

The Tobacco Industry's Political Influence:

The Erosion of Article 5.3 FCTC in
Latin America and the Caribbean



Report

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The Tobacco Campaign, Latin America Program 2025

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1. Executive Summary

This report analyzes the political influence of transnational tobacco corporations in Latin America and the Caribbean, with a focus on the strategies deployed by the tobacco industry to access and shape public institutions. Covering eight countries—Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama—the report draws on credible public sources, including official communications, media coverage, civil society reports, and institutional social media content produced between 2019 and 2025.

At the core of the analysis is the principle enshrined in Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), which obliges Parties to protect public health policies from the commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry. The findings reveal a systematic erosion of this obligation across the region. Through formal agreements, symbolic partnerships, public-private enforcement initiatives, and a narrative strategy centered on illicit trade, innovation, and economic contribution, the industry has normalized its involvement in policymaking spaces at all levels of power and governance.

Even in countries that have ratified the WHO FCTC (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama), high-level executive authorities, diplomatic missions, customs bodies, and subnational governments have engaged in practices that conflict with the spirit and letter of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. Meanwhile, in non-Party States such as Argentina and the Dominican Republic, the absence of binding commitments has allowed the tobacco industry to gain even deeper institutional access—often under the guise of cultural diplomacy or economic development.

The report concludes that the invisibility or deprioritization of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC in national political discourse—particularly outside health ministries—has facilitated regulatory capture and undermined the Convention’s normative power. It calls for strengthened transparency mechanisms, proactive disclosure of industry interactions, and the engagement of broader sectors—including foreign affairs, finance, and trade ministries—in the implementation of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. It also recommends reinforcing the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade on Tobacco Products (The Protocol) - itself closely linked to Article 5.3 - to ensure enforcement strategies remain free from commercial influence.

2. Introduction

Transnational tobacco companies continue to exert a disproportionate influence over public policy in Latin America and the Caribbean, often under the guise of combating illicit trade, promoting innovation, or contributing to economic development. Despite the existence of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) and the Protocol to Eliminate Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products (the Protocol), many governments in the region remain vulnerable to tobacco industry interference—particularly in non-health sectors such as foreign affairs, security, finance, and trade. This report examines the strategies used by major tobacco industry actors to access political power and shape regulatory environments in their favor.

The analysis reveals a pattern of institutional engagement that extends far beyond ministries of health. It documents how the tobacco industry has gained visibility and influence through formal partnerships with executive agencies, legislative proposals promoting its interests, public-private enforcement initiatives, diplomatic alliances, and campaigns of reputational legitimacy disguised as social responsibility. These actions often exploit regulatory gaps, limited transparency, and weak accountability mechanisms, enabling the normalization of industry presence in public affairs.

Particularly concerning is the co-optation of the anti-smuggling agenda, a narrative increasingly used by the tobacco industry to forge alliances with law enforcement, customs agencies, and regional security frameworks. Meanwhile, the WHO FCTC and the Protocol remain largely absent from high-level political discourse, signaling a serious disconnect between global health commitments and domestic governance.

This report aims to contribute to the defense and implementation of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC and the integrity of the Protocol by exposing how commercial interests are woven into shaping policymaking. It calls for renewed political will, stronger safeguards, and increased citizen oversight to protect public health from the undue influence of an industry whose business model depends on addiction, misinformation, and regulatory evasion.

3. Scope

This report investigates the political influence of transnational tobacco companies across eight countries in Latin America and the Caribbean: Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Panama¹. It examines how these companies interact with different levels of State power—executive, legislative, diplomatic, law enforcement, and subnational authorities—to shape regulatory environments that serve their commercial interests. The scope includes both direct and indirect forms of influence, such as formal agreements, policy engagement, public-private partnerships, and diplomatic or symbolic endorsements.

The period under review spans from January, 2019 to June, 2025, with a particular focus on the years 2023 to 2025, during which the tobacco industry intensified its regional engagement ahead of key international events, particularly the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the WHO FCTC.

This analysis aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how commercial actors exploit regulatory gaps, diplomatic channels, and governance weaknesses to undermine public health frameworks, including the WHO FCTC and the Protocol. This research can also inform investigations in other sectors, such as ultra-processed foods, agro-chemicals, alcohol, and pharmaceuticals, to monitor, expose, and challenge augmenting influence of industry actors on the politics and policies of public health and wellbeing.

1. Countries are organized in alphabetical order.

4. Methodology

This report is based on a qualitative, desk-based investigation conducted between April and July 2025, for the aforementioned period detailed in section 3. The research involved a comprehensive review of publicly available sources in Spanish, English, and Portuguese, including official government documents, press releases, national and regional media coverage, civil society and academic reports, as well as social media posts from verified institutional accounts and, where relevant, personal accounts of public officials used for professional communication.

Data collection and analysis were guided by the principles of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC and its implementation guidelines, with all information thematically organized by country and institutional level—executive and legislative power, diplomatic missions, law enforcement, and agencies/subnational officials—while distinguishing between formal and informal mechanisms of tobacco industry influence (not all of the levels include information from the eight countries, due to the lack of public available information). Social media was explicitly treated as a noteworthy and increasingly central space for political and diplomatic communication, particularly in countries where platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Facebook, and Instagram function as primary channels for institutional announcements and signaling. While the investigation does not claim to be exhaustive, it offers a politically significant mapping of the strategies used by the tobacco industry to access public institutions and shape policy environments, and it underscores key transparency challenges—such as the lack of accessible records on government-industry interactions, the normalization of opaque partnerships, and the limited implementation of accountability mechanisms across the region.

5. Themes of Study and Research Results

5.1 Executive and Legislative Power



Argentina

On January 16, 2024, Argentina's Minister of Security, Patricia Bullrich, inaugurated a Criminal Intelligence Analysis Center in Puerto Iguazú, located in the Triple Border region between Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay. The center, led by Gendarmería Nacional, aims to combat terrorism, narcoterrorism, organized crime, money laundering, and corruption. It aligns with U.S. strategies and seeks to enhance cooperation between national and international security forces. The center's operations include strategic, tactical, and operational analysis to support investigations, strengthen interagency collaboration, and anticipate emerging criminal trends. It also integrates various Argentine security institutions, such as the Federal Penitentiary Service and the National Migration Directorate, with direct communication links to the U.S. Embassy. Partially funded by Philip Morris International (PMI), the center addresses issues such as cigarette smuggling, narcotics trafficking, human trafficking, and arms trade (Clarín, 2024).²

In July 2025, PMI intensified its lobbying efforts in Argentina by tying a potential \$1 billion investment to the repeal of existing regulations that prohibit "smoke-free" products such as IQOS. The company allegedly dispatched its new regional president, Marco Hannappel, with a mandate: to persuade President Javier Milei to eliminate these restrictions and adopt a model similar to the one PMI implemented in Italy. Hannappel characterized the current legal framework as a "political blockade" and cautioned that, without reform, Argentina risks forfeiting both a major foreign investment and the chance to become a regional manufacturing hub for "smoke-free" alternatives (Economía Sustentable, 2025).³

2. Clarín. (2024, enero). Inauguraron un centro de inteligencia en la Triple Frontera para la lucha contra el narcoterrorismo. https://www.clarin.com/politica/inauguraron-centro-inteligencia-triple-frontera-lucha-narcoterrorismo_0_1EqyRw5QeG.html

3. Economía Sustentable. (2025). El plan "Made in Italia" que el mayor productor de cigarrillos del mundo quiere replicar en Argentina. <https://economiasustentable.com/noticias/el-plan-made-in-italia-que-el-mayor-productor-de-cigarrillos-del-mundo-quiere-replicar-en-argentina/>



