



Support for a tobacco endgame strategy in 18 European countries



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ABSTRACT

Objective. The feasibility of a tobacco endgame strategy, aiming to bring smoking prevalence to near-zero levels, is currently under debate. We provide information on public support for such a strategy in Europe.

Methods. In 2010 we conducted a face-to-face representative survey in 18 European countries (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Croatia, England, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden). The present analysis is based on 16,947 individuals aged ≥ 15 years providing information on their attitudes towards a complete ban on the use or sale of tobacco.

Results. Overall, 34.9% of adults (32.8% in men and 37.0% in women; $p < 0.001$) supported a complete ban strategy on use or sale of tobacco, 41.2% of never, 29.4% of ex- and 25.6% of current smokers. The highest support was observed in southern Europe (42.5%), followed by eastern (39.1%), northern (27.5%) and western Europe (23.0%; $p < 0.001$). A significant inverse trend was observed with both age and education.

Conclusion. Approximately one in three adults (and one in four smokers) supports a comprehensive tobacco endgame intervention. This first study in Europe provides a baseline for evaluating future trends in public support for extreme propositions to end or drastically cut smoking.

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Introduction

Potentially radical approaches to reduce tobacco use have recently been discussed under the framework of a “tobacco endgame strategy”, aiming to bring smoking prevalence to near-zero levels (Malone, 2010). What seemed unrealistic only a few years ago appears to be feasible in the future (Jenks, 2013; Smith, 2013). New Zealand and Finland, for example, are developing plans to completely ban the sale and use of cigarettes, thus creating a smoke-free society, by 2025 and 2040, respectively (Levy et al., 2012a; Maubach et al., 2012). The WHO is also considering the feasibility of supporting this strategy (Chan, 2013).

The public health benefits of such a radical resolution are evident (Jenks, 2013; Proctor, 2013; Warner, 2013; Wilson et al., 2013). However, the route to a successful tobacco endgame is complex and its feasibility is

still unclear (Arnott, 2013; Malone, 2013). One of the main requirements is the need for strong political will which, in turn, has to be driven by public support (Thomson et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2013). Only a few studies from New Zealand, Australia and Hong Kong have quantified public support for such a strategy, which appeared to be relatively strong even among current smokers, i.e., backed by around 50% of smokers (Edwards et al., 2013; Hayes et al., 2014; Maubach et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2013). Here, we provide information on public attitudes towards prohibition of cigarette sales or smoking across Europe.

Methods

Within the project ‘Pricing Policies And Control of Tobacco in Europe (PPACTE)’, in 2010 we conducted a face-to-face survey on smoking in 18 European countries (Albania, Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, England, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Sweden) (Gallus and La Vecchia, 2012; Gallus et al., 2014, 2012; Joossens et al., 2012). In each country, we enrolled a sample of around 1000 participants, representative of the general population aged 15 years or

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over (311 million Europeans) in terms of age, sex, geographic area and socio-economic characteristics.

In several countries (Albania, Croatia, Hungary, Italy, Poland and Romania) a multi-stage methodology was used. In the first stage, the primary unit of selection was a geographic area or voting centre. In the second stage, households or municipalities were selected. In the last stage, respondents were chosen randomly, in order to be representative of the population in terms of sex, age, geographic area and socio-economic characteristics. In those countries where adult respondents had been selected from electoral rolls, a quota method was used to select respondents aged 15 to 17. For other countries (Austria, England, Finland, France and Ireland) we used a quota method for the selection of the entire sample, stratifying the population according to selected variables including age, sex, and alternatively geographic area and/or occupation. For most other countries, we used a stratified random method or a simple random method. For each country, statistical weights were used to generate estimates representative of the national population.

Trained interviewers administered a standardised questionnaire on smoking. One question on attitudes towards a radical endgame strategy was included: “The government or the national political decision makers could adopt several strategies to control and limit tobacco use; how useful do you consider making smoking or cigarette sales illegal?” The present analysis is based on 16,947 individuals with information available on that question (93.9% of survey respondents). Details on the study, including further information on sampling methodology and a copy of the questionnaire in English are available elsewhere (Gallus et al., 2012).

Odds ratios (OR) and the corresponding 95% confidence intervals (CI) for support vs. non-support of a tobacco endgame strategy were estimated using unconditional logistic regression model, after adjustment for sex, age, level of education and smoking status. ORs for individual-level characteristics were further adjusted for country. *p*-values for trend were derived through Wald chi-square tests, using the same logistic regression model.

Results

Overall, 40.8% of adults found making smoking illegal useless, 24.3% rather useless, 18.5% quite useful and 16.4% very useful. Thus, 34.9% of adults (32.8% in men and 37.0% in women; OR for women vs. men: 1.16; 95% CI: 1.08–1.24) considered a tobacco endgame strategy useful, 41.2% among never smokers, 29.4% among ex- (compared to never smokers OR: 0.75; 95% CI: 0.68–0.83) and 25.6% among current smokers (OR: 0.52; 95% CI: 0.48–0.56; Table 1). Inverse trends were observed with age (*p* for trend <0.001) and education (*p* for trend = 0.001), support being greatest in the youngest and less educated. At an individual country level, a statistically significant inverse trend with education was observed in France, Italy, Portugal and Romania, whereas a direct trend was observed in England and Croatia.

