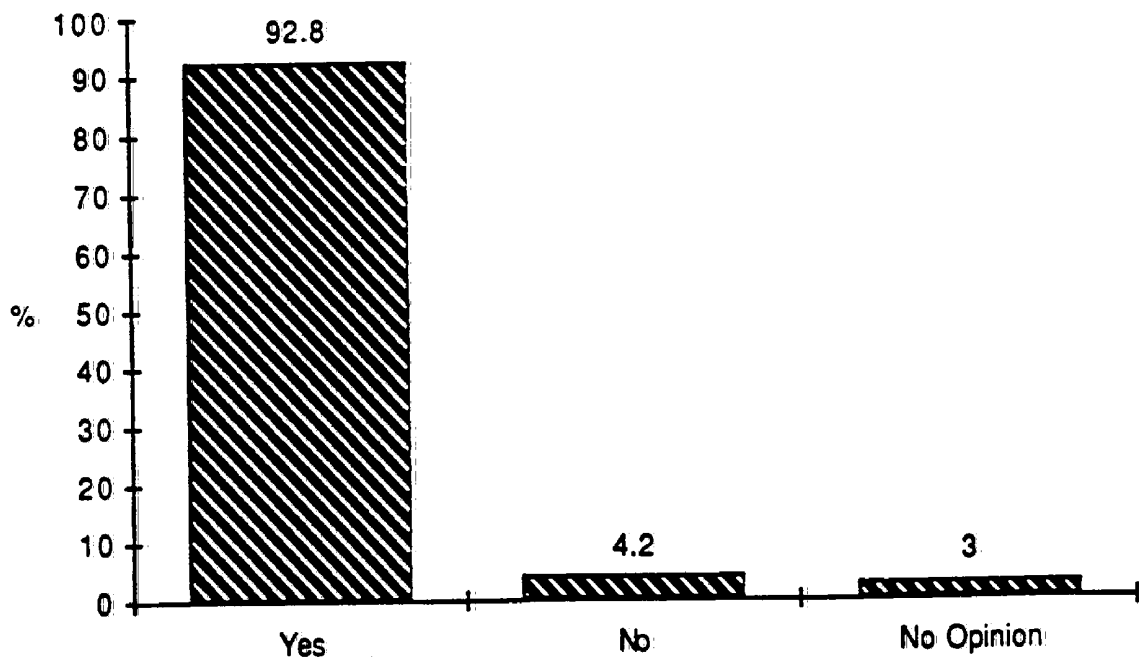


### Smokers who approve of the ban.



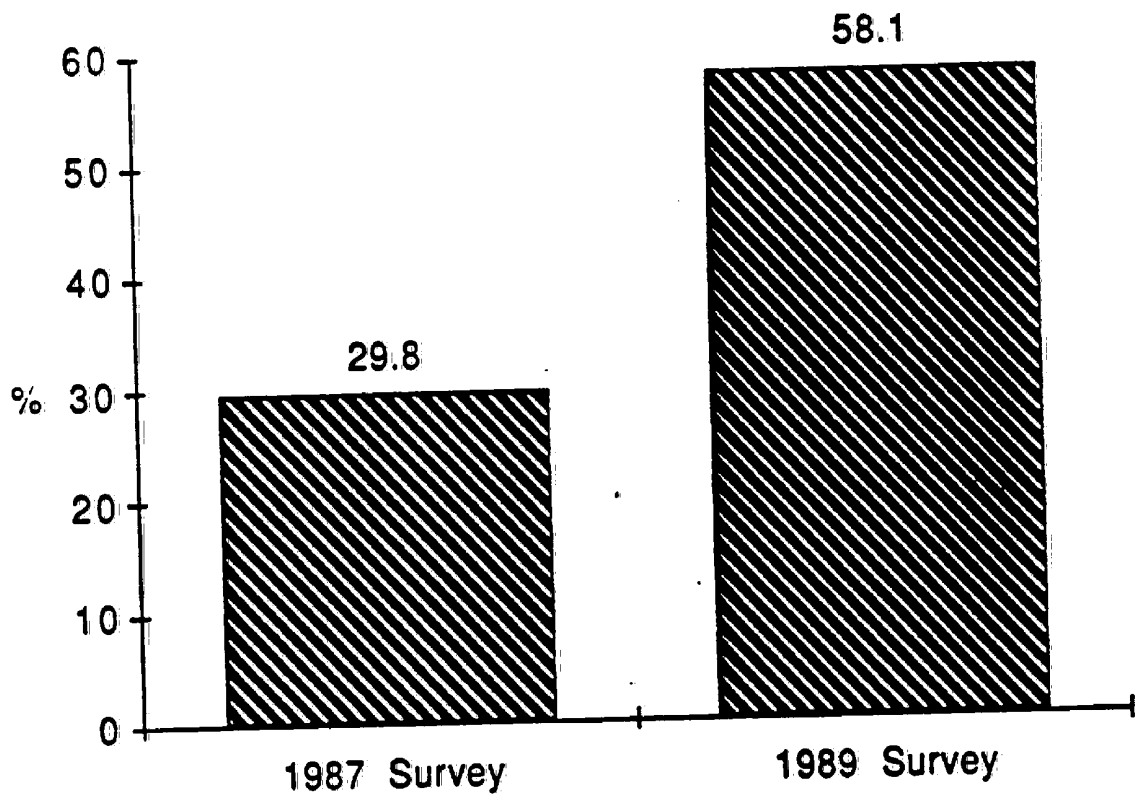
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### Nonsmokers who approve of ban.



