



## REVIEW

# The politics of smoke-free policies in developing countries: Lessons from Africa

Jeffrey M. Drope

Marquette University, Department of Political Science, Box 1881, Wehr Physics #409, Milwaukee, WI 53201-1881, United States

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### Summary

The public health rewards of smoke-free policies are well documented. But in their enthusiasm to achieve such policies, public health advocates and policymakers frequently underestimate the political complexity of passing laws, and then implementing and enforcing them. Using 12 African countries as the focus of discussion, this research examines the basic political process for and the barriers to achieving smoke-free policies. Moreover, in addition to the obstacles, it examines why some countries have been experiencing comparatively more success in the smoke-free policy area. The findings of the research suggest strongly that the presence of a vigorous tobacco control civil society movement, some will on the part of government institutions, and active research support contribute significantly to successful smoke-free policies. It is also apparent that the emerging battle fronts in smoke-free policies are in the areas of implementation and enforcement, and while similar variables that affect the passing of new laws also condition these outcomes, there are the added distinct challenges of policy fatigue and additional resource constraints.

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## Introduction

The public health rewards of smoke-free policies have been well established and substantiated empirically by scholars including, among other benefits, tobacco consumption reduction, the diminishment of youth smoking initiation [1], and the overall reduction of heart attacks [2,3]. But what might seem like an obvious policy prescription to im-

prove the overall health of a community can get easily mired in the daily political struggles of a country, state or city. Moreover, both advocates and policymakers often underestimate the sustained and vigorous effort – often coordinated between multiple, not always agreeable, parties – it requires first to pass such policies, and then to implement and enforce them effectively. Scholars have only begun to examine the importance of the role of politics in the shaping

E-mail address: [jeffrey.drope@marquette.edu](mailto:jeffrey.drope@marquette.edu)

of successful smoke-free policies, particularly in developing nations. This research seeks to help fill this significant lacuna in the scholarly and policy-specific literature.

In many parts of the developing world, smoke-free policies either do not yet exist or are in nascent stages. It is therefore both timely and useful to examine systematically the politics of pursuing smoke-free policies in a diverse sample of developing nations in an effort to elucidate meaningful patterns that can be helpful to those beginning or who might be currently engaged in similar policy processes. Accordingly, this research examines the recent or current political contexts of smoke-free policies in 12 African countries including Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Eritrea, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania and Zambia. The word “politics” is multifaceted and in this research it refers both to the process of decision

making within and by governments, and the contestation for new policies that in addition to the government can involve non-state actors such as civil society organizations and individuals. The two definitions are used more or less interchangeably in this research, but should be evident in the context of the specific discussion.

The sample of countries in this research, all of which participated in the recent Africa Tobacco Situational Analyses (ATSA) initiative [4], represents a broad cross-section of both Africa generally and levels of tobacco control specifically. Countries in the sample demonstrate considerable variation on size, types of political systems and socioeconomic development. As Table 1 illustrates, the extent of tobacco control legislation also varies markedly: a number of these countries have already passed comprehensive national tobacco control legislation (all of which include smoke-free

**Table 1** Status of smoke-free policies in 12 African countries.

Country	National comprehensive smoke-free policy	Active enforcement of smoke-free	Sub-national smoke-free policies	Passed other smoke-free policies
Burkina Faso	1988 – “Raabo” (some smoke-free provisions) <sup>a</sup>	No (except several targeted initiatives beginning in 2006)		
Cameroon	No		Ban in government buildings in Yaoundé	Bans in buildings of the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Economy and Finance
Eritrea	2004 – Proclamation 143	No (except 2009 educational institutions initiative)		
Ghana	No <sup>a</sup>			Ministry directives for education, health and transportation facilities; government offices and restaurants and cinemas
Kenya	2007 – Kenya Tobacco Control Act (almost 100% FCTC-compliant)	Yes		
Malawi	No			Bans at airports, domestic flights and fueling areas
Mauritius	1999 and 2008 – Public Health Act (almost 100% FCTC-compliant)	Yes		
Nigeria	1990 – Tobacco Smoking (Control) Act and Decree 20 (some smoke-free provisions) <sup>a</sup>	No (until 2009 efforts in Abuja)	Yes (Abuja and Osun State)	
Senegal	No		Yes (City of Touba)	
South Africa	1993, 1999, 2007 and 2008 – Tobacco Products Control Act, and Amendments (almost 100% FCTC-compliant)	Yes		
Tanzania	2003 – Tobacco Products Regulation Act <sup>a</sup>	No		
Zambia	1992 – Public Health (Tobacco) Regulation and subsequent instruments <sup>a</sup>	No (until 2009 Lusaka initiative)		

<sup>a</sup> Indicates that there is pending FCTC-influenced or FCTC-compliant legislation that is either entirely new (Ghana and Nigeria) or seeks to improve on older, weaker, non-FCTC-compliant legislation (Burkina Faso, Tanzania and Zambia).

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