Colombia

Philip Morris International (PMI) reportedly invited 12 members of Congress to its R&D Center in Switzerland – four of whom accepted – during a critical period of legislative debate in Colombia over the regulation of e-cigarettes and similar devices. Though PMI insisted it was “legitimate for us to educate decisionmakers, without any kind of expectation”, the invitation was cancelled when it became public knowledge. Colombian public health advocates argued that acceptance of the invitation constituted a violation of the WHO FCTC (Peril, 2024).⁴



Dominican Republic

On October 8, 2020, the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and SMEs (MICM) and Philip Morris Dominicana signed a cooperation agreement to combat illicit trade in tobacco products in the Dominican Republic. The partnership aims to address the economic and regulatory impacts of contraband tobacco through technical capacity building, training, seminars, and research (MICM, 2020). Minister Víctor Bisonó emphasized that “at the Ministry, we work to create regulatory conditions that encourage development, ensure compliance with the law, and eliminate deeply rooted distortions such as illicit trade” (MICM, 2020). Philip Morris Dominicana’s Director General, Roberto Yunén, added that “illicit trade is a serious issue that negatively affects the sector and tax revenues, making it essential to continue promoting strong action plans to mitigate this practice” (MICM, 2020).⁵

In 2022, the Congress of the Dominican Republic approved legislation declaring Dominican tobacco and cigars as “cultural heritage of the Dominican Republic,” establishing their promotion, preservation, defense, and development as matters of national interest within the framework of policies to promote competitiveness and exports (Congreso Nacional, 2022).⁶

During the last two Conferences of the Parties (COP9 and COP10) of the WHO FCTC, the Dominican Republic—although not a Party to the Convention—attracted attention for its interventions, which were denounced by civil society organizations as obstructive (Salud Justa Mx, 2021).⁷ Investigative media also reported that the Dominican delegation promoted the idea that the cigar industry constitutes

4. Perfil (2024) Philip Morris invitó a 12 congresistas a Suiza en medio del debate por la regulación de cigarrillos y vapeadores <https://www.perfil.com/noticias/internacional/philip-morris-invito-a-12-congresistas-a-suiza-en-medio-del-debate-por-la-regulacion-de-cigarrillos-y-vapeadores.phtml>

5. MICM. (2020). MICM y Philip Morris aliados en el combate del comercio ilícito de productos de tabaco. Ministerio de Industria, Comercio y Mipymes. <https://micm.gob.do/transparencia/micm-y-philip-morris-aliados-en-el-combate-del-comercio-ilicito-de-productos-de-tabaco>

6. Congreso Nacional. (2022). Ley No. 341-22 que declara el tabaco y el cigarro dominicano como patrimonio cultural de la República Dominicana. https://micm.gob.do/transparencia/images/pdf/transparencia/base-legal-de-la-institucion/leyes/2023/Ley_341-2022_Declara_tabaco_y_cigarro_dominicana_patrimonio_cultural.pdf

7. Salud Justa Mx. (2021). Organizaciones civiles acusan a delegaciones <https://saludjusta.mx/interfertenciap9/>

“cultural heritage” and should therefore be regulated differently to cigarettes (Contracorriente, 2023).⁸ At COP10, in an unusual intervention, Dominican delegate Marienna Hayr defended the “benefits” of handmade cigars before the plenary, stating: “The Dominican Republic considers it extremely important to highlight the benefits surrounding handmade cigars and supports their cultural and economic relevance for the countries” (Swissinfo, 2024).⁹

In parallel, the Dominican Republic’s Cigar Producers Association publicly praised President Luis Abinader for his ongoing support of the national tobacco industry. Speaking at the closing gala of the Procigar Festival, association president Hendrick Kelner highlighted the president’s efforts, including the enactment of the cultural heritage law, as a recognition of the strong connection between tobacco and the country’s identity and economy (Presidencia RD, 2024).¹⁰

On March 18, 2024, Philip Morris Dominicana and the Dominican Republic’s MICM signed a collaboration agreement to strengthen border security and combat smuggling. The agreement includes a donation from Philip Morris Dominicana of equipment to support border enforcement efforts—such as mobile offices, motorcycles, and scanners—to be managed by CECCOM (a fuel control corps) and Cesfront (the security force which controls the border with Haiti). During the donation ceremony, PMI’s representative in the Dominican Republic praised MICM for its committed efforts in combating illicit trade (Presidencia RD, 2024).¹¹

8. Contracorriente. (2023). Asociar el tabaco con la cultura para evadir regulaciones: la estrategia del monopolio tabacalero de Centroamérica y el Caribe. <https://contracorriente.red/2023/01/18/asociar-el-tabaco-con-la-cultura-para-evadir-regulaciones-la-estrategia-del-monopolio-tabacalero-de-centroamerica-y-el-caribe/>

9. Swissinfo. (2024). Los productos emergentes del tabaco, bajo la lupa en la conferencia mundial en Panamá. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/spa/los-productos-emergentes-del-tabaco%2C-bajo-la-lupa-en-la-conferencia-mundial-en-panam%C3%A1/72363426>

10. Presidencia RD. (2024). Asociación de Productores de Cigarros de RD valora apoyo incansable del presidente. Retrieved from <https://www.presidencia.gob.do/noticias/asociacion-de-productores-de-cigarros-de-rd-valora-apoyo-incansable-del-presidente>

11. Presidencia RD. (2024). Industria y Comercio acuerda con Philip Morris Dominicana fortalecer la seguridad en la frontera. <https://presidencia.gob.do/noticias/industria-y-comercio-acuerda-con-philip-morris-dominicana-fortalecer-la-seguridad>



Ecuador

On January 28, 2020, Ecuador's Minister of Government, María Paula Romo, participated in the panel "Towards an Ecuador Without Smuggling," hosted by Universidad Internacional SEK in Quito. The event brought together state officials, academics, students, and media representatives to address the challenges of combating smuggling (Ministerio de Gobierno, 2020).¹²

During her intervention, Romo emphasized that "contraband is an illegal activity which corrupts state agents and entire communities which normalise it." She also pointed out "the misconception that State control over smuggling hinders economic development in certain areas," and stressed that "fighting this activity also has to do with the culture of legality." The panel included participants such as Alexander Wittich, Brand Integrity Manager for Philip Morris International's Andean Cluster, and María Alejandra Muñoz, Director of Ecuador's Customs Agency (Ministerio de Gobierno, 2020).

On September 9, 2024, the Chamber of Industries and Production hosted the trilateral event "Secure Borders: Legal Trade Ecuador-Colombia 2024" in Quito, aiming to strengthen binational cooperation against illicit trade. Supported by the Latin American Anti-Contraband Alliance (ALAC) and Colombia's National Business Association (ANDI), both of which have tobacco industry links (Colombia Tobacco Index 2020)¹³, as well as the San Francisco University of Quito (USFQ), the event brought together public, private, and academic stakeholders to address the economic and social challenges posed by illicit trade (CIP, 2024).

