

Monitoring political discourse around end-game goals

Using automated textual analysis to enable an on-going overview for tobacco control

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Political support crucial to end-game success

Achieving NZ's smokefree 2025 goal will require new policy measures that the tobacco industry will contest. Successful end-game policy thus depends on both robust evidence and sustained political support¹.

Discourse monitoring can inform advocacy strategies by identifying how and when politicians discuss the goal, who the goal 'champions' are, and how strongly the goal features within wider tobacco-related communications.

We analysed New Zealand political speeches and press releases for mentions of the Smokefree 2025 goal before and after its adoption by the Government in March 2011.

Aspects of the monitoring can be automated

We analysed:

- Over 12,000 speeches and press releases by NZ politicians
- From two databases^{2, 3} covering April 2010 to July 2012

We developed custom algorithms to:

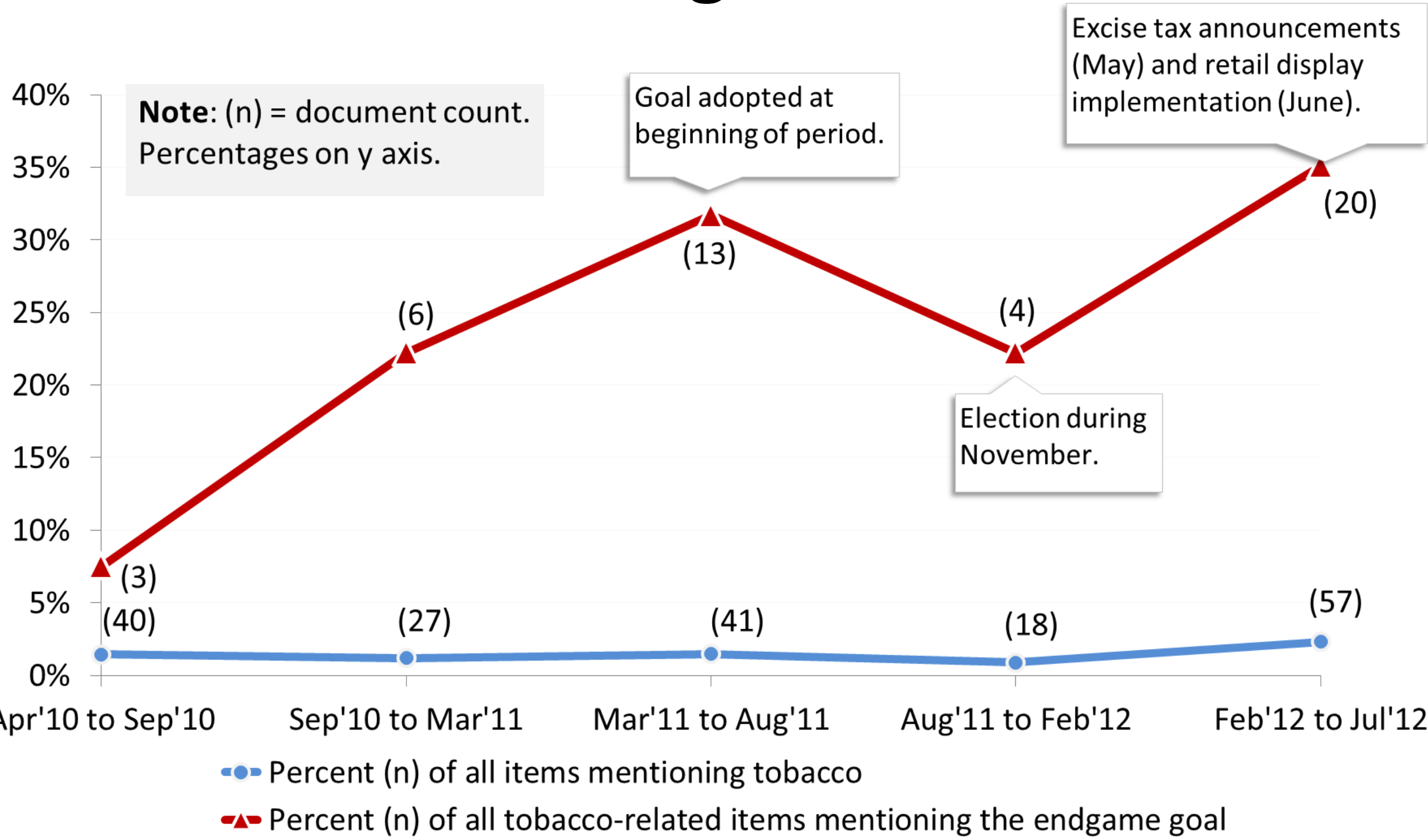
- Detect mentions of the 2025 goal
- Assign authorship to documents*
- Capture metadata, such as the date of release.



As well as tracking overall tobacco and end-game goal references, we explored references by political party.

* Human verification was used for a small proportion of documents flagged by the algorithms as having ambiguous authorship. We also manually verified samples of the algorithm outputs at each stage of the development process.

