

What do South Africans think about SA's proposed Tobacco Bill?

New research reveals that the general South African public views the burgeoning growth of illegal cigarette sales in the country as of far greater importance to address, than the Government's proposed plain packaging for tobacco products.



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The South African Government's Draft Control of Tobacco Products and Electronic Delivery Systems Bill, published in early 2018, includes a number of proposed new measures to regulate the sale of tobacco products: the banning of smoking in all public spaces, introducing standardised (plain) packaging on all tobacco, and a retail display ban at selling points, amongst other proposals.

However, in a national survey commissioned by JTI South Africa, when South Africans are asked to directly rank plain packaging as a policy priority compared to 10 other areas for the Health Minister to consider, it comes in last, with 99% of South Africans saying it is more important to prioritise the provision of better hospitals, healthcare and infrastructure.



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The research also shows that:

- 86% of South Africans agree that the government should prioritise developing and investing in an effective policy to reduce the amount of illegal cigarettes in the country as opposed to plain packaging;
- At least 88% of South Africans agree that if the government wants to reduce youth smoking, its priority should be enforcing existing regulations, with 92% stating Government's priority should be education programmes in media and in schools; and
- Most South Africans (87%) think the Health Minister should prioritise more effectively enforcing existing rules prohibiting the sale of alcohol and cigarettes to minors.

There are therefore strong results demonstrating that South Africans do not see plain packaging as a priority policy to reduce youth smoking:

- Enforcing existing regulations is considered more important
- The main issue with youth smoking is believed to be the poor enforcement of existing regulations
- Education is regarded as a more important priority than regulation



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The survey further reveals that the majority of South Africans believe plain packaging for cigarettes is unnecessary, a poor use of government resources, and not the most important or effective policy the government should pursue if it wants to reduce youth smoking.

In addition, respondents expressed a high level of concern about plain packaging resulting in a number of major negative consequences: Increasing illegal cigarette sales, increasing counterfeit cigarettes and benefitting organised crime.

Respondents strongly believed that it was important for an independent evaluation of the areas above to be undertaken before plain packaging is introduced, and also independent evaluation of a reduction in taxes and the impact on government budgets.



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"As the sale of illegal tobacco spirals out of control in SA, authorities continue to insist on further restricting the legal industry that complies with current tobacco regulations", says Bongani Mshibe, JTI's corporate affairs and communications director for South, East & Central Africa.

"Rather, they should focus their efforts on enforcing the existing and already sufficient regulations, working with the tobacco sector as a whole to combat illegal trade, and concentrate on introducing 'youth-centered' tobacco prevention programmes. It seems South Africans agree with this view. The question is whether anyone is listening to them," he concludes.

Research methodology: 1,114 South African adults (18+) were interviewed using CATI (Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) methodology in all main local languages, between 14 and 27 November 2018. The survey was regionally and demographically representative of South Africa's population.

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