



Asia Pacific Tobacco Industry Interference Index 2025

Implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control



Executive Summary

The Asia Pacific Tobacco Industry Interference (TII) Index 2025 exposes continuing and evolving tactics by the tobacco industry (TI) to influence, delay, or weaken tobacco control measures across 24 countries. Despite widespread ratification of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC), implementation of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, which mandates governments to protect health policies from the vested interests of the TI, remains inconsistent and insufficient.

Covering developments between April 2023 and March 2025, the Index highlights stark disparities across the region. Governments such as Brunei, Palau, Fiji, and the Maldives continue to demonstrate strong political commitment and transparency by rejecting all forms of industry engagement and corporate social responsibility (CSR). Others, including Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, and the Philippines, remain deeply entangled with tobacco interests through policy participation, CSR partnerships, and economic concessions.

The findings reveal that transnational tobacco companies, including Philip Morris International (PMI), British American Tobacco (BAT), Japan Tobacco International (JTI), Imperial Brands, and the China National Tobacco Corporation (CNTC), have expanded their influence under the guise of “harm reduction” and “innovation.” This has been facilitated by fragmented governance, economic dependency, and the absence of transparency mechanisms in most countries.

Governments continue to provide the TI with tax incentives, delay key health legislation, and permit duty-free tobacco purchases, all of which undermine the objectives of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC). Conflicts of interest persist, particularly where governments retain ownership or financial stakes in tobacco enterprises, as in China, Japan, Lao PDR, Thailand, and Vietnam. Without strong safeguards, transparency, and enforcement, the TI's power to shape national agendas remains unchecked.

While 20 countries have taken steps toward strengthening compliance with Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC through codes of conduct, awareness campaigns, and new legislation, progress remains slow and uneven. The Index underscores that genuine protection of public health requires political will, vigilance, and full transparency, not mere policy commitments on paper.

Key Findings

- **Widespread Industry Participation in Policymaking**

The TI continues to influence tobacco tax policies, advertising restrictions, and regulations on electronic smoking devices in countries such as Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, New Zealand, and the Philippines. Industry-backed lobbying delayed, diluted, or repealed laws, including Malaysia's Control of Smoking Products Act (2024) and New Zealand's tobacco endgame law.

- **CSR Activities Persist Despite Bans**

Although Brunei, Lao PDR, Thailand, and the Maldives prohibit tobacco-related CSR, most other countries still accept or endorse such initiatives. BAT, JTI, and domestic tobacco companies implemented environmental and agriculture-themed CSR projects with government collaboration, legitimizing their presence and undermining public health objectives.

- **Economic Benefits and Incentives Granted to the TI**

Many governments continue to provide tax breaks, excise exemptions, and trade privileges. Lao PDR's long-standing investment deal with Imperial Brands, tax reductions for heated tobacco products in Japan and New Zealand, and delayed tobacco tax reforms in Vietnam all benefited the industry. Only Brunei, Fiji, the Maldives, and Palau reported no such incentives.

- **Unnecessary Government Interactions with the TI Continue**

High-level meetings and public endorsements of tobacco companies persist in Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Diplomatic missions have also supported tobacco ventures abroad, and several governments have awarded tobacco companies as "top taxpayers" or "model contributors."

- **Transparency Remains Critically Weak**

Only Brunei and, to some extent, the Philippines maintain mechanisms to document or disclose interactions with the TI. No country has established a public registry of industry lobbyists or third-party front groups. This opacity enables hidden influence and undermines accountability.

- **Conflicts of Interest are Deeply Entrenched**

State ownership of tobacco enterprises continues in five countries, and government-linked pension or investment funds hold shares in tobacco corporations in Bangladesh, India, Korea, and Malaysia. The revolving door between government and industry remains common, eroding trust in public institutions.

