

# Why smoking bans may have advantage over higher tobacco taxes

December 17 2015

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Credit: Vera Kratochvil/public domain

If governments want to discourage smoking among young people, both high taxes and smoking bans do the job - but bans may have one key advantage.

A first-of-its-kind national study found that bans worked best at limiting smoking among more casual users: Those who smoked less than a pack a

day. Heavy taxes worked best with those who smoked more than a pack a day.

"Both taxes and bans have their place. But bans might stop casual smokers from becoming heavy tobacco users," said Mike Vuolo, lead author of the study and assistant professor of sociology at The Ohio State University.

"If you think of casual smoking as the beginning of the path to addiction, then bans might be the way to go."

The study is the first to look at how city-level government policies - both taxes and bans - affected actual smokers.

"We're not just looking at how state policies affect smoking rates in general. We were able to determine how individual smokers reacted to changes in government policies at the city level," Vuolo said.

"We were never able to get to that level of detail before."

Another key finding of the study was that combining smoking bans with high taxes didn't reduce overall smoking rates in a city more than either of the policies by itself.

The study was published online Dec. 17, 2015 in the *American Journal of Public Health*. Vuolo conducted the study with Brian Kelly and Joy Kadowaki of Purdue University.

Data on smokers came from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997. This study included 4,341 people from 487 cities who were interviewed every year from 2004 to 2011. All participants were between the age of 19 and 31 during the study. The NLSY97 is conducted by Ohio State's Center for Human Resource Research for the

## U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

Data on city-level smoking bans and tax rates came from the Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation (ANRF) tobacco policy database.

The database told the researchers which participants lived in cities where there was a comprehensive smoking ban, which means that workplaces, bars and restaurants are 100 percent tobacco free with no indoor exceptions.

The database also includes information on the total state and local tobacco excise taxes for cigarette packs sold in each city.

The researchers found big changes in both bans and taxes from 2004 to 2011. The percentage living in a city with a comprehensive ban increased from 14.9 percent to 58.7 percent during that time, while average taxes increased from 81 cents to \$1.65 per pack.

The cities with the highest rates of smoking were those that had no smoking bans and low or no taxes on cigarettes, Vuolo said.

Results showed that those residing in cities with bans were 21 percent less likely to currently smoke at all when compared to those who lived in cities without bans. But taxes did not have a significant effect on casual smokers.

"There's a lot of evidence that casual, social smokers are influenced by their environment. If they can't smoke inside with their friends at a restaurant or bar, they may choose not to smoke at all," Vuolo said.

By contrast, those who smoked more than a pack a day were primarily deterred, not by the bans, but by the economic costs - in other words, higher taxes.

The fact that combining high taxes with [smoking bans](#) didn't have an additional impact on [smoking rates](#) means that policymakers have several effective options for tobacco control, Vuolo said.

"They are both effective in different ways. Smoking bans might be more effective in preventing new smokers, but it definitely pays to do something," he said.

"The worst case is not having bans or taxes."

Provided by The Ohio State University

Citation: Why smoking bans may have advantage over higher tobacco taxes (2015, December 17) retrieved 8 April 2024 from

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