

A students' assignment for a class at the  
Department of Political Science at the University of Zurich

Research Question

# Women Preferences and Smoking Bans in the Swiss Federal State

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Research results and practical observation point to the fact that secondhand smoke policies are concerns specific to women. In Switzerland, smoking bans have been adopted in most cantons, very often through popular vote — meaning that these concerns could not be adequately recognized through local parliaments. Therefore we propose the following research question: What is the relationship between Swiss women’s political participation at the cantonal level and the implementation of different smoking bans among Switzerland’s federal units?

## 1 Secondhand smoke as a gendered issue

There are multiple reasons why the issue of secondhand smoke is a particular concern to women: They are more affected by it, and they tend to favor preventive measures over economic concerns. Moreover, actual political behavior by women shows a gender gap on the evaluation of tobacco-related policies.

### 1.1 Women are more vulnerable and exposed to secondhand smoke

Several medical studies have shown, that women show higher levels of health risks by equal quantities of smoking or secondhand smoke. For example, Njølstad et al. (1996) show that smoking is a higher risk factor for infarction for women than for men. Other diseases where women are more vulnerable to smoke than men are increased bronchial responsiveness and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease among others (Langhammer et al., 2003).

Furthermore, pregnant women do not only consider their health while getting into contact with smoke, but also of the health of the child they are bearing. Secondhand smoke increases the probability of fetal mortality and preterm delivery and also slows fetal growth (Kharrazi et al., 2004).

Additionally, women are more exposed to secondhand smoke at the workplace, because of the composition of the relevant workforce. Workers are mostly exposed to secondhand smoke in the foodservice sector (Radtke et al., 2007) — the discussed smoking bans seek to protect them — which is typically associated with women service personal.

In Switzerland, 56% of foodservice workers were women in 2005. Averaging over the last 20 years, only few sectors have had a higher women’s participation to the workforce.<sup>1</sup>

This is why, assuming a certain degree of information and self interest, women are expected to be more sympathetic to smoking bans.

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<sup>1</sup>These are textile and clothing production, retail trade, social welfare and healthcare. Data from the job statistics by the Swiss federal administration. Own computation. “Vollzeitbeschäftigte nach Wirtschaftsabteilungen und Geschlecht”, <http://www.bfs.admin.ch/bfs/portal/de/index/themen/03/02/blank/data/02.html>, retrieved January 26, 2013.

## 1.2 Gender gap in the political preferences

Gender studies theorists assert that women's and men's political preferences — hence voting patterns — are fundamentally different. This gender gap has been depicted as the one between the “economic man” and the “social woman” (Gidengil, 1995). Gilligan (1982) posits that moral issues are framed differently across genders: where men see competing rights, women see conflicting responsibilities. This, in turn, leads to women valuing community, connectedness and attachment more than men, who value instead autonomy, individuation, liberty and privacy (Gidengil, 1995, p. 385–387). This dichotomy has also been labeled with the terms ethic of justice (men) and ethic of care (woman) (Taylor, 1998, p. 479–480). When it comes to evaluating actual policies, women are more skeptical about free markets and competition, and less so about state intervention. Moreover, they are less likely to rely solely on economic argumentations (Gidengil, 1995, p. 388–390, 403–404).

Within this theoretical frame it is easy to see why women are more likely to favor smoking bans: the commonly spread arguments against the regulation of smoking in public places revolve around personal and entrepreneurial liberty, self regulation by free market forces, economic losses in foodservice sector,<sup>2</sup> whereas the arguments in favor are about the reduction of tobacco consumption, thus public health, and concern for the well being of the workers exposed to secondhand smoke.

## 1.3 Empirics about women and smoking bans

Despite the efforts of the tobacco industry, smoking bans were introduced in nearly all domestic US flights in 1989. The Association of Flight Attendants played a prominent role as they became advocates for smoke free flights. Their main concern was the exposure to passenger smoking by airline workers and the related health issues (Pan et al., 2005). Data shows that workers in the flight attendants sector are predominantly female: in the US there were 19.3 male for 100 female in 1980 and 26.4 male for 100 female flight attendants in 2007 (Saenz and Evans, 2009).

It is telling, that the diffusion of smoking bans at the workplace started in that service sector, whose personal was mostly women.

The Social Science Research Center of the University of Mississippi conducts since 2000 the “Mississippi social science survey of tobacco control” (Mississippi Tobacco Data Workgroup, 2011) with the purpose of measuring “the fundamental position of tobacco control in society”.<sup>3</sup> Questions in the survey range from “if children are not present but will be later, it is not ok to smoke inside the home” to questions supporting smoke-free areas like “beaches should be smoke free”. 14 out of the 17 questions asked in the 2011 survey showed significantly different answers between women and men. Women always

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<sup>2</sup>Volksinitiative “Für ein liberales Rauchergesetz” — Argumente, <http://www.freie-wirte.ch/argumente.htm>, retrieved January 26, 2013.

<sup>3</sup><http://surveillance.mstobacodata.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/2011-MS-SCS-ABF-RDD-Merged-Codebook-1.pdf>, retrieved January 26, 2013.

avored smoking bans more than men.<sup>4</sup>

With Funk and Gathmann (2010) there is also a study directly measuring women's preferences on selected policies in Switzerland. These are the policies submitted to direct democratic decisions through popular votes (either referendums or initiatives at the federal level) between 1981 and 2003. The authors evaluated survey data on individual voting behavior. It indeed showed consistent patterns of gender gap, even after controlling for some socioeconomic variables. Women were significantly more likely to favor environmental protection, oppose expansion of the army and favor support for the old age and the disabled. Moreover, among the sample of 197 votes considered, the largest difference in approval rates between men and women, that is the largest gender gap, was found on an initiative bundling policies to prevent tobacco consumption (17.7%).