Sonsoles García, Ecuador's Minister of Production, emphasized the need for clear public policies and robust private-sector partnerships to address the issue effectively. Silvia Solís, advisor to the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, stressed the importance of protecting intellectual property rights. Carolina Uribe of PMI highlighted the critical role of industry-government collaboration in tackling cigarette smuggling (CIP, 2024).¹⁴

12. Ministerio de Gobierno. (2020). La Ministra de Gobierno participó del panel "Un Ecuador sin contrabando". <https://www.ministeriodegobierno.gob.ec/la-ministra-de-gobierno-participo-del-panel-un-ecuador-sin-contrabando/>

13. GGTC Colombia Tobacco Index (2020) <https://globaltobaccoindex.org/country/CO>

14. Cámara de Industrias y Producción (CIP). (2024). Encuentro trilateral. <https://www.cip.org.ec/2024/09/10/encuentro-trilateral-para-combatir-el-comercio-ilicito/>



El Salvador

On March 1, 2023, Vice President Félix Ulloa of El Salvador and Claudia de Larín, Executive Director of the Higher School of Innovation in Public Administration (Escuela Superior de Innovación de la Administración Pública, ESIAP), met with representatives from PMI to discuss cooperation opportunities. ESIAP is an initiative of President Nayib Bukele, created to serve as the institution responsible for strengthening public administration through “the implementation of training and research programs targeted at public officials and civil servants across the country” (ESIAP, n.d.).¹⁵

During the meeting, Vice President Ulloa highlighted government initiatives to bridge the digital divide, including the distribution of tablets and computers to public-sector students and teachers, as well as software development scholarships for youth (Presidencia El Salvador, 2023). Ulloa and Susana Vásquez, PMI’s Director of External Affairs for Central America, also signed a Letter of Intent to enhance public administration competencies at both central and municipal levels. The collaboration aims to provide training and certification programs for public officials. PMI expressed admiration for El Salvador’s technological advancements and pledged technical support for research and innovation. Participants included PMI executives and Salvadoran government officials (Presidencia El Salvador, 2023).¹⁶

On June 12, 2023, the Government of El Salvador, under President Nayib Bukele, launched a specialized internship program focused on developing digital skills among Salvadoran youth. This initiative, supported by PMI, aims to empower university students with training, tools, and technological resources aligned with the new Law for the Promotion of Innovation and Technological Manufacturing (Gobierno de El Salvador, 2023).

The program, which was to run for six months, benefited 100 university students across 34 institutions nationwide, particularly those studying engineering, computer science, and related fields. Participants received a monthly stipend of \$250 to cover expenses. The program seeks to prepare students for the job market by equipping them with practical experience and advanced digital competencies (Gobierno de El Salvador, 2023).¹⁷

In September 2023, the Press Secretariat of the Office of the President of the Republic of El Salvador posted on its official social media account: “with the support of Philip Morris International (PMI), President Nayib Bukele’s government is bringing satellite internet to 100 public spaces, including parks and municipal plazas” (Secretaría de Prensa de la Presidencia, 2023).¹⁸

15. ESIAP. (n.d.). ¿Qué es la ESIAP? <https://esiap.gob.sv/>

16. Presidencia El Salvador. (2023). Firman carta de intención para fortalecer la administración pública. <https://www.presidencia.gob.sv/firman-carta-de-intencion-para-fortalecer-la-administracion-publica/>

17. Gobierno de El Salvador. (2023). El Gobierno lanza programa de pasantías tecnológicas con el apoyo de Philip Morris. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=607289141575350&id=100068828095989_rdr

18. Secretaría de Prensa de la Presidencia. (2023). Con el apoyo de Philip Morris International, el Gobierno del Presidente Bukele lleva internet satelital a 100 espacios públicos Facebook https://www.facebook.com/story.php/?story_fbid=661172526187011&id=100068828095989

On April 16, 2024, the Secretariat of Innovation hosted a software development forum, bringing together academia, the private sector, and public institutions to discuss innovation and technology in the industry. The event, organized in partnership with PMI, featured expert presentations on best practices and experiences in national and international software development. Daniel Méndez, Secretary of Innovation, emphasized the importance of nurturing young talent to meet market demands and drive the country's digital transformation (Diario El Salvador, 2024).¹⁹

The Vice President of the Republic of El Salvador, Mr. Félix Ulloa Jr., in his capacity as Rector of the Higher School of Innovation in Public Administration (ESIAP), visited the Cube, PMI's innovation center in Neuchâtel, Switzerland. The visit aimed to explore various projects developed by the company that integrate science and technology into their processes (Diario La Huella, 2025).²⁰

During the same visit, Vice President Ulloa met with the CEO of PMI to advance efforts aimed at reducing El Salvador's digital divide. The meeting resulted in the signing of a Letter of Intent to strengthen public administration, along with a Memorandum of Understanding with the Secretariat of Innovation to invest in digital infrastructure and promote entrepreneurship. Key initiatives include the installation of antennas to provide free internet in public spaces and the launch of digital entrepreneurship internships to develop technological and business skills. These efforts seek to enhance connectivity and foster economic opportunities for Salvadoran entrepreneurs (La Página, 2025).²¹

19. Diario El Salvador. (2024). Secretaría de Innovación promueve el desarrollo de software en el país. <https://diarioelsalvador.com/secretaria-de-innovacion-promueve-el-desarrollo-de-software-en-el-pais/491011/>

20. Diario La Huella. (2025). Vicepresidente Ulloa visita instalaciones de "El Cubo" de reconocida empresa suiza para conocer sobre proyectos tecnológicos. <https://diariolahuella.com/vicepresidente-ulloa-visita-instalaciones-de-el-cubo-de-reconocida-empresa-suiza-para-conocer-sobre-proyectos-de-tecnologicos/>

21. La Página. (2025). Vicepresidente Ulloa se reúne con CEO de PMI en Suiza: buscan reducir brecha digital con internet gratuito en parques. https://lapagina.com.sv/nacionales/vicepresidente-ulloa-se-reune-con-ceo-de-pmi-en-suiza-buscan-reducir-brecha-digital-con-internet-gratuito-en-parques/#google_vignette

5.2 Diplomatic Missions



Argentina

In May 2019, a public-private mission from Argentina to the United Kingdom, organized by the Argentine-British Chamber of Commerce (CCAB) and supported by Argentina's Foreign Ministry, aimed to "strengthen bilateral integration in investment projects, focusing on energy and mining sectors." Participants included officials, legislators, and business leaders from both countries, including from British American Tobacco (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, 2019).²²

In December 2023, reports highlighted lobbying efforts by Philip Morris International, through its Argentine subsidiary Massalin Particulares, to promote legislative changes aimed at reducing taxes on heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes. This campaign was part of a broader effort to introduce currently prohibited nicotine delivery devices under a more favorable tax regime. The reports suggested that this lobbying was supported by the U.S. Embassy in Argentina, as well as legislators from the Together for Change coalition and the Republican Proposal (PRO) party (Página12, 2023;²³ *Ámbito*, 2023).²⁴



Brazil

In February 2024, at the 10th Conference of the Parties (COP10) to the WHO FCTC, in Panama, a committee of parliamentarians from tobacco-growing areas in southern Brazil lobbied the Brazilian delegation in favor of the industry. This committee received "daily debriefing sessions" organized by the Brazilian Embassy in Panama, which were attended by the ambassador, who headed the Brazilian delegation to the COP. During one of these sessions, representatives of various Brazilian industry associations were also present. The ambassador also met the Tobacco Growers' Association of Brazil (Afubra) and the International Tobacco Growers Association (ITGA) - despite some strongly-worded criticism of the Brazilian delegation by the president of ITGA (Gatehouse, 2024).²⁵

On October 28, 2024, Flávio Bettarello, Commercial Attaché of the Brazilian Embassy in Spain, hosted a promotional event in Madrid focused on Brazilian tobacco and cultural diplomacy. The initiative is part of Brazil's broader strategy to reinforce its status as the world's leading tobacco exporter by deepening commercial ties with the Spanish market. During the event, Bettarello and

22. Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, Comercio Internacional y Culto de la República Argentina. (2019, mayo). Misión al Reino Unido 2019. Embajada de la República Argentina en el Reino Unido. <https://eruni.cancilleria.gob.ar/es/misi%C3%B3n-al-reino-unido-2019-0>

23. Página12. (2023, diciembre). La multinacional tabacalera Massalin busca que el Gobierno de Javier Milei reduzca los impuestos a los cigarrillos electrónicos. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/696073-la-multinacional-tabacalera-massalin-busca-que-el-gobierno-d>

24. *Ámbito*. (2023, diciembre). Alerta por concesiones a las multinacionales tabacaleras: bajan impuestos al cigarrillo. <https://www.ambito.com/informacion-general/alerta-concesiones-las-multinacionales-tabacaleras-bajan-impuestos-al-cigarrillo-n5904040>

25. Gatehouse, Tom (2024). [Brazilian Delegation Meets Tobacco Industry Associations During COP](#), in COP10 Bulletin Day 5. Global Alliance for Tobacco Control.