- **Protective Measures are Limited and Uneven**

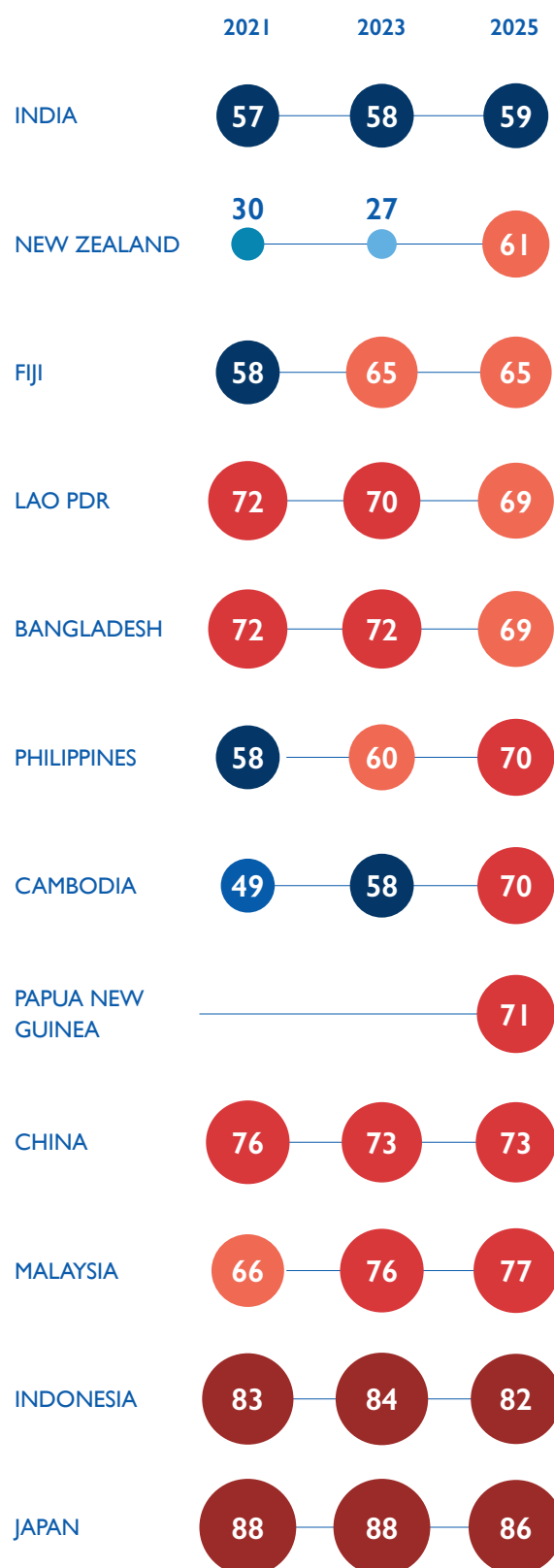
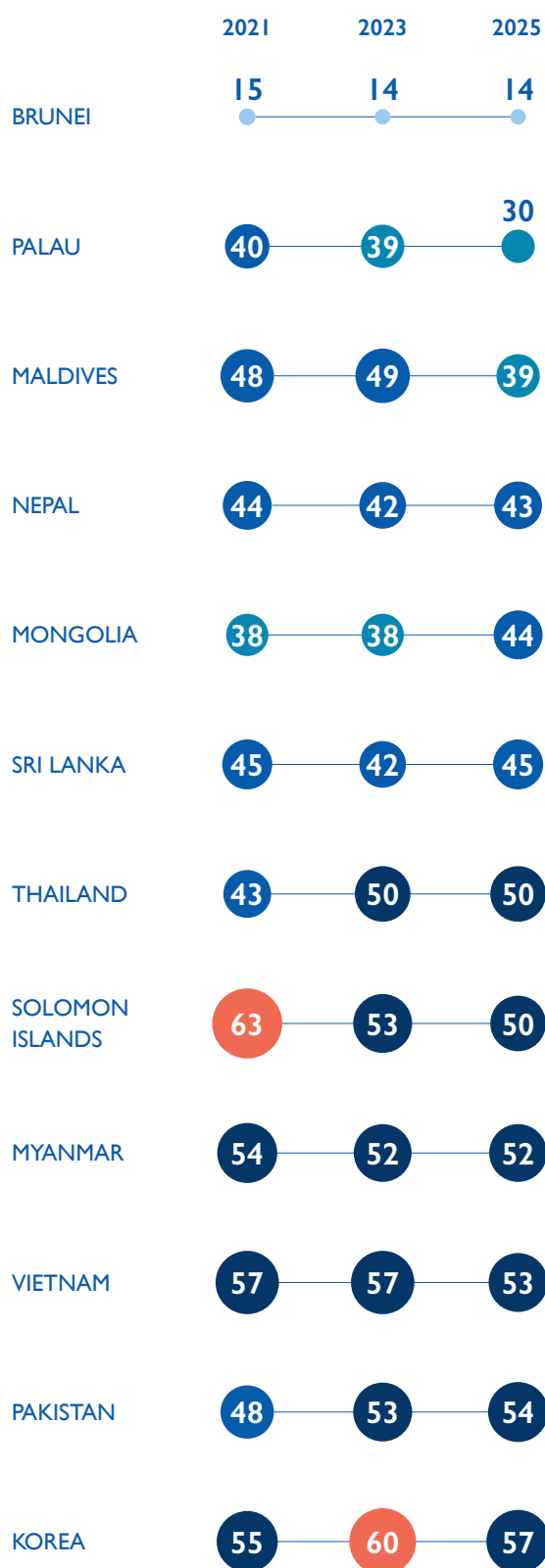
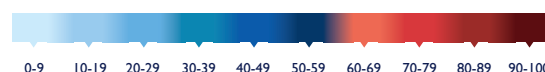
While several governments have introduced codes of conduct and Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC awareness initiatives, these are often confined to the health sector. Only Pakistan mandates the tobacco industry to disclose political contributions and CSR expenditures. Most other countries lack comprehensive systems to monitor or regulate industry activities across all sectors.

