Reviewer's report

Title: Participation and argument in legislative debate on statewide smoking restrictions: An observational study

Version: 1 Date: 30 March 2007

Reviewer: Candace Nykiforuk

Reviewer's report:

General

In general, this manuscript was very well-written and an interesting read. There was a coherent flow of logic, the hypotheses and results were nicely presented, and the discussion reasonable. The title and abstract accurately represent the paper.

The research question posed by the authors was novel and, for the most part, sufficiently defined. The methods were transparent and appropriate given the research question (some specific questions regarding methods and analysis are listed below). The data used was appropriate, and the authors took care in selecting a sample that would be as representative as possible given the circumstances of the research.

Overall, the discussion and conclusions are supported by the data presented, however, the conclusion section could be enhanced, and further discussion (with additional links to the public health and policy literatures) would strengthen the paper.

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Major Compulsory Revisions (that the author must respond to before a decision on publication can be reached)

- The background and conclusion sections warrant a more comprehensive discussion of the participation as linked to the literature advocacy, lobbying, and policy cycle, particularly in tobacco control. This literature is all but absent in this paper, which although well-written, could be more strongly grounded in the broader context of work in this area.

- P12 and figure 1 - The sentence starting with "With one exception..." suggests a correlation between participation and policy outcomes (strength of legislation). Was this correlation statistically examined (i.e., re statistical significance) or based on the interpretation of 'descriptive coincidence' in the qualitative data? While I do not think that a statistical analysis is necessary for this paper (or to justify this finding), I would recommend that the authors qualify this statement in light of how the finding was produced. It would also be of benefit for the authors to provide some discussion of next steps in terms of further examination (and validation) of the findings reported in this paper. Further, the statement that "participation fully predicts legislative outcomes" is strongly overstated given the methodology and sample size, and needs rewording.

- While political and population control of analysis was not feasible in this study (as reported by the authors on p15), I think the paper would be strengthened by some discussion of how contextual factors (e.g., varying cultural climates between states, time period of legislation relative to public awareness of issues) may have influenced both participation and the policy outcomes.

- Conclusion section - While well written, the conclusion section is somewhat underwhelming given the extent of work presented throughout the paper. This section could, and should be expanded to discuss the findings within their broader context of implications for those interested in tobacco control policy-making.

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Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

- P2, Para 1 - Please operationalize 'participation' in your opening paragraph. This will be helpful to readers new to this concept. An additional minor detail - in the second sentence of this paragraph, please clarify that the 6 states are in the USA.
- P8, para 1, last line "results can be generalized... add "to the broader USA". It is unclear whether these generalizations will be applicable in other political climates.

- Table 3 and discussion - This table can be interpreted to mean that only one type of argument (socializing or privatizing) occurred in each case state. Is this accurate? Or does the table reflect the majority/general trend in each of the 6 states? Please clarify. Otherwise, the use of quotes is a nice addition to this paper.

- Section "analysis of arguments" - please consider organizing using hypotheses as sub-headings

Discretionary Revisions (which the author can choose to ignore)

- Theory section - the authors may want to consider relocating their hypothesis statements to before the rationales for each hypothesis.

- p5, Para 2, Line 5, "health advocates started from a position of relative disadvantage... maybe add "from the status quo perspective"

What next?: Accept after minor essential revisions

Level of interest: An article of importance in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.