César Ricardo, a representative of the Spanish tobacco sector, emphasized the attractiveness of Brazilian tobacco products, even in the face of regulatory constraints—demonstrating the embassy's proactive role in promoting the industry internationally (RTVE, 2024).²⁶

On January 31, 2025, the Romanian Ambassador to Brazil, Monica-Mihaela Știrbu, met with representatives of PMI to discuss the company's "smoke-free" product agenda. The conversation focused on PMI's alleged commitment to reducing the health impacts of smoking and transitioning to "smoke-free alternatives." The company presented Romania as a supposed model of success, citing recent investments in innovative technologies facilitated by what it described as a "coherent regulatory framework". The conversation also touched upon possible areas of collaboration between Romania and Brazil (Diplomacia Business, 2025).²⁷

On May 8, 2025, Gilson Becker—mayor of Vera Cruz, Rio Grande do Sul, and president of Amprotabaco (the Association of Tobacco-Producing Municipalities)—met with Brazil's ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Tovar da Silva Nunes, to advocate for the interests of the tobacco sector ahead of the WHO FCTC COP11. A network of mayors of tobacco-growing municipalities with a record of defending industry positions (Amprotabaco 2023), Amprotabaco presented concerns about illicit trade, the regulation of e-cigarettes, and the economic importance of tobacco production, emphasizing that more than one million Brazilians rely on the industry for their livelihoods. Joined by representatives from major industry groups, the delegation sought to influence Brazil's stance at the upcoming negotiations. The president of Amprotabaco stated: "The ambassador committed to seeking further information and working to ensure that Brazil's position at COP11 does not impose new restrictions on the tobacco production chain" (Agrolink, 2025).²⁹



Dominican Republic

On November 17, 2022, Dominican Ambassador to the United States, Sonia Guzmán, hosted a reception at her residence for members of the Premium Cigar Association (PCA), as part of the Association's Second International Policy Summit—considered the most influential lobbying event for the cigar industry in the U.S. The event featured key figures such as PCA President Greg Zimmerman and Executive Director Scott Pearce, as well as Dominican Minister of the Presidency Joel Santos Echavarría, who emphasized the cultural and economic importance of tobacco to the Dominican Republic. He also referenced recent legislation declaring tobacco national cultural heritage and outlined government efforts to boost the industry under President Luis Abinader. U.S.

26. RTVE. (2024, October). Brasil quer aumentar exportação de tabaco para Espanha [Audio broadcast]. <https://www.rtve.es/play/audios/emissao-em-portugues/brasil-quer-aumentar-exportacao-tabaco-para-espanha/16307482/>

27. Diplomacia Business. (2025). Embaixadora da Romênia tem reunião na PMI. <https://www.diplomaciabusiness.com/embaixadora-da-romenia-tem-reuniao-na-pmi/>

28. O Joio e o Trigo (2023) Amprotabaco: a rede de prefeitos na defesa da indústria do fumo <https://ojoioeotrigo.com.br/2023/03/amprotabaco-rede-de-prefeitos-defesa-industria-do-fumo/>

29. Agrolink. (2025). Embaixada da Suíça abre o diálogo com cadeia produtiva do tabaco. https://www.agrolink.com.br/noticias/embaixada-da-suica-abre-o-dialogo-com-cadeia-produtiva-do-tabaco_501855.html

lawmakers including Representatives Dan Meuser, Byron Donalds, and staff from Congresswoman Nancy Mace’s office were also in attendance, underscoring the event’s diplomatic and legislative significance (Embajada Dominicana en EE. UU., 2022).³⁰

Representing the Dominican Embassy in the United States, the Commercial Attaché attended PCA 2022 in support of the Association of Cigar Producers of the Dominican Republic. The event, held in Las Vegas, Nevada, is recognized as the largest trade show in the premium tobacco industry (Dominican Embassy USA, 2022).³¹

A 2023 document from the Embassy of the Dominican Republic in Mexico lists the country’s main cigar exporters, including Swedish Match Dominicana SAS, a subsidiary of Swedish Match, which is owned by PMI. The report, prepared by the Dominican Embassy, was designed to “provide our exporters with essential information allowing them to begin, facilitate or expand their exports to the Mexican market” (Embajada RD en México, 2023).³²

On August 16, 2023, Dominican Ambassador to the U.S., Sonia Guzmán, welcomed a federal court ruling that blocks the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) from enforcing new restrictions on premium cigar marketing and packaging. The decision excludes handcrafted premium cigars from FDA jurisdiction, “eliminates the possibility of applying marketing restrictions in the American market regarding advertising, brand promotion and packaging of premium cigars,” preserving access to the U.S. market. The outcome followed diplomatic efforts by the Dominican Embassy in Washington, which coordinated with trade associations and U.S. lawmakers to highlight the potential economic harm to tobacco-exporting countries like the Dominican Republic (Acento, 2023).³³

On December 5, 2023, the Dominican Embassy in Egypt, led by Chargé d’Affaires Andy Rodríguez Durán, secured official recognition of the Dominican Republic as a producer and exporter of tobacco by Egypt’s General Customs Authority. This recognition opened the Egyptian market to Dominican tobacco exports, including premium cigars (Dominican Embassy Egypt, 2023). Rodríguez Durán reaffirmed the embassy’s commitment to advancing the Dominican government’s foreign policy agenda, which prioritizes export promotion, international trade, and foreign investment, while strengthening the nation’s presence in Africa and the Middle East. This achievement aligns with President Luis Abinader’s 2020 initiative to revitalize the tobacco industry and expand into new markets (Dominican Embassy Egypt, 2023).³⁴

30. Embajada Dominicana en EE. UU. (2022, November 17). La embajadora @soniaguzmank acogió en su residencia a los miembros de la Asociación de Cigarros Premium (PCA). Facebook https://www.facebook.com/DominicanEmbassy/posts/2742624289206531/?_rdc

31. Dominican Embassy USA. (2022). PCA 2022 - Participación de la Agregaduría Comercial en apoyo al sector tabacalero. https://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=2624114287724199&id=184962204972765&set=a.1293658894103085&locale=be_BY

32. Embajada RD en México. (2023). Cigarro dominicano. <https://mex.mirex.gob.do/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/RDenMexico-Perfil-Cigarro-Dominicano-comprimido.pdf>

33. Acento. (2023). Embajadora Sonia Guzmán saluda decisión judicial que impide trabas a comercio de cigarros premium en Washington DC. <https://acento.com.do/economia/embajadora-sonia-guzman-salud-decision-judicial-impide-trabas-a-comercio-de-cigarros-premium-en-washington-dc-9235432.html>

34. Dominican Embassy Egypt. (2023). Embajada abre el mercado egipcio al tabaco nacional. <https://egy.mirex.gob.do/embajada-abre-el-mercado-egipcio-al-tabaco-nacional/>

The process began following concerns raised by Dominican Ambassador to Turkey, Elvis Antonio Alam Lora, about customs restrictions that had previously blocked the entry of Dominican tobacco samples into Egypt. Efforts included a July 2023 meeting between Counselor Yasir Mateo Candelier and the director of Egyptian customs, during which the Dominican Republic's inclusion in Egypt's producer and exporter registry was discussed (Dominican Embassy Egypt, 2023).

