

Industry Accountability

Vital Strategies' Work Against
Tobacco Marketing Reducing
Tobacco Advertising, Promotion,
and Sponsorship (TAPS)

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The tobacco industry spends billions of dollars each year on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship (TAPS) for its products¹. Advertising, promotion and sponsorship normalize tobacco, making it seem like any other consumer product despite its deadly burden of killing nearly one in two users. Moreover, popularity, glamor and sex appeal have historically been used as a longstanding tobacco industry strategy to reach markets since the 1880s², and present-day tobacco industry efforts are no different.

Each year the industry loses customers thanks to global advocacy efforts, growing tobacco regulations, and media campaigns that have reduced the use, acceptability and accessibility of tobacco products. Tobacco companies try to attract a new generation of tobacco users through aggressive marketing, to build long-term smokers and ultimately maintain their business. Next generation products such as e-cigarettes, heated tobacco products and snus are actively being marketed to new users as “less harmful” alternatives to smoking even though there is no strong, conclusive evidence. Today, the same long-standing marketing strategies are used widely to depict vibrant young people using e-cigarettes on social media and at glamorous industry-sponsored events. Online platforms enable the tobacco industry to spread their messages further and more quickly than in decades past.

Vital Strategies aligns with the evidence-based technical policy package from the World Health Organization (WHO), called [MPOWER](#). It calls for a total ban on all tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, including banning point-of-sale and indirect advertising, strengthening legislation, and countering industry opposition to such policies, all to reduce the demand for tobacco⁶.

Vital Strategies' programs on TAPS

We've developed new initiatives to mobilize the general public and counter the tobacco industry's advertising efforts.

In countries where women don't traditionally smoke, such as China, tobacco companies use sophisticated marketing to target women. In the United States, they have also relentlessly targeted Black communities, using heightened advertising of products such as menthol cigarettes³. It is no coincidence that nearly nine in 10 Black smokers use menthol cigarettes, which are easier to smoke and harder to quit⁴. Evidence also shows that many Black neighborhoods in the U.S. have a disproportionate number of tobacco retailers as well as culturally tailored tobacco advertising⁵.



(Above) An anti-tobacco campaign in Dhaka, Bangladesh

Stopping Tobacco Organizations and Products

STOP is a global tobacco industry watchdog whose mission is to expose and counter tobacco industry behavior that undermines public health. Through robust monitoring, research and reporting, STOP holds the tobacco industry accountable and supports efforts around the world to address industry interference in policy. STOP is a partnership comprising The Tobacco Control Research Group at the [University of Bath](#), [The Global Center for Good Governance in Tobacco Control](#), [The Union](#) and [Vital Strategies](#). To learn more, visit exposetobacco.org.



A GLOBAL
TOBACCO
INDUSTRY
WATCHDOG

Media Campaigns

Vital Strategies has developed many campaigns to counter TAPS activities that target susceptible populations around the world:

- In **Indonesia**, the “Seng Mau Rokok” (Say No to Cigarettes) campaign was [featured all across the city of Ambon](#), even under water. This built such great momentum that a smoke-free bill was drafted and passed in September 2019. Similarly, the [#TheyLieWeDie campaign](#) reached millions of people over the years and called for the cancellation of tobacco-sponsored conferences and events, including large-scale ones such as the Indonesia Millennial Summit.



(Above) Vital goes underwater in Indonesia

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- In **India**, Vital Strategies launched the [Tobacco Enforcement and Reporting Movement \(TERM\) Facebook page](#), encouraging the general public to report on the tobacco industry's marketing violations. TERM tracks publicly reported direct and indirect marketing violations, including "corporate social responsibility" efforts and e-cigarette advertisements. More than 400 marketing violations were reported across 14 Indian states in the first six months after its launch. This information is further used to strengthen policies for TAPS bans across India.
- In **Ukraine**, point of sale remains the main advertising platform targeting youth. To address this, Vital worked with the government to launch "Tobacco companies target kids," a campaign that draws attention to displays as an industry tactic to market tobacco to youth, and ultimately calls for bans on point of sale advertising and flavored cigarettes. The campaign, which aired on T.V., radio, billboards and social media and included parliamentarians speaking out on World No Tobacco Day, reached approximately 4 million people. A post-campaign survey found 70% support among youth for a point-of-sale ban bill.
- In **Bangladesh**, Vital collaborated with government to air government-funded mass media campaigns on popular television networks calling for a ban on [TAPS and selling to minors](#).
- In **Pakistan**, when kiosk tobacco advertising was banned, Vital Strategies replaced point-of-sale tobacco advertisements with 100,000 new kiosk and billboard displays with tobacco control messages in the very place the tobacco industry was forced to take down their signs. This nationwide campaign spans 10 major cities in Pakistan, reaching more than 500,000 people daily.

