Author’s response to reviews

Title: Who calls the shots in tobacco control policy? Policy monopolies of pro and anti-tobacco interest groups across six European countries.

Authors:

Thomas Kuijpers (t.kuijpers@maastrichtuniversity.nl)
Anton Kunst (a.kunst@amc.uva.nl)
Marc Willemsen (marc.willemsen@maastrichtuniversity.nl)

Version: 3 Date: 30 Apr 2019

Author’s response to reviews:

Reviewer reports:

Rachel Brown, PhD (Reviewer 1): Reviewer comments

Page 24 - Ethics approval: the clarification of the ethics framework in each participating nation is a good addition to the paper and the effort the authors have made here is appreciated. It is my view that this does enough to address any potential reader concerns.

Page 4, lines 44-46 Policy dominance. This is a good explanation of policy dominance and effectively addresses the point raised.

Background - (Author response to comment on discussion of supra-national policy) - As we focus only on national level policymaking, we wanted to highlight the role of supranational institutions such as the EU to emphasize the fact that tobacco control policy is developed at multiple levels. We believe that a more elaborate discussion about the interaction of layers of governance would disrupt the flow of the background section. Therefore we decided not to further elaborate on this topic there.

Reviewer - I appreciate the point made but still feel that a brief amendment at the start of 'Background' is needed to illustrate the layering of legislation in effect. This doesn't need much amendment but should clarify that national government decision-making happens in a wider context. In paragraph 1, you state 'Despite efforts by the World Health Organisation and European Union…"', and I would suggest that 'despite' may be more effectively framed as 'along side' to show that they are not in opposition, but are often directly associated with national action e.g. on warnings, cross-border advertising bans etc. This would better set up your next statement that display bans are based on Article 13 of the FCTC and that the paper is looking at how, despite these being international guidelines, they are enacted differently at national level. This
would also set up the rationale you go on to make on choice of cross-national comparisons, which reads really well with the additional material on page 4.

We have added a sentence (page 3, line 19-24) about the fact that tobacco policymaking in European countries is a functioning example of multi-level governance, as policy is developed at several levels. Furthermore we replaced ‘despite’ by ‘alongside’, as suggested (page 3, line 29).

Methods
The elaborations on stakeholder selection, data management and interview topics work well and I have no additional changes here.

Results
I really appreciate the work that has been done to refine the Results section and it has been effective. The themes are still well-chosen and the additional narrative at the start of each section works well in positioning it in the overall story. It creates better linkage as you move through the paper.
Page 14 - line 39 should be 'frameworks'

Corrected.

Discussion - The additional content on the positioning of display bans within broader national policy works really well and follow on cohesively from Results. I accept the point that elaborating any more on historical development of power structures would add too much to the word count and the additional comments in 'Limitations' covers the points raised.

I would be happy to see this paper published with the minor amendments stated. The findings are timely and are a good addition to current, and ongoing, policy discussions.

Jennifer McKell (Reviewer 2): I am grateful to the authors that they have responded to my earlier comments and I believe that the manuscript is now much improved. The Methods section is now much more transparent in terms of how interviews were conducted and the authors have set out why they used the Framework methods. The Results section is also much clearer and easier to read, making it possible to see the evidence for the arguments set out in the Discussion section.

I feel, however, that there are some issues outstanding with this manuscript but with some minor revision these could be addressed. My main concern is with how the policy contexts within Belgium and the Netherlands are handled. From the examples provided, it seems to me that the policy contexts here are quite complicated in that they contain elements demonstrated in both the pro and anti-tobacco control countries but this isn't fully acknowledged or addressed. I note that in the Discussion, there are descriptions of moves to introduce tobacco display bans, in Belgian's case from members of a ruling party and in the Netherlands from the government yet it is also acknowledged by the authors that health NGOs in these countries are relatively weak, particularly in Belgium where NGOs struggle to work together.

We have now addressed this in the first general part of the results’ section (page 9, line 32-42), where we state: ‘Overall, three clusters of countries emerged from the data: a policy monopoly
by health groups in Finland and Ireland, a policy monopoly by the tobacco industry and associated businesses in Germany and Italy, and Belgium and The Netherlands had more complicated policy contexts, as they demonstrated elements both indicative of health and industry monopolies.

Furthermore, we added to the discussion section an explicit statement saying that The Netherlands and Belgium contain elements of both other groups: ‘Belgium and the Netherlands may be positioned in between these extremes, having mixed profiles containing elements both indicative of health and industry monopolies.’ (Page 21, line 2-5).

Also, I'm not entirely clear on the distinction made between the frame of reference in Italy and Germany being focused upon tobacco use as a private matter for individuals, and the frame of reference in Belgium and the Netherlands being the avoidance of paternalism in people's lives. To me these sound very similar and so I think this need more careful delineation or explanation of why they are different.