On April 10, 2024, Ambassador Pablo Valentín Rosario attended the tasting and presentation of the "Smoking Jacket" cigar, blended and produced in the Dominican Republic by Hendrick Kelner Jr. and distributed by Cigar Mundi. The event, held at the Hotel Schweizerhof & Spa in Bern, Switzerland, was attended by members of the Cigar Club of Bern (Embajada RD en Suiza, 2024).³⁵

On July 10, 2024, during the event "Entre culturas, España y República Dominicana" at the Spanish residence in Bern, Ambassador Pablo Valentín Rosario proudly received a special cigar named "El Embajador" (Embajada RD en Suiza, 2024).³⁶

On July 14, 2024, the Dominican Embassy in the United Kingdom facilitated a strategic partnership between Liverpool-based entrepreneurs and the Dominican tobacco company Tabacalera Díaz, led by renowned cigar maker Don Eladio Díaz. This collaboration launched the Kiskeya Cigars brand, with plans to produce unique blends and establish cigar lounges across the UK. The initiative, spearheaded by the embassy's commercial counselor, Antonio Castillo, under the leadership of Ambassador Elnio Durán, aims to "strengthen bilateral relations and promote foreign investment in the Dominican Republic" (Acento, 2024).

The Liverpool investors behind Kiskeya Limited, including Martin Bramley and others, reportedly chose the Dominican Republic over destinations like Nicaragua and Honduras. According to official statements, "the intervention and effective promotion by the Dominican Embassy emphasized the manufacturing quality, security, economic growth and political stability of the Dominican Republic. This was instrumental in the investors' final decision" (Acento, 2024).³⁷

Future plans for Kiskeya Cigars include establishing a factory in the Dominican Republic to consolidate its position in the UK and European markets, while promoting the Dominican tobacco industry globally (El Caribe, 2024).³⁸

On September 25, 2024, Dominican Ambassador to Jamaica Angie Martínez held a working meeting with executives from Philip Morris Dominicana to discuss the current dynamics of Dominican product exports to Jamaica. The meeting also addressed PMI's so-called "innovative vision" for the future of the tobacco industry. Representatives from PMI included Andrés Espinal, Director of External Affairs for the Caribbean; Leticia de Andrés, Manager of Government Affairs

35. Embajada RD en Suiza. (2024, abril). Presentación del cigarro "Smoking Jacket" en Berna. Instagram https://www.instagram.com/rdensuiza/p/C5q0S2ZLWuU/?hl=fr&img_index=1

36. Embajada RD en Suiza. (2024). Lanzamiento del cigarro "El Embajador" Instagram https://www.instagram.com/rdensuiza/p/C90CPjSo1sd/?img_index=1

37. Acento. (2024). Embajada de RD en Reino Unido promueve inversión en el tabaco. <https://acento.com.do/economia/embajada-de-rd-en-reino-unido-promueve-inversion-en-el-tabaco-9365733.html>

38. El Caribe. (2024). Embajada de RD en Reino Unido atrae inversionistas para sector tabacalero. <https://www.elcaribe.com.do/panorama/dinero/embajada-de-rd-en-reino-unido-atrae-inversionistas-para-sector-tabacalero>

for the Caribbean; Erick Pérez del Toro, Manager of Illicit Trade Prevention for the Caribbean; as well as Marcos Guillén and Ferdinand Herrera from Ferdinand Herrera Consultores (Embajada RD en Jamaica, 2024).³⁹

On November 12, 2024, the Dominican Embassy in Honduras hosted “Tobacco and Rum to the Rhythm of Merengue” in Tegucigalpa, in partnership with Jerko Cigar Lounge. The event promoted Dominican culture and products—such as Ron Ripiao, Ron Johnny Ventura, and LB Cigars—while strengthening cultural and commercial ties with Honduras, in line with the country’s foreign policy goals of promoting national values internationally (Hoy, 2024).⁴⁰



On October 3, 2024, the Nicaraguan Embassy received a visit from Diego Mazzia, General Manager of Tobacco International, an Italian company specializing in tobacco processing. The meeting focused on exploring trade opportunities and promoting foreign investment in Nicaragua’s tobacco sector, particularly in the Estelí region.

Ambassador Mónica Robelo highlighted Nicaragua’s favorable conditions for investors, including “tax incentives, political stability, and excellent climate and soil for tobacco cultivation,” positioning the country as “a pioneer in premium cigar production.” She also reaffirmed the government’s commitment to supporting the tobacco sector and promoting Nicaragua’s national brand through sustainable agricultural practices. The visit concluded with an invitation to the Puro Sabor International Tobacco Festival (El 19 Digital, 2024).⁴¹

On October 3, 2024, Nicaragua’s ambassador to Zimbabwe met with the Tobacco Industry Marketing Board to explore collaboration in the tobacco sector. Zimbabwe presented its export growth and industrialization plans, while Nicaragua emphasized its leadership in premium cigar production. Both countries expressed interest in future cooperation and knowledge exchange (El 19 Digital, 2024).⁴²

On November 26, 2024, the Nicaraguan Embassy in Vietnam met with VINATABA, Vietnam’s state-owned tobacco company, to explore collaboration opportunities. VINATABA highlighted its 40-year experience in scientific research on tobacco, while Nicaraguan Ambassador Mario Armengol emphasized the growth of Nicaragua’s tobacco exports and the international prestige of its premium varieties. Both sides expressed interest in strengthening commercial and research ties between the two countries (El 19 Digital, 2024).⁴³

39. Embajada RD en Jamaica. (2024). Reunión de trabajo con Philip Morris Dominicana en Kingston. Instagram <https://www.instagram.com/rdenjamaica/p/DAXNX7CPa1G/>

40. Hoy. (2024). Embajada de RD en Honduras celebra el evento cultural <https://hoy.com.do/embajada-de-rd-en-honduras-celebra-el-evento-cultural-tabaco-y-ron-al-ritmo-de-merengue/>

41. El 19 Digital. (2024). Embajada nicaragüense recibe visita de empresa tabacalera italiana. <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/156846-embajada-nicaragüense-recibe-visita-de-empresa-tabacalera-italiana>

42. El 19 Digital. (2024). Embajadora de Nicaragua en Zimbabue se reúne con representantes del sector tabaco. <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/156526-embajadora-de-nicaragua-en-zimbabue-se-reune-con-representantes-del-sector-tabaco>

43. El 19 Digital. (2024). Embajada de Nicaragua en Vietnam se reúne con el Instituto del Tabaco Vinataba <https://www.el19digital.com/articulos/ver/158693-embajador-de-nicaragua-en-vietnam-en-el-instituto-del-tabaco-vinataba>

5.3 Law Enforcement



Colombia

In December 2023, PMI was among the private sector actors participating in the second meeting of the Regional Public-Private Alliance against Illicit Trade, held in Cartagena, Colombia. Organized by Strategos BIP – a consulting firm specializing in investigation, security, and the protection of legal trade in Latin America and the Caribbean – the United Nations University for Peace, and Universidad Hemisferios, the event convened 28 institutions—including government agencies, international organizations, academic institutions, and private companies—to discuss regional strategies to address illicit trade.

Panel discussions focused on the role of public-private collaboration in preventing contraband and counterfeiting, with an emphasis on building a unified regional response. Opening remarks were delivered by retired Brigadier General Juan Carlos Buitrago Arias, former director of Colombia's Fiscal and Customs Police (El Congreso, 2021),⁴⁴ and current CEO of Strategos BIP. He also presented a report on the progress of COEPA (a public-private alliance against the illicit trade between Colombia, Ecuador and Panama) since its launch in December 2022. A tool called CIMA (Central for Research, Monitoring, and Analysis of Illicit Trade), developed by Strategos BIP, was introduced as a mechanism to enhance operational intelligence (Strategos BIP, 2023).