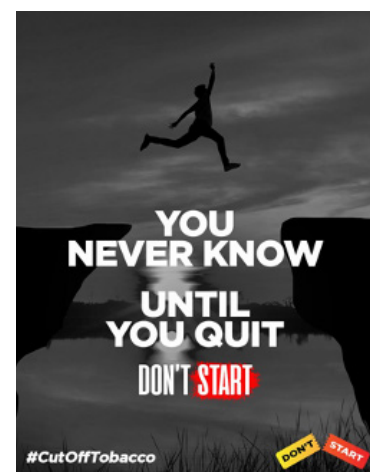


Advertisements in Pakistan



A young boy in Pakistan looks at anti-tobacco messages at eye level

- To mark **World No Tobacco Day** in 2020, Vital Strategies launched “[Don't Start](#)”—a dozen global campaigns and initiatives across multiple countries, including **Indonesia, the Philippines, Myanmar, China, India, Bangladesh and Mexico**. The digital campaign encouraged youth not to start using tobacco and called for TAPS bans. The global campaign reached more than 20 million people, engaging youth, artists, advocates, singers, athletes and more.
- In **Turkey** and elsewhere, we partner with governments to use broadcast rules that allow for the free airing of public health messages on television and radio to counter the billions of dollars that the tobacco industry spends promoting their products to young people. [Anti-industry messages](#) in Turkey run on more than 160 TV stations and 50 radio stations. Similarly, in **India**, a film rule we supported calls for anti-tobacco health warnings to air anytime smoking or tobacco products are depicted in a film, on TV, in a theater, or when streaming online.

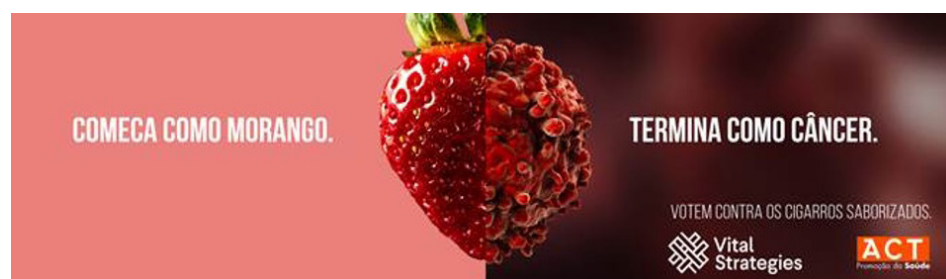


A campaign in Indonesia countering tobacco ads with new quit messages

Our efforts contributed to recent policy achievements:

In **Indonesia**, the Supreme Court upheld the city of Bogor's smoke-free regulations and TAPS ban, in response to the tobacco industry's attempts at a legal dispute. Vital supported the Department of Health's regulations by launching a campaign that included an earned media strategy for influential media outlets and mobilizing the public.

A campaign in **Brazil** using the message “It starts with strawberry and ends with cancer,” helped to uphold flavor bans in the courts that were being challenged by the tobacco industry. In 2021, after nearly a decade of struggle, Brazil's highest court ruled that regulatory officials have the right to ban the use of additives in tobacco products.



A campaign to support a flavor ban on tobacco products in Brazil reads, “It starts with strawberry and ends with cancer.”

Endnotes

- 1 [CDC, Tobacco Industry Marketing. 2020](#)
- 2 [Truth Initiative, Sex Sells, 2018](#)
- 3 Truth Initiative, Why tobacco is a racial justice issue, Research and resources, August 2020, accessed January 2021
- 4 [Truth Initiative, Why Tobacco is a Racial Justice Issue. 2020](#)
- 5 Lee, JGL, et al., "A Systematic Review of Neighborhood Disparities in Point-of-Sale Tobacco Marketing," American Journal of Public Health, published online ahead of print July 16, 2015.
- 6 [World Health Organization, MPOWER](#)