

# The Truth Behind the Tweet: Engaging Communities of Color in Examining Tobacco Industry Narratives on the Proposed Menthol Ban

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# Menthol tobacco use is a health equity and social justice issue

- 1** Targeted marketing of menthol to communities of color (e.g., Black, Hispanic/Latinx)
- 2** Disproportionate use of menthol cigarettes in Black communities
- 3** Higher rate of lung cancer among Black smokers compared to non-Black smokers



# Agenda setting happens on social media and policy makers pay attention

## Attention

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Growing political debate around the menthol ban on social media

## Volume

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Large amounts of online content generated by policy events

## Activity

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Active social media response with anti-regulatory sentiment

## Uncertainty

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Uncertain about opinions of those most impacted by the policy

**Social media listening and analytics provide an opportunity for near real-time monitoring of public opinion**

Measures amount and diffusion of online posts



Relies on expert input to train the algorithms and interpret results

May be prone to bias in machine learning

Can miss the lived experience of the audience of interest if they are not posting



**We wanted to understand how people who identify as Black/African American and Hispanic/Latinx think and feel about the recently proposed ban on menthol cigarettes and the effect it will have on their communities.**



# Advance our understanding of the intersection of anti-regulatory sentiment and the menthol ban on social media

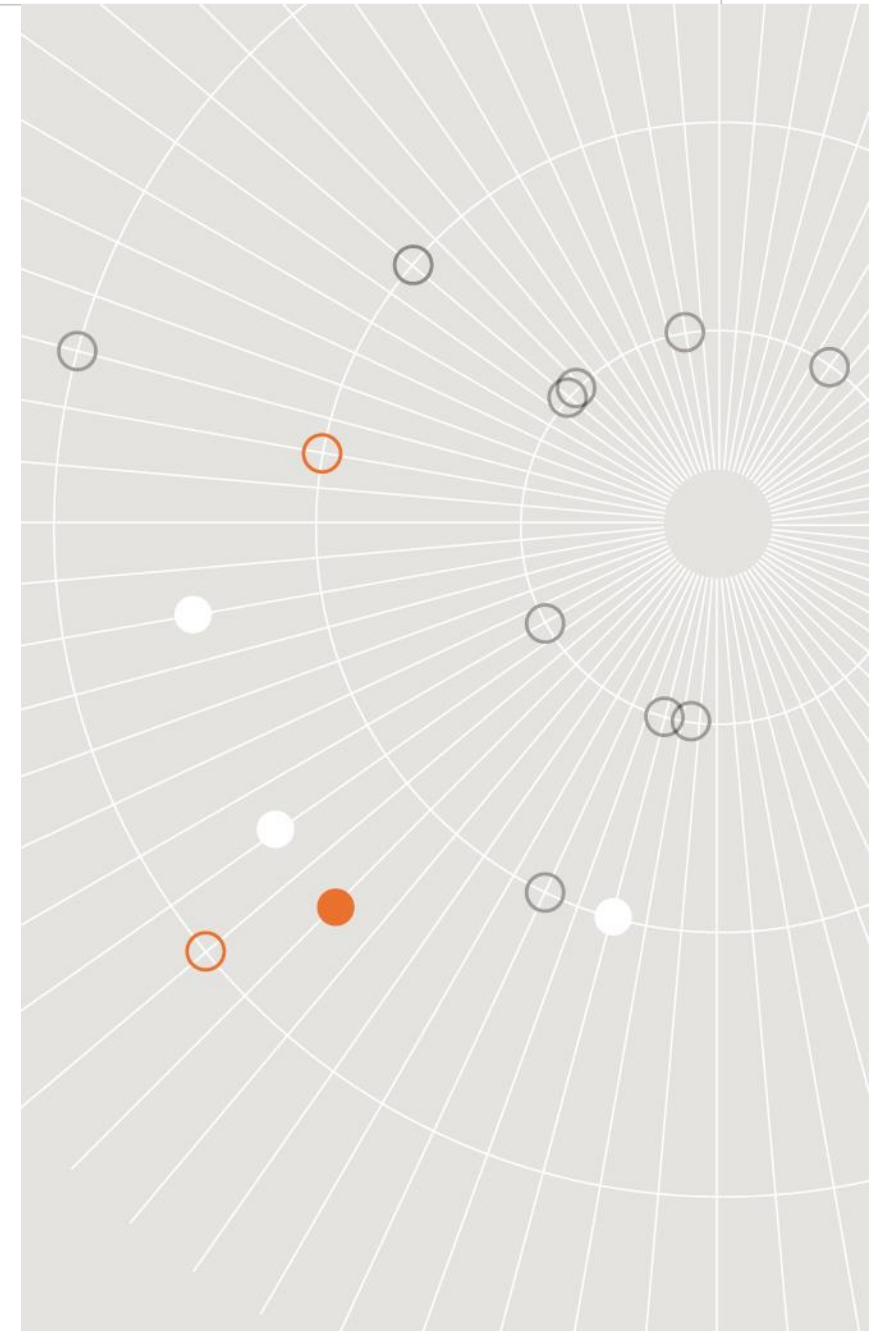