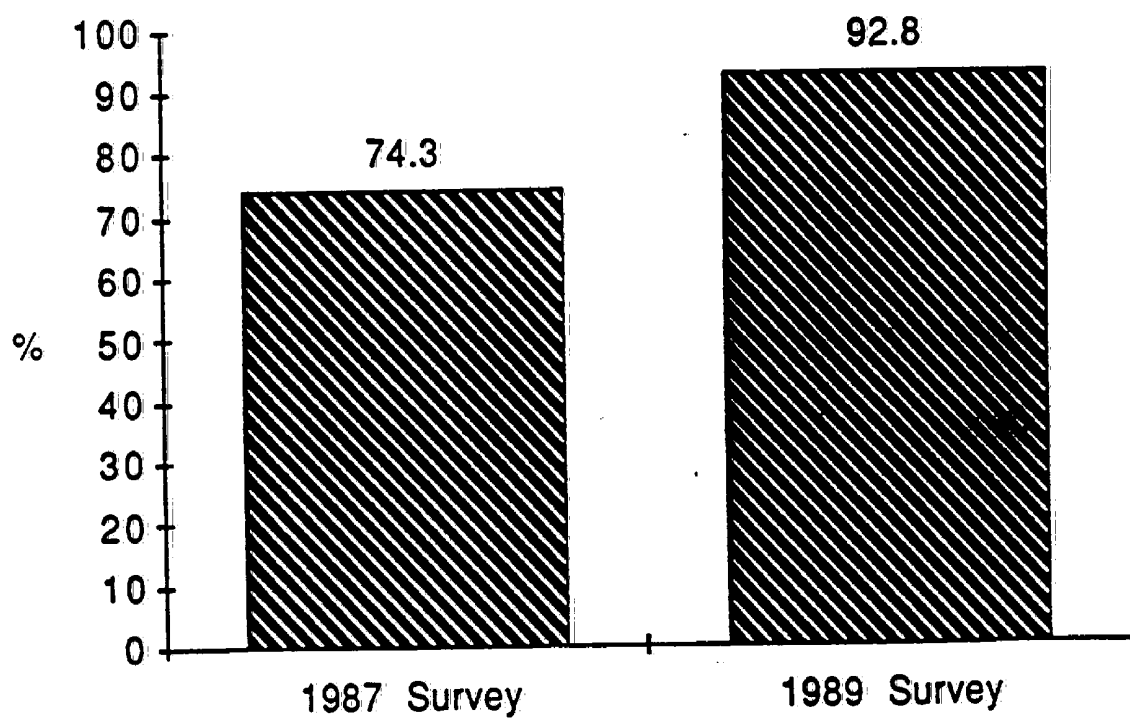
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# Change in attitude of smokers who favor ban



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# Change in attitude of nonsmokers who favor ban



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4. Would you favor legislation making this two-year ban a permanent ban?