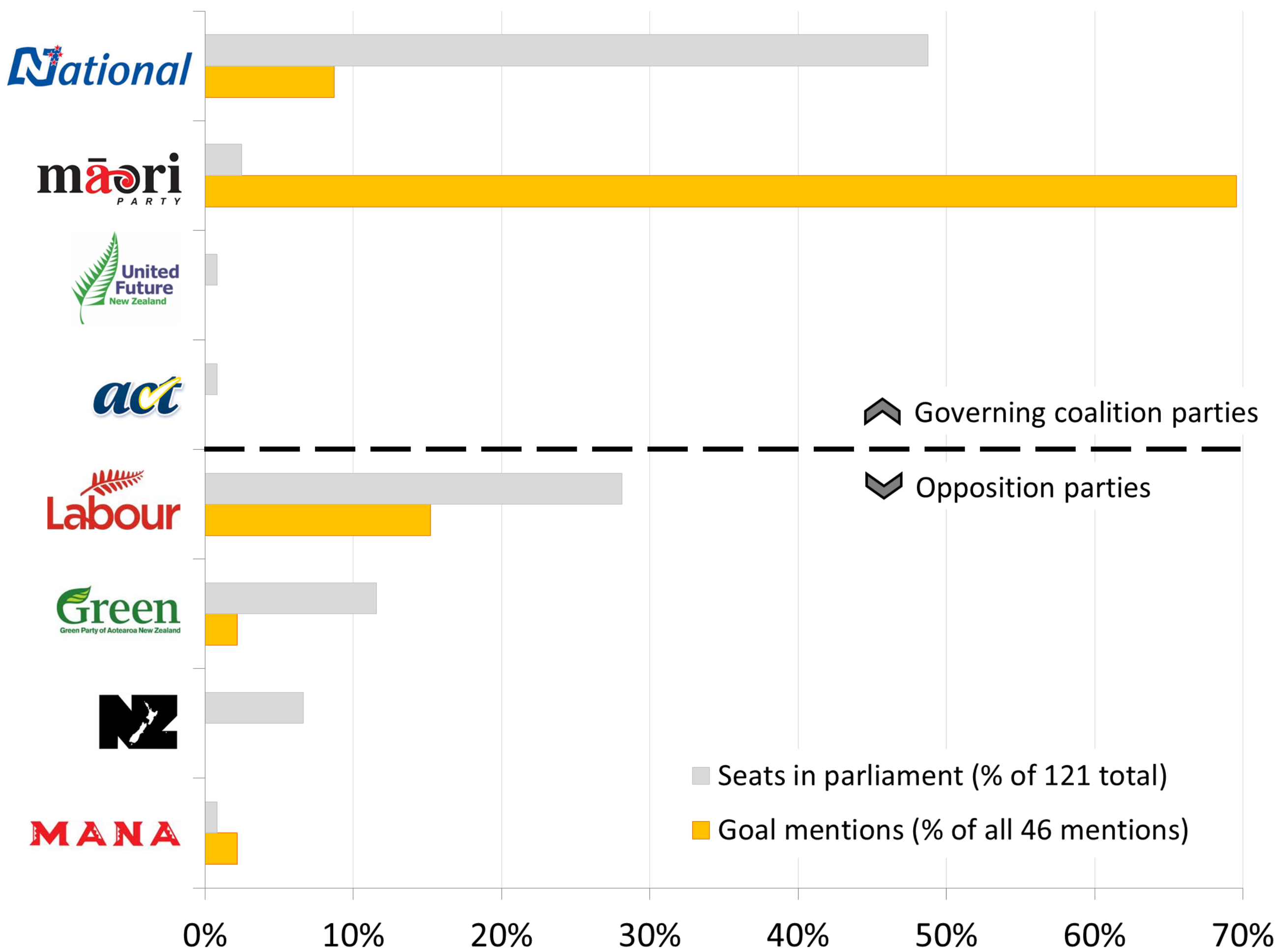
Mentions of the 2025 goal rose...



Total 2025 goal references increased from 3 at the start of the monitoring period to 13 around the time that the government adopted it as a national goal. After a dip at election time these increased again to 20 in the first half of 2012.

...But there were imbalances in support

2025 Goal mentions by NZ political party



Seventy percent of all documents mentioning the goal came from a minor coalition party holding three seats (2%) in the 121 seat parliament. Most of those were produced by one politician, who is retiring in 2014.

In contrast, politicians from the largest governing party (59 seats [49%]) contributed 9% of all documents mentioning the goal. The government's Minister of Health mentioned the goal in just one of his 26 tobacco-related communications during the analysis period.

Key implications for end-game advocacy

These exploratory results indicate that sustained long-term progress toward the 2025 goal may require more politicians, representing more diverse political interests, to adopt and actively champion it. Tobacco control advocates might enhance goal salience by emphasising links between the goal and shorter-term issues of political import.



The results also highlight a need to maintain goal salience in public discourse during elections.

This method can be used to help identify the degree to which political support and salience exists for an end-game goal, and inform the targeting of advocacy efforts to enhance it.

Citations

[1] Currie L, Clancy L. The road to smoke-free legislation in Ireland. *Addiction* 2011;106(1):15-24.

[2] New Zealand Government. The official website of the New Zealand Government. Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 7 March, 2013. Available from: <http://beehive.govt.nz/>

[3] Scoop Media. Scoop independent news. Wellington, New Zealand. Accessed 7 March, 2013. Available from: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/>

This project used the following open source software:



See more research at <http://aspire2025.org.nz>

ASPIRE2025

Research for a tobacco-free Aotearoa