The meeting brought together high-level representatives from security forces, customs authorities, and law enforcement agencies from Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, and the United States, alongside international organizations such as Ameripol and the Organization of American States. Academic institutions and private sector actors—including PMI—also participated, reinforcing a narrative of collaborative enforcement against illicit trade. Among the proposals discussed was the creation of a Regional Intervention Group to coordinate cross-border actions, reportedly supported by intelligence contributions from the private sector (Strategos BIP, 2023).⁴⁵

On September 2024, in Bucaramanga, the National Anti-Contraband Meeting was organized by the Colombian Federation of Departments (Federación Nacional de Departamentos in Spanish) -Further elaboration is provided in the following section- and brought together representatives from all 32 departments, the Capital District, public institutions, law enforcement agencies, and private sector actors. The event addressed the fiscal, health, and territorial security implications of contraband—particularly the illicit trade in cigarettes and alcohol—and aimed to strengthen institutional strategies to combat it. The private sector was represented by PMI and the National Association of Industrialists of Colombia (ANDI). ANDI is widely recognized as a prominent voice for

44. El Congreso. (n.d.). Por amenazas, el director de la Policía Fiscal y Aduanera sale de su cargo. <https://revistaelcongreso.com/por-amenazas-el-director-de-la-policia-fiscal-y-aduanera-sale-de-su-cargo/>

45. Strategos BIP. (2023). 2do Encuentro de Alto Nivel de la Alianza Regional Público Privada COEPA - Colombia, Ecuador, Panamá. <https://www.strategosbip.com/post/2do-encuentro-de-alto-nivel-de-la-alianza-regional-p%C3%BAblico-privada-coepa-colombia-ecuador-panam%C3%A1>

the tobacco industry—among others—in congressional debates and the broader public discourse. Reflecting industry talking points, PMI’s representative Yexid Mejía claimed that “increasing cigarette taxes could elevate contraband levels to 80% in Colombia, mirroring Ecuador’s 84% rate.” Initiatives such as ANDI’s regional group were highlighted for their alleged role in training authorities and businesses to curb illicit trade (Corrillos, 2024).⁴⁶ Independent studies have identified PMI’s Marlboro as “the best-selling smuggled brand in Ecuador” (La República, 2021).⁴⁷

Dominican Republic

On September 13, 2024, the Dominican National Police led a high-level coordination meeting to advance the “Security and Human Coexistence Project for the Capotillo Neighborhood,” an initiative aligned with national public security policies. Key state agencies such as the Ministry of Defense (J2 and J3 divisions) and the National Drug Control Directorate also participated. Notably, the initiative includes the training of 25 instructors and 139 officers to be deployed in the area, with support from the National Police and in collaboration with the Instituto Dominicano de Desarrollo Integral and PMI (Policía Nacional, 2024).⁴⁸

Panama

During COP10 in Panama, arguments from the tobacco industry and its allies about illicit trade were widely circulated through media outlets, press releases, and meetings, raising concerns about the motivations behind these efforts. The regional director of Crime Stoppers suggested that contraband cigarettes have become a “primary income source for criminal groups, overshadowing their previous role as secondary support for activities such as drug trafficking and human smuggling” (Prevención del Lavado, 2024).⁴⁹

The dissemination of these arguments was primarily driven by the COEPA Alliance. Gregoire Verdeaux, former Vice President of External Affairs at PMI, expressed the company’s global support for these collaborations to address the fiscal and criminal impacts of illicit trade (Spondylus Digital, 2024)⁵⁰. Held in Panama City and organized by Strategos BIP, the meeting brought together representatives from national authorities, the private sector, international organizations, and academia (BASC Panamá, 2024).

46. Corrillos. (2024, septiembre). El contrabando no es un problema menor: Philip Morris International. <https://www.corrillos.com.co/el-contrabando-no-es-un-problema-menor-philip-morris-internacional>.

47. La República. (2021, abril). Marlboro, la marca más vendida de contrabando en Ecuador, según estudio. <https://www.larepublica.ec/blog/2021/04/20/marlboro-la-marca-mas-vendida-de-contrabando-en-ecuador-segun-estudio/>

48. Policía Nacional. (2024). Policía Nacional coordina avances del “Proyecto de Seguridad y Convivencia Humana del Barrio Capotillo” <https://www.policianacional.gob.do/policia-nacional-coordina-avances-del-proyecto-de-seguridad-y-convivencia-humana-del-barrio-capotillo/>

49. Prevención del Lavado. (2024). Contrabando de cigarrillos es fuente principal de financiación de estructuras criminales en América Latina. https://www.prevenciondelavado.com/portal/nota_gratuita.aspx?codigo=133603&cd_producto=OYNMX&nm_origen=Home

49. Spondylus Digital (2024) COEPA: alianza contra comercio ilícito en América Latina <https://spondylusdigital.com/comercio-ilicito-cigarrillos/>

Participants included Panama's National Customs Authority, Ministry of Public Security, National Police, the British Embassy, Colombia's National Directorate of Taxes and Customs (DIAN), Colombia's Fiscal and Customs Police, Ecuador's National Police, the Financial Information and Analysis Unit (UIAF), the University for Peace (UPEACE), International Community on Risk Management and Security (COLADCA), Universidad Hemisferios, the Organization of American States (OAS), Europol, Ameripol, Interpol, Prevention of Money Laundering and Crimes (FELADE), and companies such as PMI and DIAGEO (BASC Panamá, 2024).⁵¹

In September 2024, the National Customs Authority of Panama conducted a training session on the illicit tobacco trade in Latin America, aimed at staff from the Directorate of Prevention and Customs Inspection. Experts from PMI's Illicit Trade Prevention Unit, Víctor Klepach and Alain Vermaut, led the session, addressing the scope of the issue, applicable legislation, identification of illegal products, regional trends, and relevant studies. The training emphasized the complexity of the problem and the importance of equipping customs officials with skills to combat it effectively. This initiative aligns with the administration's "modernization strategy and commitment to continuous staff training for improved service delivery" (Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas de Panamá, 2024).⁵²

51. BASC Panamá. (2024). BASC Panamá participa de mesa de diálogo "Estrategia Triángulos". <https://web.archive.org/web/20250624131341/https://www.bascpanama.org/basc-panama-participa-de-mesa-de-dialogo-estrategia-triangulos/>

52. Autoridad Nacional de Aduanas de Panamá. (2024). Capacitación sobre comercio ilícito de tabaco dirigida a colaboradores de la DPFA. Facebook. https://www.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=915764197258807&id=100064757046276

5.4 Agencies and Subnational Officials



Brazil

On July 9, 2025, Amprotabaco—the Association of Tobacco-Producing Municipalities—organized a public hearing at the Chamber of Deputies to rally political and industry support ahead of COP11. The event underscored “the economic, social, and cultural relevance of tobacco production”, particularly in southern Brazil’s small municipalities, and called for a “balanced” approach from Brazil’s delegation in the upcoming international negotiations. During the hearing, State Deputy Marcus Vinícius introduced a draft bill proposing that tobacco be officially recognized as an activity of significant economic, social, and cultural interest. The bill seeks to integrate tobacco into municipal development agendas, granting access to public credit lines, technical assistance, and targeted support for smallholder farming families. The event reflected a coordinated effort by the tobacco lobby to influence both domestic and international policy, with strong attendance from federal and state legislators, mayors, and industry representatives (Agrolink, 2025).⁵³



Colombia

In its 2023 Form 10-K, PMI states that “in 2009, our Colombian subsidiaries entered into an Investment and Cooperation Agreement with the national and regional governments of Colombia to promote investment in, and cooperation on, anti-contraband and anti-counterfeit efforts,” committing \$200 million over 20 years to initiatives such as combating the illicit cigarette trade and supporting local tobacco production (PMI, 2023).⁵⁴ A central partner in this agreement is the Federación Nacional de Departamentos (FND), the entity which represents Colombia’s departments (states) in their interactions with central government, the private sector and international organizations. It is also the entity responsible for administering and distributing Colombia’s tobacco tax revenues (FND, n.d.).⁵⁵