All responses

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
22,446	4,069	1,162
81.1%	14.7%	4.2%

Responses of Smokers

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
3,506	2,916	359
51.7%	43.0%	5.3%

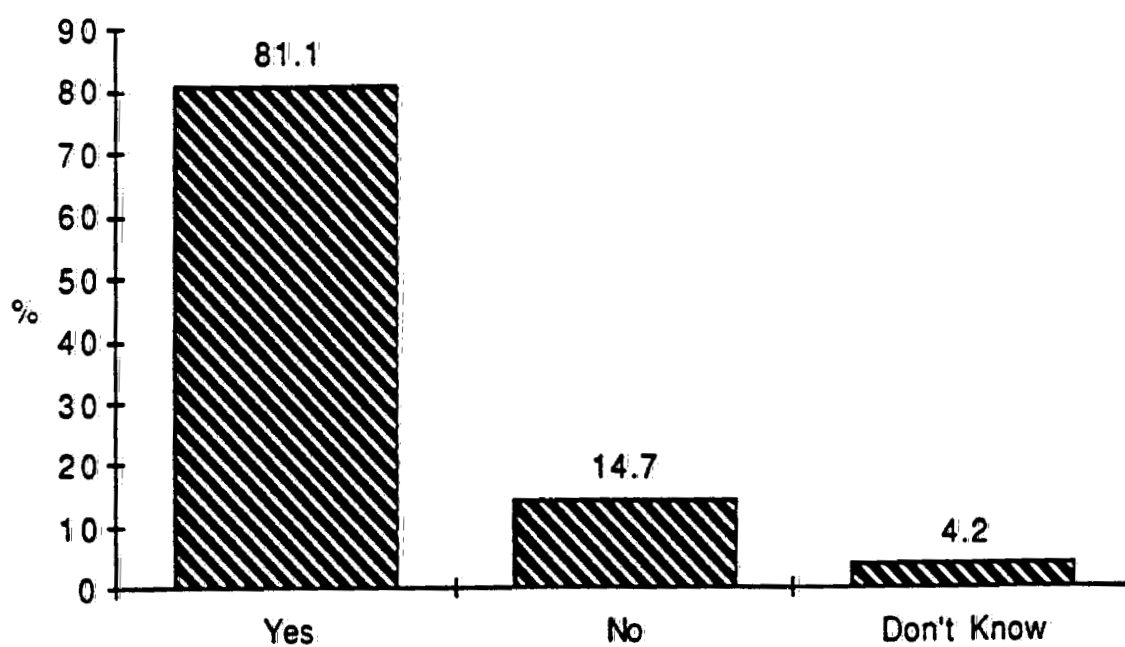
Responses of Nonsmokers

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
18,911	1,142	705
91.1%	5.5%	3.4%

Again, overall, respondents highly approve of a permanent ban. Just slightly over half of the smokers favor a permanent ban, and about 5% have no opinion. Nonsmokers, naturally, favor the ban and only 5.5% are not in favor.

