

“In the 20th century, the tobacco epidemic killed 100 million people worldwide. During the 21st century, it could kill 1 billion.”

—WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION
MPOWER REPORT, 2008

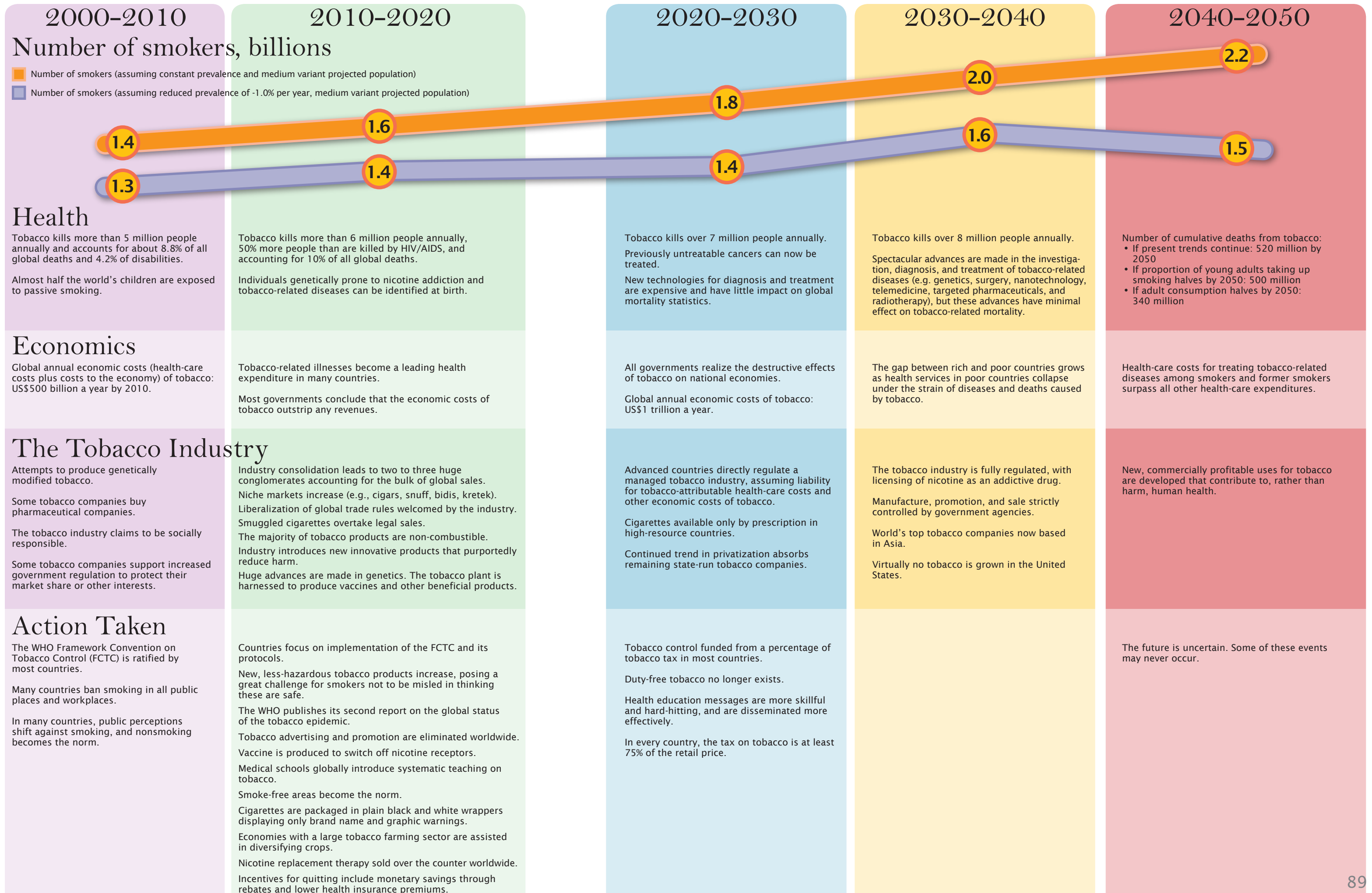
Future predictions are by their nature speculative, but some things are certain: the tobacco pandemic, with its enormous health and economic costs, is both increasing and also shifting from developed to developing nations, with more women smoking than ever before.

The tobacco industry is consolidating and shifting focus from high-resource to low- and middle-resource countries, where there may be less government regulation and organized public opposition to the machinations of transnational tobacco companies.

The global tobacco pandemic is worse today than it was 50 years ago, and it will be even worse in another 50 years unless extraordinary efforts are made now. Even if smoking prevalence rates begin to decline, the number of smokers in the world will inexorably rise for the foreseeable future, due principally to world population growth.