However, serious concerns have emerged about the implementation of this partnership. In August 2019, media reports exposed alleged “corrupt maneuvers” (Corrupción al Día, 2019)⁵⁶ involving the FND, including the hiring of politically connected individuals and relatives of politicians using funds allocated to anti-smuggling efforts (Cuestión Pública, 2021a).⁵⁷ Further controversy arose

53. Agrolink. (2025). Fortalecimiento da cadeia do tabaco marca encontro da Amprotabaco. https://www.agrolink.com.br/noticias/cultura/fumo/fortalecimento-da-cadeia-do-tabaco-marca-encontro-da-amprotabaco_503744.html

54. Philip Morris International. (2023). Form 10-K 2022 Annual Report. <https://philipmorrisinternational.gcs-web.com/static-files/783187b7-811d-43ad-9265-c8da85a17857>

55. Federación Nacional de Departamentos. (n.d.). ¿Quiénes somos? <https://fnd.org.co/federacion/quienes-somos>

56. Corrupción al día. (2019, agosto). Las maniobras corruptas desde la Federación de Departamentos para elegir Registrador. <https://corrupcionaldia.com/las-maniobras-corruptas-desde-la-federacion-de-departamentos-para-elegir-registrador/>

57. Cuestión Pública. (2021a, diciembre). Philip Morris y Fededepartamentos: un inseparable matrimonio. <https://cuestionpublica.com/philip-morris-y-fededepartamentos-el-inseparable-matrimonio/>

when it was revealed that the FND used data on contraband cigarette consumption not only for institutional purposes but also to lobby Congress against increasing tobacco taxes—even though the FND directly benefits from those revenues. During a congressional debate, Edna Rangel, then deputy director of the FND, acknowledged that the institution could face “potential conflicts of interest” due to financial support from PMI, yet she continued lobbying lawmakers using industry-aligned studies that claimed smuggling had increased in 2018 (Cuestión Pública, 2021b;⁵⁸ Cuestión Pública, 2021c).⁵⁹



On December 15, 2023, the Dominican Republic’s Export and Investment Center (CEI-RD) held a meeting between its Executive Director, Biviana Riveiro, and representatives of PMI to discuss the processes underway “to develop a standard for the specification of non-combustible tobacco products or electronic heated tobacco devices” (CEI-RD, 2021). The proposed regulation seeks to “establish detailed specifications and quality standards for the importation and commercialization of these electronic devices. This initiative aims to promote innovation, enhance consumer benefits, and attract foreign investment to the sector” (CEI-RD, 2021).⁶⁰

58. Cuestión Pública. (2021b, diciembre). De PMI para Fededepartamentos: los 155 millones de dólares poco vigilados. <https://cuestionpublica.com/de-pmi-para-fededepartamentos-los-155-millones-de-dolares-poco-vigilados/>

59. Cuestión Pública. (2021c, diciembre). Cuotas de políticos en Fededepartamentos con plata de Philip Morris. <https://cuestionpublica.com/cuotas-de-politicos-en-fededepartamentos-con-plata-de-philip-morris/>

60. CEI-RD. (2021, diciembre). Centro de Exportación e Inversión de República Dominicana. Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/Prodominicana/posts/nuestra-directora-ejecutiva-bivianariveiro-junto-a-parte-de-nuestro-equipo-direc/4725099314204973/>

6. Analysis and Conclusions

The evidence collected across Latin America and the Caribbean reveals a persistent and multifaceted pattern of tobacco industry interference in public governance. From presidential cabinets to municipal legislatures, and from customs agencies to diplomatic missions, tobacco industry representatives have embedded themselves in State structures through partnerships, public-private initiatives, legislative lobbying, and symbolic diplomacy. These engagements are often framed as efforts to promote innovation, combat illicit trade, or support economic development—but in practice, they open pathways for tobacco industry interference in policy.

Thus, this section presents the key conclusions identified throughout the report, organized thematically by spheres of government and institutional influence. It highlights how executive authorities, diplomatic actors, law enforcement agencies, and subnational institutions have opened formal and informal pathways for industry engagement—often in ways that directly contradict the principles of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. Whether a country is a Party to the WHO FCTC or not, these practices are harmful to public health, weaken the treaty, and signal a troubling regional trend: the normalization of tobacco industry influence in policy spaces that should remain independent, accountable, transparent, democratic, and oriented toward public health.

Conclusions: Executive and Legislative Power

Executive-level collaboration with the tobacco industry across Latin America and the Caribbean has emerged as a key vector of interference that undermines both the spirit and the implementation of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. In multiple countries, governments have granted the tobacco industry institutional legitimacy by integrating it into national strategies on security, innovation, investment, and anti-contraband efforts.

The Argentine case demonstrates the use of investment leverage as a form of executive pressure, with PMI directly linking regulatory concessions to economic incentives. This behavior, even in non-Party contexts, threatens regional policy coherence and sets a precedent for commercially driven governance.

The case of the Dominican Republic illustrates how state-led partnerships and legislative actions can institutionalize tobacco industry interests, promoting regulatory exceptionalism, and obstructing international consensus—particularly given the absence of formal treaty obligations. Similarly, El Salvador’s integration of PMI into its digital modernization agenda highlights how reputational partnerships blur the boundaries between public service and commercial interest, exposing institutions to long-term risks of policy capture and positioning the tobacco industry as an agent advancing public interest.

In Ecuador, the executive’s repeated inclusion of tobacco representatives in high-level enforcement events reflects a broader trend of normalization of industry participation within government operations. These interactions reinforce the false narrative of the tobacco industry as a legitimate

governance partner and compromise the structural independence of public policy frameworks.

These examples show that when executive power fails to observe Article 5.3 WHO FCTC, it can serve as a gateway for industry influence in the heart of governments, bypassing public health safeguards and eroding the authority of international standards designed to prevent such interference.

Conclusions: Diplomats and Embassy Staff

Diplomatic actors in Latin America and the Caribbean have increasingly served as conduits for tobacco industry interests, often under the banners of trade facilitation, cultural diplomacy, or economic development. These activities—though not always framed as explicit policy advocacy—grant the industry institutional legitimacy and visibility in foreign affairs spaces that should remain free of commercial interference, in line with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC.

The case of Argentina reveals how diplomatic support, particularly from foreign missions, can be instrumental in advancing industry-driven regulatory agendas, including tax reductions and the introduction of banned products. Such facilitation, even in non-Party states, undermines the WHO FCTC's authority and reinforces commercial narratives over public health priorities.

Diplomatic engagement demonstrates how embassies and permanent missions can become direct interlocutors between the tobacco industry and multilateral institutions, for example by relaying the demands of industry-aligned coalitions in the context of global health negotiations, such as COP11.

In the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua, embassies have actively promoted premium cigars as national symbols, elevating tobacco within foreign policy discourse. These efforts destigmatize the industry's presence in diplomacy and establish reputational platforms that further entrench its outsized influence in both domestic and international arenas.

Collectively, these cases reveal how diplomacy—when left unregulated—can become a strategic avenue for the tobacco industry to bypass domestic restrictions, shape international perceptions, and erode the normative power of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC.

Conclusions: Law Enforcement and Customs Authorities

The growing involvement of tobacco industry actors in law enforcement and customs agendas across Latin America and the Caribbean reflects a concerning pattern of institutional co-optation. Under the guise of combating illicit trade, these engagements have facilitated the integration of commercial interests into public security frameworks—contradicting the protective intent of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC and the Protocol.

In Colombia and Panama, PMI has positioned itself as a legitimate stakeholder in security and customs cooperation by participating in high-level meetings and promoting tools such as the CIMA platform. These initiatives—although presented as technical collaborations—effectively embed the

tobacco industry into enforcement systems, granting it influence over institutional narratives and operational strategies. The absence of independent oversight or conflict-of-interest safeguards in these engagements further entrenches the industry's role in shaping enforcement priorities.