## 2 Adoption of smoking bans

Through history, there have been many different kinds of smoking bans. However, the first nationwide ban on smoking in workplaces by a modern western democracy was imposed by Ireland in 2004. Soon Norway and Italy followed and nowadays most European countries have some kind of anti-smoking legislation.<sup>5</sup>

### 2.1 Previous research on enactment of smoking regulations

An european milestone case for tobacco control policy is the smoking regulation introduced in 2005 in Italy. Mele and Compagni (2010, p. 830–832) identify four factors in the strategy of the Health Minister that led to the success of this policy: (1) reframing the issue from “smoking cessations” to “non-smokers protections”; (2) delegation of the debate to the State-Regions Joint Panel that further developed the standards and nature of the law; (3) Implementation of polls and surveys to monitor public support and debate with counterparts; (4) Other strategies concerning the legislative process.

In addition to this, Toshkov (2012, p. 15–18) identifies — in a comparative analysis of policy-making concerning restrictions on smoking in bars and restaurants in 29 European countries — national and international factors that influence the adoption, enactment and enforcement of such restrictions. The smoking prevalence in society and the scale of tobacco production in a country extend enactment time and increase the probability that the restriction will not be rigidly enforced. Furthermore, public support seems to be an important determinant for “duration-till-enactment and of the strictness of the smoking bans”. They argue that politicians are opportunistic and will take their position depending on the mood of the public, since smoking bans are not an ideological debate. Beside these national factors, Toshkov also states that the horizontal policy diffusion between countries is an important determinant for smoking restrictions.

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<sup>4</sup><http://mstobaccodata.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/my-brothers-keeper-public-opinion.pdf>, retrieved January 26, 2013.

<sup>5</sup>European public health Alliance, <http://www.eph.org/a/1941>, retrieve January 26, 2013.

Interestingly both papers mention public opinion and public support, but do not further analyse how local interest groups or sectors from the society may influence adoption and enactment of such bans. Taking into account that secondhand smoke is a gender issue, hence analysing the role of women concerning smoking bans should give us further insights into the adoption of this kind regulation.

## 2.2 Diffusion process among Swiss cantons

The establishment of legislation banning smoke in public spaces across most Swiss cantons has typically been considered as a diffusion process. It is no coincidence, that the first canton introducing legislation —one of the harshest, inspired to the Italian solution— was the culturally and geographically close Ticino. After that, many cantons followed. Later, in 2010, federal regulation was enacted in order to guarantee a minimum level of protection in the whole country. Cantons still may keep or establish stronger legislation, and 15 out of 26 have done so.<sup>6</sup>

We think however, that it is also very interesting that the majority of these proposal could be enacted only after a popular vote —this is the case in at least 11 cantons out of the 15 having stronger regulation— which was very often an initiative —at least in six cases, including Ticino, which arguably set off the process.<sup>7</sup>

## 3 Women’s participation in Swiss politics

The relevant United Nations body considers that women in Switzerland are still underrepresented “in elected and appointed positions in public life”. Moreover they are disadvantaged when it comes to access to political decision making (CEDAW, 2009, p. 3, 5).

In the cantonal parliaments for instance, they are still heavily underrepresented: For the year 2011 Basel City and Glarus were the cantons with most and least womens in their parliament, with 37% and 11.7% respectively, and the nationwide median was 24%.<sup>8</sup> This is relevant for us, because our research question focuses on the establishment of smoking bans at the cantonal level.

## 4 Theory on Swiss direct democracy instruments

Direct democracy in Switzerland allows the electorate to review decisions of the Parliament through the referendum or to incorporate their own ideas in the legislation

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<sup>6</sup>“Schutz vor Passivrauchen in den Kantonen”, Swiss federal administration, (<http://www.bag.admin.ch/themen/drogen/00041/03814/03815/index.html?lang=de>, retrieved January 26, 2013.

<sup>7</sup>No systematical descriptive study of the processes of implementation at the cantonal level could be found. This numbers are based on Wikipedia, [http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nichtraucherschutzgesetze\\_in\\_der\\_Schweiz](http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nichtraucherschutzgesetze_in_der_Schweiz), retrieved January 26, 2013.

<sup>8</sup>BADAC, Datenbank über die Schweizer Kantone und Städte, [http://www.badac.ch/db/db.php?abs=canton\\_x&code=Ci1.10a2MATIC](http://www.badac.ch/db/db.php?abs=canton_x&code=Ci1.10a2MATIC), retrieved January 26, 2013.

through popular initiative (Linder, 2005, p. 241). Theory suggests that referendums should not take place if all actors had full information. The coalition would know if the referendum is capable of winning a majority or not (Linder, 2005, p. 259). Moreover, referendum democracy is considered to have an integration effect: it assures that no relevant political group is permanently left outside the decision making process (Linder, 2005, p. 262–263). This suggests that women’s lack of participation at the parliamentary level could be compensated by their participation to popular votes.

## 5 Conclusion

We identified protection from secondhand smoke at the workplace as an issue of particular concern to women. Women are significantly more likely to favor smoking bans. The Swiss case is very interesting: because of the federalism and the direct democracy, it could produce insights into the adoption process of this kind of regulation and the role of women. Women are in fact underrepresented in cantonal politics, they can however vote. As a conclusion, we suggest following research question: What is the effect of women political participation on the introduction of smoking ban regulation at Swiss cantonal level? More generally, we urge to look at smoking policies as a gendered issue. This has already been recognized by medical literature (Greaves and Jategaonkar, 2006), apparently not so much by political scientists.

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