Support for smoke-free generation strategies in Italy

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Current and proposed legislations aimed at limiting tobacco sales to young people hold promise in achieving a tobacco endgame (a strategy to reduce tobacco use to less than 5% of the population and ultimately eliminate it).[1,2] The Tobacco 21 (T21) law - consisting of raising the legal age of sale of tobacco to a minimum of 21 years - has shown effectiveness in delaying smoking initiation among young people in a few US states, and was recently proposed in Ireland.[1,2] Furthermore, the UK government is contemplating a smoke-free generation (SFG) law, prohibiting tobacco sales to individuals born after January 1st, 2009, thereby restricting access to tobacco throughout their lifetime.[3] Assessing public support for these legislations is essential to gauge the feasibility in their adoption. To our knowledge, only few data are available on the attitudes towards these laws, mainly from countries where they are already proposed or adopted.[1,4,5]

Between October 2023 and March 2024, we enrolled an online panel of 22,428 Italian adults (9792 men, 12,636 women; mean age: 47.9 years). The distribution of this convenience sample is comparable to Italian census data in terms of geographic area, sex, and age. We gathered data on support for the two legislations, which were not restricted to tobacco but also encompassing electronic cigarettes. Adjusted odds ratios (aOR) for supporting T21 (aOR_{T21}) and SFG (aOR_{SFG}) legislations, with 95% confidence intervals (CI), were estimated through unconditional logistic regression models adjusted for age, sex, education and smoking status.

Overall, 81.7% of the population (83.7% of non-smokers, 77.5% of current smokers) supported the implementation of T21 in Italy, and 74.1% (77.1% of non-smokers, 67.9% of current smokers) of SFG law (Table 1). Compared to never smokers, current ($aOR_{T21} = 0.59$, 95% CI 0.55–0.64; $aOR_{SFG} = 0.54$, 95%

	Adoption of Tobacco 21 in Italy[a], N (%)					Adoption of a sale ban for the generation born since 2009 in Italy[b], N (%)				
	N	Strongly in favour	In favour	Against	Strongly against	Does not know/ does not state	Strongly in favour	In favour	Against	Strongly against	Does not know/ does not state
Total	22,428	11,993 (53.5)	6327 (28.2)	1907 (8.5)	746 (3.3)	1455 (6.5)	10,454 (46.6)	6171 (27.5)	2761 (12.3)	1275 (5.7)	1767 (7.9)
Sex											
Male	9792	5050 (51.6)	2841 (29.0)	917 (9.4)	389 (4.0)	595 (6.1)	4356 (44.5)	2828 (28.9)	1268 (13.0)	637 (6.5)	703 (7.2)
Female	12,636	6943 (55.0)	3486 (27.6)	990 (7.8)	357 (2.8)	860 (6.8)	6098 (48.3)	3343 (26.5)	1493 (11.8)	638 (5.1)	1064 (8.4)
Age											
18–24	556	215 (38.7)	183 (32.9)	88 (15.8)	32 (5.8)	38 (6.8)	206 (37.1)	172 (30.9)	105 (18.9)	41 (7.4)	32 (5.8)
25–44	8404	4315 (51.3)	2594 (30.9)	753 (9.0)	273 (3.3)	469 (5.6)	3879 (46.2)	2473 (29.4)	1019 (12.1)	470 (5.6)	563 (6.7)
45–64	11,302	6286 (55.6)	2957 (26.2)	899 (8.0)	378 (3.3)	782 (6.9)	5376 (47.6)	2950 (26.1)	1364 (12.1)	664 (5.9)	948 (8.4)
65+	2166	1177 (54.3)	593 (27.4)	167 (7.7)	63 (2.9)	166 (7.7)	993 (45.9)	576 (26.6)	273 (12.6)	100 (4.6)	224 (10.3)
Education level											
Low	2207	1130 (51.2)	578 (26.2)	188 (8.5)	84 (3.8)	227 (10.3)	1060 (48.0)	555 (25.2)	253 (11.5)	111 (5.0)	228 (10.3)
Intermediate	12,028	6561 (54.6)	3314 (27.6)	1009 (8.4)	389 (3.2)	755 (6.3)	5697 (47.4)	3273 (27.2)	1399 (11.6)	672 (5.6)	987 (8.2)
High	8193	4302 (52.5)	2435 (29.7)	710 (8.7)	273 (3.3)	473 (5.8)	3697 (45.1)	2343 (28.6)	1109 (13.5)	492 (6.0)	552 (6.7)
Smoking status											
Never smokers	9561	6025 (62.9)	2149 (22.4)	612 (6.4)	249 (2.6)	546 (5.7)	5403 (56.4)	2216 (23.1)	950 (9.9)	361 (3.8)	651 (6.8)
Ex-smokers	5554	2943 (53.0)	1551 (27.9)	511 (9.2)	174 (3.1)	375 (6.8)	2522 (45.4)	1530 (27.6)	725 (13.1)	317 (5.7)	460 (8.3)
Current smokers	7293	3025 (41.5)	2627 (36.0)	784 (10.8)	323 (4.4)	534 (7.3)	2529 (34.7)	2425 (33.3)	1086 (14.9)	597 (8.2)	656 (9.0)

[a]Full question available in the Supplementary Table S1. [b]Full question available in the Supplementary Table S1.

Table 1: Support for smoke-free generation legislations among 22,428 Italian adults overall and according to socio-demographic characteristics and smoking status.

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CI 0.50–0.58) and ex-smokers (aOR_{T21} = 0.73, 95% CI 0.67–0.80; aOR_{SFG} = 0.70, 95% CI 0.65–0.76) were less frequently supportive of the implementation of both strategies. For T21, but not for SFG, support was higher in females and increased with age and education (Supplementary Table S1).

In Italy, the vast majority of the population, including over two-thirds of current smokers, supports T21 and SFG laws. While some participants may have responded favourably because the proposed bans did not directly affect them, our results testify that the desire for a nicotine-free society is strong. The widespread support observed in this large-scale study suggests that these proposals are not broadly perceived as extreme or infringing on personal freedom.[5] Policymakers should feel confident in advancing such laws also in countries, like Italy, where major tobacco control strategies have yet to be fully adopted.

Contributors
S.G. and A.L. had the original idea of the work. M.S. performed the statistical analyses. S.G., A.L. and M.S. drafted and critical reviewed the manuscript.

Declaration of interests
We declare no competing interests.

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