Support was greater in Albania (60.6%), Croatia (60.3%) and Italy (57.8%) and lower in Hungary (11.3%), Portugal (18.3%) and France (20.6%). In Finland, support was 23.3% (14.4% among smokers). Support in most other countries was around 30%. Compared to northern European countries (27.5%), less frequent support was found in western Europe (23.0%; OR: 0.77; 95% CI: 0.69–0.86), and more frequent support was observed in southern (42.5%; OR: 1.89; 95% CI: 1.72–2.08) and eastern and central European countries (39.1%; OR 1.64; 95% CI: 1.48–1.82). Participants living in countries with a relatively low smoking prevalence showed higher support (40.5%) than those living in countries with intermediate (32.1%) or high smoking prevalence (27.5%; *p* for trend <0.001). Higher support was also observed in countries with weaker tobacco control policies (i.e., countries with a tobacco control scale, TCS < 45; 36.6%) than in those with stronger policies (i.e., TCS > 45; 33.6%; OR: 0.86; 95% CI: 0.80–0.92).

Table 2 shows the distribution of support for a tobacco endgame strategy by smoking status. The pattern was similar across various individual-level and country-specific characteristics, with the exception of the strength of tobacco control measures already in place in a country. In the latter, measured using the Tobacco Control Scale, higher support was observed among never and ex-smokers in countries with weaker

Table 1

Distribution of 16,947 European adults according to their perception of the utility of making smoking or cigarette sales illegal as a tobacco control strategy, in strata of selected characteristics. Corresponding odds ratios (OR) and 95% confidence intervals (CI). PPACTE, 2010.

	N	% support ^a	OR ^b (95% CI) for support of tobacco endgame
Total	16,947	34.9	–
<i>Individual-level characteristics</i>			
<i>Smoking status</i>			
Never smoker	9282	41.2	1 [§]
Ex-smoker	2646	29.4	0.75 (0.68–0.83)
Current smoker	5019	25.6	0.52 (0.48–0.56)
<i>Sex</i>			
Men	8182	32.8	1 [§]
Women	8765	37.0	1.16 (1.08–1.24)
<i>Age group (years)</i>			
<25	2651	37.8	1 [§]
25–44	6100	35.1	0.88 (0.80–0.98)
45–64	5382	32.2	0.74 (0.66–0.82)
≥65	2814	36.9	0.83 (0.74–0.94)
<i>p</i> for trend			<0.001
<i>Level of education^c</i>			
Low	5364	36.5	1 [§]
Intermediate	7808	34.1	0.86 (0.79–0.93)
High	3773	33.6	0.86 (0.78–0.95)
<i>p</i> for trend			0.001
<i>Country-specific characteristics</i>			
<i>Geographic area^d</i>			
Northern Europe	3843	27.5	1 [§]
Western Europe	1896	23.0	0.77 (0.69–0.86)
Southern Europe	3813	42.5	1.89 (1.72–2.08)
Eastern and central Europe	7395	39.1	1.64 (1.48–1.82)
<i>Country-specific smoking prevalence^e</i>			
Low (<26.5%)	5804	40.5	1 [§]
Intermediate (26.5%–29.9%)	5480	32.1	0.69 (0.65–0.74)
High (≥30.0%)	5663	27.5	0.59 (0.53–0.65)
<i>p</i> for trend			<0.001
<i>Tobacco Control Scale (TCS)^f</i>			
<45 (median value)	7374	36.6	1 [§]
≥45 (median value)	7729	33.6	0.86 (0.80–0.92)

^a Prevalence estimates were computed weighting each country in proportion to the country specific population aged 15 years or over. “% support” is the proportion of respondents who rate making cigarette smoking or sales illegal as quite or very useful.

^b ORs were estimated using unconditional logistic regression model, after adjustment for sex, age, level of education and smoking status. ORs for individual-level characteristics were further adjusted for country. Estimates were weighted for statistical weights that consider the country-specific population size.

^c The sum does not add up to the total because of some missing values.

^d Northern Europe: FI, IE, SE, and UK; western Europe: AT and FR; southern Europe: ES, GR, IT and PT; eastern and central Europe: AL, BG, CZ, HR, HU, LV, PL, and RO.

^e Low: SE, IT, UK, AL, FI, and RO; intermediate: HR, FR, PL, CZ, LV, and SP; high: AT, PT, HU, IE, GR, and BG.

^f TCS < 45: AT, BG, CZ, HU, LV, PL, and PT; TCS ≥ 45: ES, FI, FR, IE, IT, RO, SE, and UK. Albania and Croatia excluded.

[§] Reference category.

tobacco control policies, whereas among current smokers higher support was observed in countries with stronger policies.

Discussion

In our large scale survey, approximately one in three European adults (and one in four smokers) supports a tobacco endgame strategy, confirming that a large proportion of smokers themselves do not approve their habit (Proctor, 2013). Attitudes towards a smoke-free society were even higher in a few studies conducted among smokers in New Zealand (Edwards et al., 2013; Maubach et al., 2012) and in the general population in Australia (Hayes et al., 2014) and Hong Kong (Wang et al., 2013). In Finland, where a 2040 endpoint has been envisioned (Levy et al., 2012a), we found relatively low support.

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