We agree that the dominant policy frames of the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and Germany are very similar. The most noteworthy difference, however, is that in The Netherlands and Belgium, these frames seem very much tied to the members of the ruling liberal-conservative party, whereas in Germany and Italy, these ideas seem more wide-spread (also across policy domains and parties). We mention this in the results section now (page 10, line 17-27). We also added an extra Italian quote to better illustrate this (page 10, line 43-46).

Germany and Italy are different in another way as well, because there is no policy-debate (apart from compulsory debates). So this may further suggest that it is regarded as a minor problem, not to be subjected to governmental interference (e.g. not necessarily a policy issue, but an issue that needs to be dealt with in the private sphere) (page 11, line 5-10). An extra Italian quote is added here for further illustration (page 11, line 17-24).

Also, the interpretation of the FCTC article 5.3 appears to be very similar in Ireland and the Netherlands in that they appear to consult with tobacco industry on technical implementation issues only, yet there is more emphasis on Ireland distancing itself from tobacco industry.

We have highlighted the similarity between the Netherlands and Finland and Ireland (page 17, line 5-7). Furthermore, we once more highlighted the fact that it is not clear whether the Netherlands has a health policy monopoly (page 16, line 53-56), although the interpretation of 5.3 is similar to countries with a health monopoly.

On a side note the extra information included about the moves to implement display bans in the individual countries is a welcome addition but I think it would be better placed within the results section rather than the Discussion.

These policy processes were amply discussed during the interviews, yet we did not do empirical analyses on these processes. We feel more comfortable only presenting in the results’ section empirical evidence that emerged from systematic analyses of our data (and occasionally a reference to a source when it concerns factual phenomena such as the importance of cigarette
manufacture for the German economy). We therefore decided to leave the discussion about actual policy processes in the discussion.

Other smaller issues, and I apologise for not highlighting these earlier, are firstly, that I think in the explanation of the use of the theory of policy monopolies it necessary to explain why exactly this theory was used to examine tobacco control policy-making. Other theories are mentioned as having a useful contribution to make e.g corporatism, federalism, but the manuscript doesn't explain what the theory of policy monopolies adds particularly.

Implicitly, we provide a rationale for choosing an interest-group approach on page 4, line 68-72: ‘Advocacy by interest groups is an important concept in explaining achievements in tobacco control (9,10). Stronger regulations are readily attributed to the existence and activities of a relatively strong national network of health NGOs (9,11,12) and weaker or averted regulations are attributed to a relatively more dominant tobacco industry and associated businesses’. We have decided not to include the justification for this particular theory in the background (as opposed to, for example, the Advocacy Coalition Framework). We tried this, but it would in our opinion disrupt the flow of the background section. We will explain why we chose this framework here:

When studying interest groups, the most common approach is choosing a framework such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF). The most important reason that we did not use this framework, is because we take a static ‘snapshot’ of policy processes and related framing and institutions in six countries simultaneously. The ACF is better suited to explain policy change in a single country over a decade or more.

Furthermore, we wanted to use these cross-national data to demonstrate the role and importance of (political) institutions (mentioned on page 4, line 44-49) in relation to the relative power of interest groups. The theory on policy monopolies provides an interest-group theory that allows for the incorporation of such relevant (political) institutions. It posits that institutions are associated with the relative power of interest groups.

Secondly, I think it would be helpful to know if the themes included in the codebook were all pre-determined (deductive) or were also informed by the interviews themselves (inductive). I would presume from the fact that the interviewer encouraged spontaneous reflection from interviewees that the approach was inductive as well as deductive but this isn't apparent in the discussion of the analysis.

We now include a remark on the development of themes, stating that indeed it was both a top-down and bottom-up process (page 8, line 36-42): ‘Themes were developed both inductively and deductively, as the main codes (framing and institutions) were theoretically informed and sub codes were predominantly informed by the interviews.’

Finally, even more minor issues are that the manuscript would benefit from a closer proof read to pick up spelling and other errors, and some of the headings require review as they do not set out all sections clearly.
We indeed thoroughly proofread the manuscript one more time. We have harmonized some headings in the results section because they did indeed not fully correspond to the codes and sub-codes in table 1. We have now corrected this. We replaced ‘pro-tobacco advocacy institutions’ with ‘Retailers’, as it turned out that it were only retailers that eventually were captured in this code (Table 1, page 32). Furthermore, we replaced ‘Industry/business’ to ‘liberal-conservative’ frame in table 1, because this fitted the content of sub codes better, and the industry usually uses such frames, accentuating individual responsibility and freedom. Furthermore, we replaced ‘civil institutional arrangements (including businesses)’ with ‘Civil and business institutions’ and ‘Governmental institutional arrangements’ with ‘Government institutions’ (Table 1).