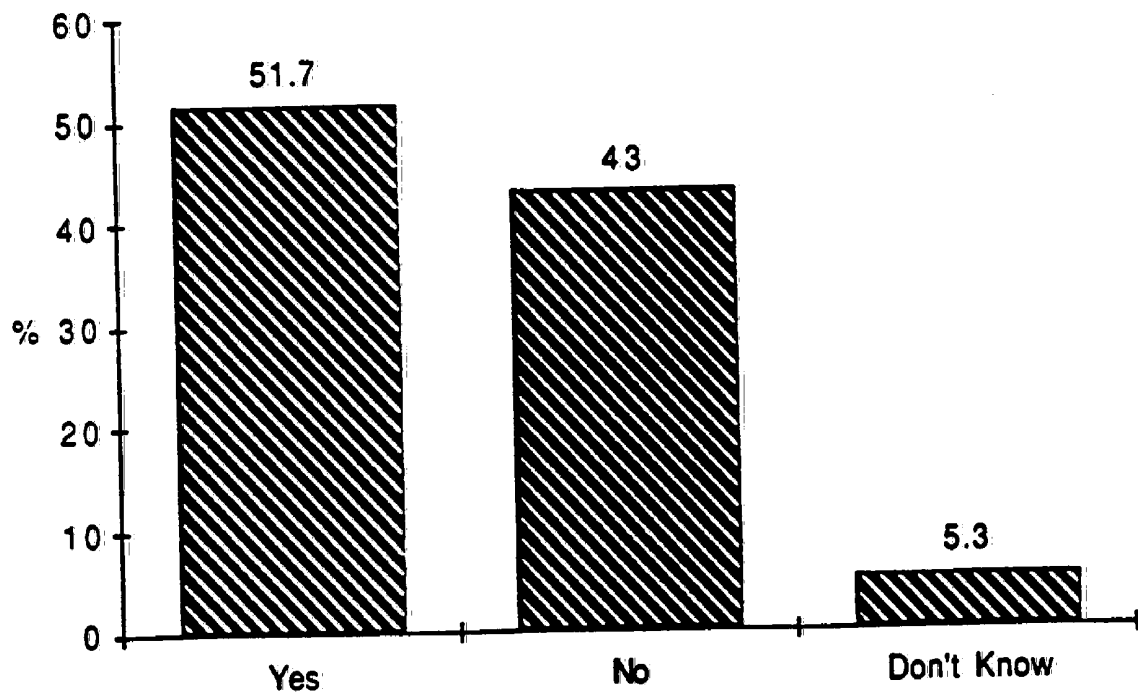
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Would you favor legislation making  
this two-year ban a permanent ban?



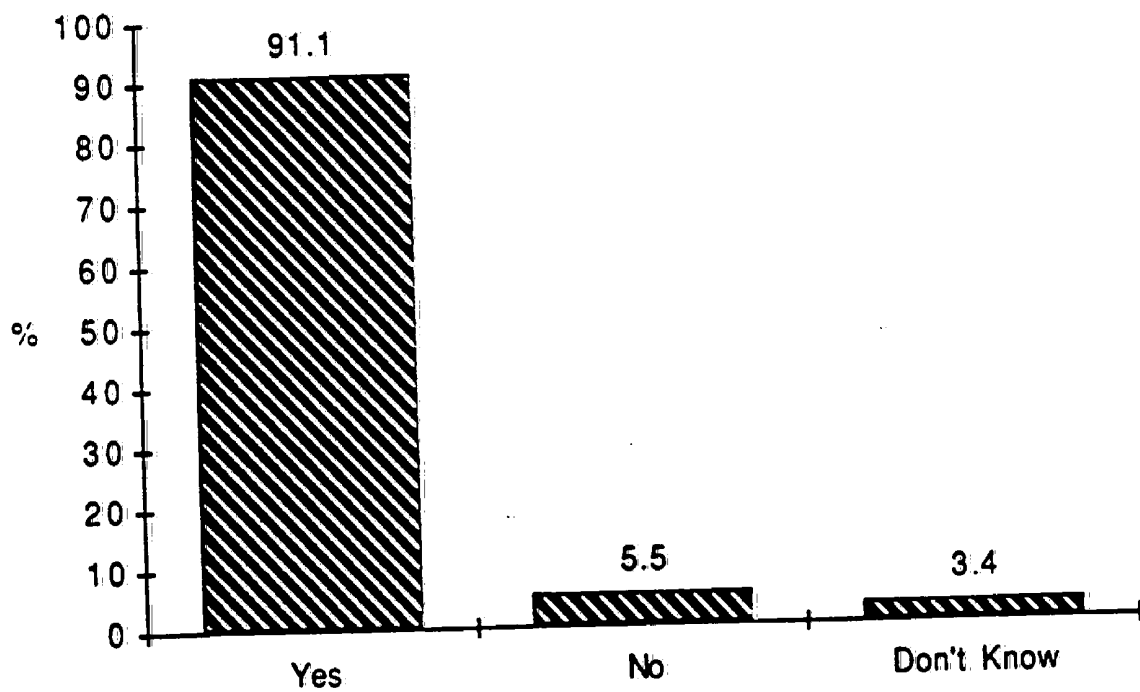
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Smokers who favor permanent ban.