Conclusion

The 2025 Asia Pacific Index reveals that the tobacco industry's interference remains pervasive, adaptive, and deeply embedded within government systems. Without binding safeguards, institutional transparency, and strong enforcement of Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, the TI will continue to shape policy, delay progress, and endanger public health. Governments must move beyond partial compliance to a whole-of-government approach that recognizes and resists industry influence in all its forms, protecting not just policy integrity, but the lives and well-being of their citizens.

Tobacco Industry Interference in Asia Pacific

The lower the score, the better the ranking



Recommendations

Governments can better protect their tobacco control policies by adopting the following measures:

a. Institutionalize Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC Across Government

- Recognize the inherent conflict between the TI's interests and public health.
- Fully exclude the TI from any involvement in public health policy formulation and implementation.
- Develop and enforce a whole-of-government strategy that includes non-health sectors, which are often unaware of or vulnerable to industry interference.

b. Ban Tobacco Industry CSR Activities

- Prohibit all forms of so-called CSR by the TI. These are often disguised attempts to gain legitimacy, public goodwill, and political influence.
- Establish clear legal frameworks to ban tobacco-related CSR, recognizing them as manipulative public relations tactics.

c. Revoke Preferential Treatment and Incentives

- Eliminate all subsidies, tax breaks, or duty waivers granted to the TI under the guise of promoting trade or economic development.
- Reallocate resources to support essential services, such as healthcare, rather than supporting an industry that causes significant health and economic harm.

d. Restrict and Regulate Interactions with the Tobacco Industry

- Limit interactions with the TI strictly to what is necessary for regulation, and ensure that these are transparent, documented, and publicly disclosed.
- Avoid any collaboration with the industry, including in areas such as the illicit trade of tobacco, where their involvement can be counterproductive.

e. Avoid Conflicts of Interest

- Governments must end all investment in the TI, including from state-owned tobacco enterprises, to eliminate institutional conflicts of interest.
- State-owned tobacco companies should be regulated with the same stringency as private tobacco businesses, with no preferential treatment.

f. Ensure Transparency and Accountability

- Strengthen transparency by adopting mandatory disclosure procedures for all interactions with the TI and relevant third parties, limiting interactions to only when strictly necessary.
- Enforce anti-corruption measures, including penalties for failure to report such interactions.

g. Strengthen Legal and Policy Frameworks

- Strengthen implementation of existing laws and policies by integrating Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC guidelines and anti-corruption principles into government procedures, codes of conduct, and regulatory practices, ensuring safeguards are in place to prevent industry influence.

h. Adopt and Enforce a Public Sector Code of Conduct

- Develop a code of conduct or guidance for public officials, especially in non-health ministries, to guide appropriate behavior with interactions in relation to the TI.
- Integrate regular training and awareness-raising programs on Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC to build capacity and promote vigilance among civil servants.