Tobacco Industry Interference in Aotearoa New Zealand:
An Analysis of a Campaign Disrupting the Retailer Reduction Policy

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INTRODUCTION

- Aotearoa New Zealand's endgame legislation proposed reducing tobacco retail outlets from 6,000 to 600.
- Tobacco companies developed an astroturf "Save our Stores" campaign to undermine this measure.
- We examined arguments and disinformation used in the "Save our Stores" campaign.

METHODS

- We used the Policy Dystopia Model[1] as a framework and examined discursive strategies (arguments) used in the "Save Our Stores" campaign.
- We classified arguments deductively and used an inductive approach to analyse new arguments.
- We critically reviewed the arguments, frames, and narratives identified.

RESULTS

Economic Costs

THE GOVERNMENT'S WAR ON SMOKING COULD COST YOU UP TO **$1.8 BILLION**
STOP HIGHER TAXES

- The campaign was primarily concerned with impacts on small businesses, claiming the government *"will force dairies to close."*
- New industry arguments stated cost-of-living concerns would be exacerbated due to decreased tax revenue.

...will **destroy small businesses**. It is as simple as that.

Taking away this much money from the public purse when Kiwis are already feeling the pinch, **would hurt families who are already struggling to make ends meet.**

Crime – Illicit Trade and Violence

SOS
Tobacco taxes pay for **35,000 POLICE OFFICERS**
KEEP THE TAX INCOME

- The SOS campaign linked economic and crime narratives.
- Facebook advertisements stoked fear by claiming the law would lead to additional retail burglaries, increased gang power, and diminished public safety.

Politics / Governance

TOBACCO PROHIBITION IS COMING TO NEW ZEALAND
CLICK HERE TO STOP IT

- The SOS campaign framed the government as authoritarian and anti-freedom.
- Campaign messages often used the word "prohibition".
- Arguments framed all New Zealanders, whether they smoke or not, as victims of an uncaring state.

...the **illicit trade** in tobacco products will boom and be **controlled by criminal networks.**

Disinformation!

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- The most common arguments focused on economic and social harms, such as illicit trade and rising crime, which supported a narrative of social discord and lawlessness.
- We identified a new normalisation narrative that framed novel measures as risky and experimental, and likely to bring unintended adverse outcomes.
- New arguments that could extend the Policy Dystopia Model[1] included cost-of-living concerns and violent crime.
- Policy makers should pre-empt known industry arguments.

	Tobacco Industry	E-cigarette & nicotine product industry (excluding pharma)	Pharma Industry
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Reference
1. Ulucanlar S, Fooks GJ, Gilmore AB. The Policy Dystopia Model: An Interpretive Analysis of Tobacco Industry Political Activity. *PLOS Medicine*. 2016; doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1002125

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