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# Methods

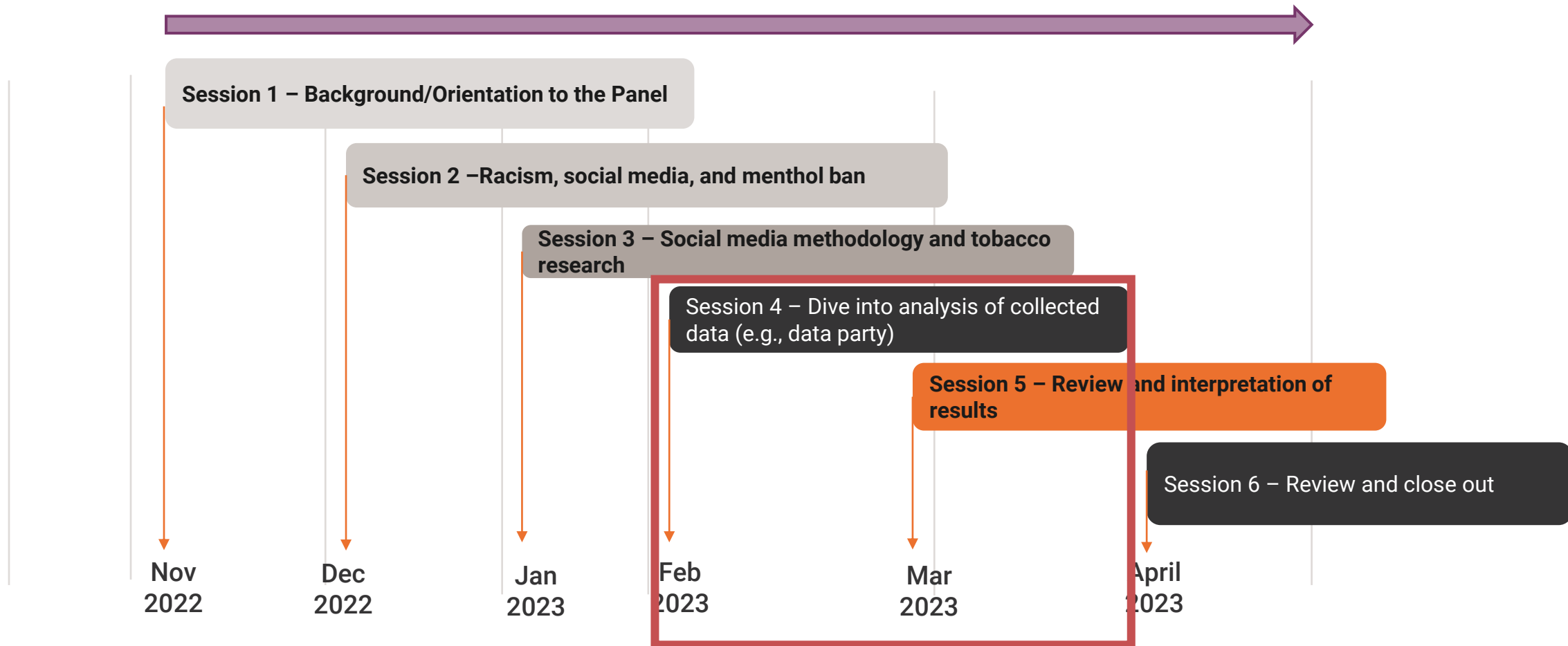
The community engagement panel (CEP) reviewed our process for collecting and analyzing social media data and discussed the best ways to involve their community in research.

- Participated in six 90-min sessions
- Learned about the research methods SDC uses, the menthol ban, and related findings
- Examined social media narratives around the menthol ban and discussed opportunities for counter messaging related to mis and disinformation
- Reflected on and discussed how individual and community-level social media habits may or may not intersect with tobacco research





# Community Engagement Panel Timeline



## Why host a data party?

A virtual **data party** is a time-limited event of 2-3 hours where diverse audience members come together to collectively analyze data in a culturally responsive and equitable way.

- Increase audiences' knowledge of area
- Improve interpretation
- Identify differences in people's perceptions
- Increase audiences' capacity to understand and use data
- Empower participants/community members' voices and incorporate/ affirm lived experience
- Identify what data might still be needed
- Increase audiences' ownership of data
- Build consensus on the results & conclusions
- Develop more realistic recommendations
- Increase buy-in for later implementation
- Inform better programming and policies.

