The Politics of Tobacco Control Policy Adoption: Lessons from India and Turkey

Background

Addressing the tobacco epidemic requires the adoption of evidence-based tobacco control policies consistent with the Framework Convention for Tobacco Control. Unfortunately, few studies have explored the political dynamics of tobacco control policy adoption to help us better understand why these policies are successfully adopted in some low- and middle-income countries but not in others.

In light of this gap, the primary aim of this study was to understand the process and determinants that led to the issuance of the 85% health warning labeling law in India in 2014 and the passage of the smoke-free law in Turkey in 2008.

Methods

Under the guidance of John Kingdon’s Multiples Streams Theory, a case study approach was used for each country whereby data were gathered from two different sources: key informant interviews (N=41) and document review (N=284). Subsequently, cross-case analysis was conducted to identify cross-cutting themes.

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Results

In India and Turkey, elections brought forth new leaders who were personally committed to tobacco control, and political parties that were eager to elevate the global status of their countries.

Understanding this context, international and national advocates worked collaboratively to seize these windows of opportunities; policy entrepreneurs gained direct access to new leaders, and framed the policies as measures that are not only evidence-based, but ones that can help their respective countries gain global leadership. To ensure that tobacco use continued to be regarded as a problem of concern, media advocacy was also employed to shed light on the severity of the epidemic.

Conclusions

This comparison suggests the need for advocates to:
• develop a rigorous understanding of their countries’ political context in order to formulate appropriate advocacy strategies (i.e. in these two cases, advocates framed tobacco control as foreign policy)
• be well-versed in the scientific evidence surrounding the harms of tobacco use and the effectiveness of the policy option
• work collaboratively, and
• be prepared to seize windows of opportunities