Many countries, including low-resource countries, have shown that tobacco can be controlled and smoking rates can be reduced. These successes can be reproduced by any responsible nation, but only through concerted, comprehensive, and sustained governmental and community action. The future is uncertain, and some of the events predicted here may never occur. However, preventing youth initiation and encouraging cessation clearly require steadfast political will to tackle the tobacco industry and allocate appropriate resources proportional to the health and economic magnitude of the tobacco problem.

The means to curb this pandemic are clear and within reach.



2000-2010

Number of smokers, billions

Number of smokers (assuming constant prevalence and medium variant projected population)

Number of smokers (assuming reduced prevalence of -1.0% per year, medium variant projected population)

Health

Tobacco kills more than 5 million people annually and accounts for about 8.8% of all global deaths and 4.2% of disabilities.

Almost half the world's children are exposed to passive smoking.

Economics

Global annual economic costs (health-care costs plus costs to the economy) of tobacco: US\$500 billion a year by 2010.

The Tobacco Industry

Attempts to produce genetically modified tobacco.

Some tobacco companies buy pharmaceutical companies.

The tobacco industry claims to be socially responsible.

Some tobacco companies support increased government regulation to protect their market share or other interests.

Action Taken

The WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is ratified by most countries.

Many countries ban smoking in all public places and workplaces.

In many countries, public perceptions shift against smoking, and nonsmoking becomes the norm.

2010-2020

Tobacco kills more than 6 million people annually, 50% more people than are killed by HIV/AIDS, and accounting for 10% of all global deaths.

Individuals genetically prone to nicotine addiction and tobacco-related diseases can be identified at birth.

Tobacco-related illnesses become a leading health expenditure in many countries.

Most governments conclude that the economic costs of tobacco outstrip any revenues.

Industry consolidation leads to two to three huge conglomerates accounting for the bulk of global sales. Niche markets increase (e.g., cigars, snuff, bidis, kretek). Liberalization of global trade rules welcomed by the industry. Smuggled cigarettes overtake legal sales. The majority of tobacco products are non-combustible. Industry introduces new innovative products that purportedly reduce harm. Huge advances are made in genetics. The tobacco plant is harnessed to produce vaccines and other beneficial products.

Countries focus on implementation of the FCTC and its protocols.

New, less-hazardous tobacco products increase, posing a great challenge for smokers not to be misled in thinking these are safe.

The WHO publishes its second report on the global status of the tobacco epidemic.

Tobacco advertising and promotion are eliminated worldwide. Vaccine is produced to switch off nicotine receptors. Medical schools globally introduce systematic teaching on tobacco. Smoke-free areas become the norm. Cigarettes are packaged in plain black and white wrappers displaying only brand name and graphic warnings. Economies with a large tobacco farming sector are assisted in diversifying crops. Nicotine replacement therapy sold over the counter worldwide. Incentives for quitting include monetary savings through rebates and lower health insurance premiums.

2020-2030

Tobacco kills over 7 million people annually. Previously untreatable cancers can now be treated.

New technologies for diagnosis and treatment are expensive and have little impact on global mortality statistics.

All governments realize the destructive effects of tobacco on national economies.

Global annual economic costs of tobacco: US\$1 trillion a year.

Advanced countries directly regulate a managed tobacco industry, assuming liability for tobacco-attributable health-care costs and other economic costs of tobacco.

Cigarettes available only by prescription in high-resource countries.

Continued trend in privatization absorbs remaining state-run tobacco companies.

Tobacco control funded from a percentage of tobacco tax in most countries.

Duty-free tobacco no longer exists.

Health education messages are more skillful and hard-hitting, and are disseminated more effectively.

In every country, the tax on tobacco is at least 75% of the retail price.

2030-2040

Tobacco kills over 8 million people annually.

Spectacular advances are made in the investigation, diagnosis, and treatment of tobacco-related diseases (e.g. genetics, surgery, nanotechnology, telemedicine, targeted pharmaceuticals, and radiotherapy), but these advances have minimal effect on tobacco-related mortality.

The gap between rich and poor countries grows as health services in poor countries collapse under the strain of diseases and deaths caused by tobacco.

The tobacco industry is fully regulated, with licensing of nicotine as an addictive drug.

Manufacture, promotion, and sale strictly controlled by government agencies.

World's top tobacco companies now based in Asia.

Virtually no tobacco is grown in the United States.

The future is uncertain. Some of these events may never occur.

2040-2050

Number of cumulative deaths from tobacco:

- If present trends continue: 520 million by 2050
- If proportion of young adults taking up smoking halves by 2050: 500 million
- If adult consumption halves by 2050: 340 million

Health-care costs for treating tobacco-related diseases among smokers and former smokers surpass all other health-care expenditures.

New, commercially profitable uses for tobacco are developed that contribute to, rather than harm, human health.

The future is uncertain. Some of these events may never occur.