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Nonsmokers who favor permanent ban.



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5. Do you think the ban should be extended to all flights, not just those of two hours or less?

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
17,353	8,580	1,744
62.7%	31.0%	6.3%

It has been suggested that the two-hour limit be lifted and that all flights be made smoke-free. Overall fewer people favor this concept than continuing the current ban, but two-thirds of respondents support this option.

Additionally, this question was cross-tabulated with questions 2 and 3 to see how smokers and non-smokers who approve of the current ban feel about a ban on all flights.

Smokers who approve of the current ban and favor a ban on all flights

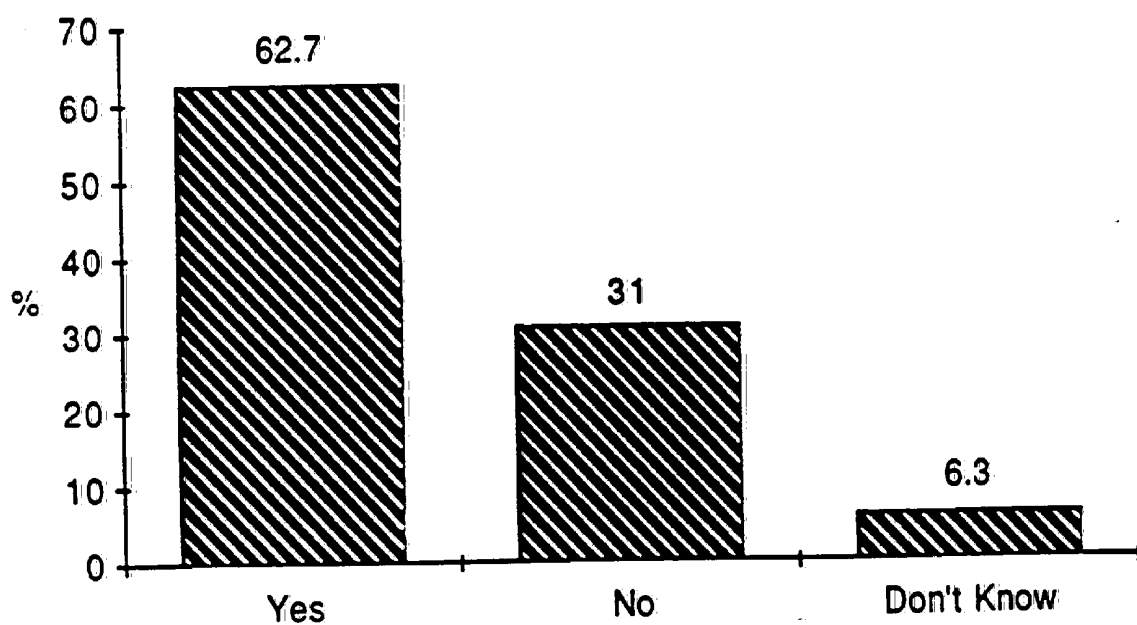
<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
1,675	2,058	209
42.5%	52.2%	5.3%

Nonsmokers who approve of the current ban and favor a ban on all flights

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>No Opinion</u>
15,333	3,044	886
79.6%	15.8%	4.6%