The Dominican Republic's case goes a step further, with PMI directly involved in the delivery of a public security program alongside police and defense authorities. This example illustrates how tobacco companies are not only participating in security discussions but are also becoming operational partners in law enforcement—an alarming expansion of industry influence into core state functions.

These developments expose a regulatory blind spot in many countries, where anti-contraband cooperation is used as a gateway for industry access to sensitive governance spaces. By legitimizing commercial actors as enforcement partners, governments compromise the impartiality, sovereignty, and independence of public institutions and risk allowing corporate interests to shape policy decisions in addition to health regulations..

Collectively, these cases underscore the urgent need to apply Article 5.3 WHO FCTC principles beyond health ministries and ensure that law enforcement, customs, and public security institutions are equally protected from industry interference.

Conclusions: Agencies and Subnational Officials

At the subnational and agency level, the tobacco industry has established durable channels of influence that compromise the autonomy and integrity of public governance across multiple countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. These engagements often take the form of technical cooperation, regulatory collaboration, or economic development partnerships—but consistently advance corporate interests at the expense of public health policy.

In Colombia, the long-standing agreement between PMI and regional governments, operationalized through the Federación Nacional de Departamentos (FND), illustrates how institutional funding and revenue-sharing arrangements can entrench industry influence. The use of industry-aligned research to oppose tax increases—by an entity that directly benefits from tobacco taxes—reveals how these partnerships can distort policy advocacy and transform public institutions into vehicles for corporate messaging.

Brazil's case demonstrates how subnational and legislative actors can institutionalize industry-friendly narratives by appealing to economic and cultural arguments. The attempt to designate tobacco as an activity of "economic, social, and cultural relevance" ahead of COP11 reflects a strategic effort to secure public resources and policy protection for the industry under the guise of defending rural livelihoods.

In the Dominican Republic, the integration of PMI into regulatory design processes through CEI-RD exemplifies a broader trend in which investment promotion agencies facilitate industry participation in rulemaking. These dynamics erode precautionary regulatory standards and normalize corporate

influence over technical decision-making—posing a clear challenge to the normative framework established by the FCTC.

Together, these examples underscore how the tobacco industry leverages local-level institutions to bypass national and international safeguards. By embedding itself in subnational governance structures and aligning with development discourse, the industry gains proximity to public policymaking while avoiding the scrutiny often present at the national level. These practices not only weaken Article 5.3 WHO FCTC compliance but also threaten to replicate and normalize institutional capture across the region.

Additional Cross-Cutting Conclusions

Institutional capture is facilitated by regulatory fragmentation and governance gaps. The tobacco industry exploits structural weaknesses—such as limited coordination between ministries, lack of transparency mechanisms, and weak enforcement capacity—to embed itself within institutional frameworks and bypass health-oriented oversight.

Public health principles are routinely sidelined in favor of economic, diplomatic, or cultural agendas. Whether through innovation discourse, trade diplomacy, or heritage narratives, the industry reframes its identity to gain acceptance in policy spaces traditionally disconnected from health, undermining the protective scope of the FCTC.

The implementation of the Protocol is being distorted by industry co-optation. While the Protocol calls for independent state enforcement, its operationalization is increasingly aligned with industry-driven platforms and tools, contradicting its foundational aim to insulate policy from commercial actors.

Lack of transparency and public accountability remains a systemic enabler of interference. Across multiple settings, the absence of mandatory disclosure—of meetings, donations, influence networks, and partnerships—facilitates unmonitored engagement with the tobacco industry, allowing hidden channels of influence to shape institutional agendas.

The visibility and perceived legitimacy of the FCTC remain limited outside health ministries. In many cases, senior officials, legislators, and diplomatic staff are unaware of or dismissive toward Article 5.3 obligations, leaving critical policy domains—such as trade, taxation, security, and innovation—vulnerable to interference.

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations respond to documented cases of tobacco industry interference across Latin America and the Caribbean, with a focus on how these actions undermine the principles of Article 5.3 WHO FCTC. Recognizing the multifaceted nature of this interference—ranging from executive partnerships and diplomatic promotion to subnational agreements and regulatory co-optation—this section is organized across four key dimensions of action:

i. States and Governments

- Adopt binding national policies and legal frameworks to implement Article 5.3 across all government sectors and subnational levels. Non-Party states are encouraged to do the same to protect public health.
- Develop and enforce codes of conduct for public officials, including diplomats and law enforcement, which bar any promotion, facilitation, or endorsement of tobacco industry interests or events, whether cultural, economic, or political.
- Terminate agreements or programs that involve or legitimize industry participation in policymaking, regulation, or public service delivery.
- Prohibit any partnerships, funding, or technical cooperation with the tobacco industry, including for enforcement efforts (e.g., anti-contraband initiatives), development programs, or innovation projects.
- Mandate full disclosure of interactions between government and industry for those occasions when interaction is necessary to regulate the industry and its products, with independent audits, public oversight, and mechanisms for corrective action.
- Ensure tobacco industry actors are excluded from all levels of public events, strategic plans, and policy platforms, to prevent reputational rehabilitation.

ii. For Civil Society and Independent Media

- Expose and challenge industry-government partnerships through public campaigns, legal challenges, and international advocacy. This includes exposing agreements framed as neutral, such as enforcement collaborations or support for innovation.
- Challenge media narratives, public discourses, and corporate doublespeak that attempt to exonerate, weaken, or subvert tobacco industry's liability for its harms to global public health, and instead reinforce the urgent need for industry liability.

- Monitor and report on diplomatic engagements that legitimize tobacco industry actors or undermine public health commitments. This includes embassies promoting tobacco products or hosting industry-affiliated events.
- Build cross-border coalitions to track and counter industry-aligned regional networks and alliances, particularly those that promote narratives of the industry as a partner in security, trade, or culture.
- Advocate for transparency and accountability in public institutions, demanding disclosure of all private sector involvement in policymaking, particularly in enforcement and regulatory spaces.
- Call on local and national governments to adopt Article 5.3 standards at all levels, including in municipalities, agencies, and councils where institutional loopholes may exist.

iii. For Academia and Research Institutions

- Document and critically analyse forms of industry interference across sectors, including executive, diplomatic, enforcement, and subnational contexts. Case studies should inform public discourse and policymaking.
- Assess institutional vulnerability to industry influence, including in partnerships, standard-setting, and funding.
- Collaborate with civil society and journalists to translate research into accessible findings, helping reveal hidden influence structures and support public accountability efforts.
- Map influence networks and regulatory capture mechanisms, especially where industry actors use soft power (e.g., diplomacy, cultural identity) to gain legitimacy.
- Develop standardized early warning indicators to inform policymakers of institutional capture or policy manipulation by commercial actors.
- Commit to strong, comprehensive, and transparent procedures for prevention of conflicts-of-interests, to advance independent, publicly-funded, and critical research in the public interest, rejecting any influence, resources, or support from the tobacco industry or others working to further its interests.

iv. A Call for International Bodies and Tobacco Control Supporters

- Reinforce global and regional technical support mechanisms for the implementation of Article 5.3, especially in countries with limited capacity to resist industry interference.
- Promote diplomatic alignment with Article 5.3, encouraging states to bar embassies and diplomatic missions from engaging with or promoting tobacco interests in any form.

- Support independent media and investigative journalism as essential tools for exposing covert influence and protecting narrative integrity in public health policy.
- Coordinate regional and global observatories to monitor, document, and analyse evolving patterns of tobacco industry interference across sectors and jurisdictions.
- Engage with other UN international treaty mechanisms to strengthen and safeguard public health and policymaking from industry interference and regulatory capture.

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