We reviewed 2 weeks of data collected after April 28th, 2022

Tweet examples covered themes challenging the menthol ban on the basis of:

- Illicit Market
- Government Incompetence
- Government Persecution

FDA NEWS RELEASE

## FDA Proposes Rules Prohibiting Menthol Cigarettes and Flavored Cigars to Prevent Youth Initiation, Significantly Reduce Tobacco-Related Disease and Death

[f Share](#) [t Tweet](#) [in LinkedIn](#) [✉ Email](#) [🖨 Print](#)

For Immediate Release: April 28, 2022

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# Results

Kat Murti Retweeted



**Jeffrey A. Singer**  
@dr4liberty

The FDA's proposed menthol ban may heap more harm on the very communities it seeks to help. @CatoHealth @gbentley1 @jacobsullum @KatMurti @cobrown



ocregister.com  
Banning the sale of menthol cigarettes may do more harm than good  
The FDA's proposed menthol ban may heap more harm on the very communities it seeks to help.

9:41 AM · May 6, 2022

5 Retweets 2 Quote Tweets 12 Likes

The group was not in agreement with the tweets and offered counter-arguments; namely that the harm from the menthol cigarettes themselves far outweighs the harm that might come from the ban (including possible increases of illicit market activity and police response).



**Irina Asanova**  
@IrinaAsanova1

Replying to @Bradstradomas and @NBCNews

I agree with you! And how does banning anything stop anything? Remember prohibition (ie banning booze)? That just sent it underground. As for the menthol ban, kids will just start with the hardcore cigs - making it easier to start dope, crack etc! Good call, FDA!

4:24 PM · Apr 28, 2022



**National Review**  
@NRO

A menthol ban wouldn't stamp out cigarette smoking. It would simply lead to more illicit trade and less tax revenue to deal with the negative health effects of smoking | By Jared Walczak



nationalreview.com  
The Unintended Consequences of Menthol Bans  
Not only do menthol bans come at a cost to states, but they come with little public-health advancement to show for it.

7:40 PM · Apr 22, 2022

1 Quote Tweet 8 Likes

The group suggested something is better than nothing, and that it's worth the effort even if it helps a small group.

 **ScherrCropper**  
@ScherrCropper

Why does the FDA even feel "*the need to issue more bans when youth and young adult smoking continues to decline.*"

 **Lindsey Stroud** @lmstroud89 · Apr 29, 2022  
About that proposed federal menthol ban - read my latest for @IWF

[iwf.org/2022/04/29/fda...](https://iwf.org/2022/04/29/fda...)

12:09 PM · Apr 30, 2022

3 Retweets 1 Quote Tweet 20 Likes

Cloud Chamber Vapor Retweeted

 **Gregory Conley** ✓  
@GregTHR

Despite my cynicism, I am often optimistic about the future.

I thought that if a menthol ban was formally proposed, the FDA would highlight the availability of menthol harm reduction products as a key reason for doing it.

With zero menthol vapes authorized, I'll take the L.



12:37 PM · Apr 28, 2022

5 Retweets 23 Likes



The group seemed more responsive to the claims in the tweets, acknowledging that they, too, are concerned about criminalization of menthol products, and that any ban on the manufacturer level must be paired with strong de-criminalization efforts so that individuals selling untaxed products do not face unintended consequences.



“There are instances of states that have banned the sale and there is no data supporting black markets and increased police interactions. On social media, it sparks emotion without data to back it up. These are just thoughts on what could happen without proof.”

– Participant

“How can it be worse with a ban compared to the current negative health effects? It is important to re-emphasize the harm that menthols cause.”

– Participant

“When people quote studies, confirm what the studies are measuring.....These misleading posts are key for social media to get a reaction from readers.”

– Participant

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# Conclusion

## Engaging community in social media research is essential to:

- Understanding how to minimize bias in the social listening algorithms
- Ascertaining if the social media content reflects the lived experiences of people impacted by the issues
- Determining whether and how much the industry oppositional narrative is shaping opinions of communities most affected by the ban
- Learning if these oppositional messages are reaching and influencing these communities
- Exploring how best to reach and counter the oppositional messaging

How will we continue to harness the power of social media and leverage community voice?

- Add an intersectionality lens by working with individuals who identify as Black or Latinx and LGBTQIA+
- Identify more community-based partners to assist with recruitment
- Continue to investigate how the tobacco industry is co-opting the narrative related to the menthol tobacco ban on social media
- Explore opportunities to use the community engagement panel approach with youth, adolescents, and young adults



# Thank you.

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