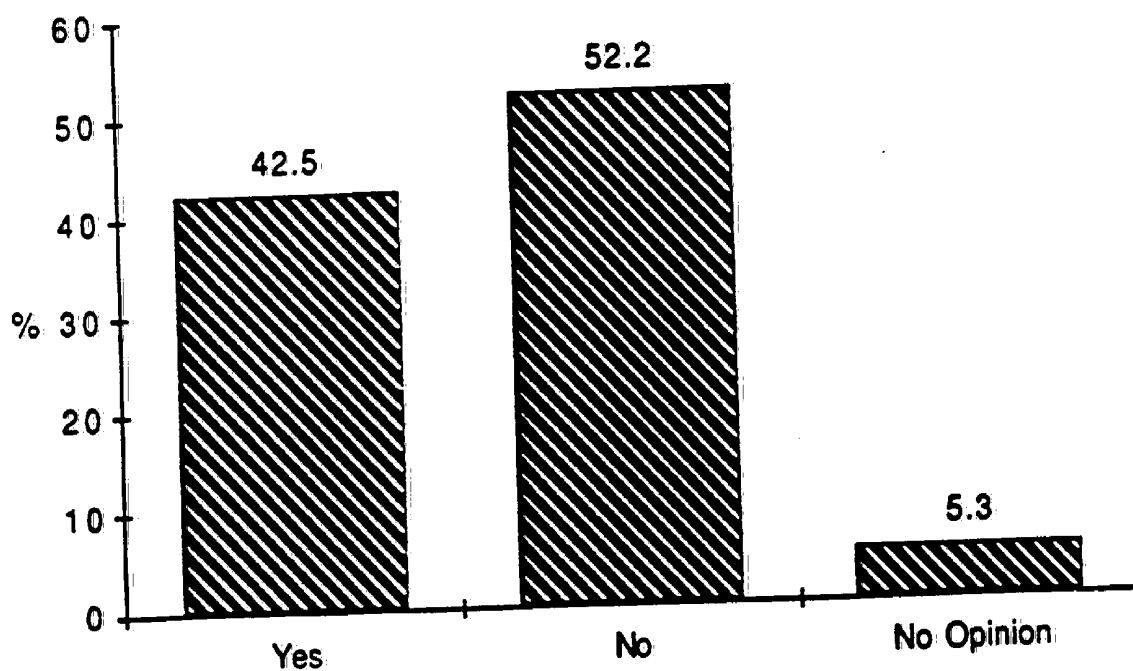
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Do you think the ban should be extended to all flights, not just those of two hours or less?



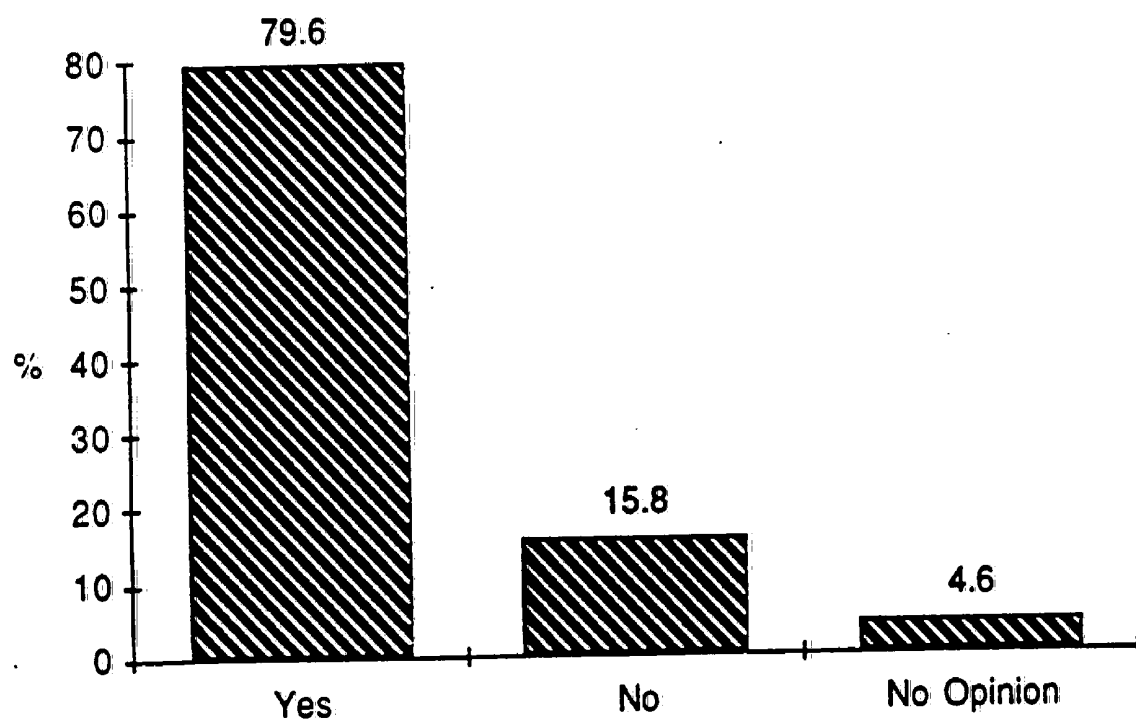
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Smokers who approve of current ban and favor  
a ban on all flights



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**Nonsmokers who approve of the current ban  
and favor a ban on all flights**



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APPENDIX

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Are you travelling for primarily for business or pleasure today?

Business:                  Pleasure                  Crew Member

Do you smoke cigarettes?

Yes:                  No:                  No answer

There is presently a law that is in force for two years that bans smoking on flights of two hours or less. Do you approve of this ban?

Yes:                  No:                  No opinion

Would you favor legislation making this two-year ban a permanent ban?

Yes                  No                  Don't know

Do you think the ban should be extended to all flights, not just those of two hours or less?

Yes                  No                  Don't know

Thank you for your time.

Are you traveling for primarily for business or pleasure today?

Business:                  Pleasure                  Crew Member

Do you smoke cigarettes?

Yes:                  No:                  No answer

There is presently a law that is in force for two years that bans smoking on flights of two hours or less. Do you approve of this ban?

Yes                  No                  No opinion

Would you favor legislation making this two-year ban a permanent ban?

Yes                  No                  Don't know

Do you think the ban should be extended to all flights, not just those of two hours or less?

Yes                  No                  Don't know

Thank you for your time.

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## Sample Letter to Airport Management

You will need to write to the airport in advance to get permission to conduct the study. Many of you know who the proper airport authorities are who make the decision about who can conduct studies. If you don't we suggest writing to the Legal Department of the Airport. (Call ahead and get the name of the director of the department so that you can personalize the letter.)

Date

Legal Department  
Anywhere Airport  
P.O. Box 000  
Anywhere, OK 78498

Dear Sir/Madam:

Our organization would like to obtain a permit to conduct a survey at your airport on April 00-00, 1989. The survey is to determine public opinion on the ban of smoking on commercial flights of two hours or less. Two years ago our association conducted a similar poll of 33,000 airline passengers and its information was used in Congressional testimony that eventually led to the two-year ban. *(Add if appropriate: Our organization, in fact, conducted this poll at this airport in March 1987)*

We would like to survey disembarking passengers or passers-by and to have some of our pollsters stationed in the baggage claim area to talk with patrons as they wait for their luggage.

We will be happy to share the results of this survey with you, as we believe you will want to know what your patrons say about smoking on flights. Enclosed is a sample of the survey indicating what questions will be asked.

Our organization is affiliated with the American Association for Respiratory Care, a 27,000 member organization concerned about public awareness of respiratory health. If you have any questions which are not explained in this letter or the attached material, please feel free to contact me.

Sincerely,

Susie Survey  
Oklahoma Society for Respiratory Care

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## **Instructions for Volunteers**

Thank you for participating in the AARC's airline smoking study. This study was conducted two years ago and helped provide information that Congress used in passing a ban prohibiting smoking on flights of two hours or less.

The information you gather today will also be provided to the Congressman Richard Durbin and Senator Frank Lautenberg as they introduce legislation extending the ban. The ban that went into effect in April 1988 is set to expire in April 1990 unless new legislation passes that will extend or make permanent that ban. This study will be used in the fight for passage of that new legislation.

Your airport coordinator will be providing you with specific instructions, but these basic instructions will help you understand what will occur.

1. You are ambassadors of your state society and the AARC. Please dress accordingly. We suggest ties for men and dresses for women.
2. Try to approach passengers as they are coming off of the plane or waiting in the baggage claim area. (The airport management may, in some cases, specify exactly where you will be located.)
3. Approach each airport patron and stress that you would like to ask them some brief questions. Do not identify your organization as this may bias results if they realize you are representing a health care society. Sample: "Hello. I'm conducting a brief poll on smoking on airlines. May I ask you five questions?" If the person refuses, please smile and thank them and go on to the next passenger.
4. When you have completed a data tabulation sheet, please return it to your airport coordinator.

Thank you for your participation in this project. It will provide valuable information to Congress as they consider the question of extending or permanently instituting a smoking ban.

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