



Technical Report on Tobacco Marketing at the Point-of-Sale in Mexico City, Mexico



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Background and Introduction

Tobacco use is a burden to Mexican society. Cigarette smokers account for 14.6% of the youth population (13 to 15-years-old) as well as 16.3% of the adult population (15-years-old and older).¹ It is estimated that more than 47,200 Mexicans die of tobacco-caused diseases every year.² Mexico was the first country in the Americas to ratify the World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) in 2003. Since then, the country has adopted and implemented many of the FCTC's recommendations. In 2008, Mexico signed the General Law on Tobacco Control (GLTC), which included the adoption of health warning labels (HWLs) on tobacco product packaging, a partial smoke-free policy, and a partial restriction on tobacco advertisement, promotion, and sponsorship (TAPS).

A comprehensive TAPS ban is an evidence-based, effective tobacco control measure, and one of the main policies required by the FCTC. Previous studies have shown significant associations between exposure to tobacco promotion at the point/points-of-sale (POS) and susceptibility to smoking and experimentation among children³, as well as an association between tobacco marketing exposure at POS close to schools and brand preference among adolescents.⁴ The tobacco industry has invested in a range of marketing strategies at the point-of-sale, including ones appealing to youth, such as flavored cigarettes and placement of products and/or advertising at the eye-level of children and near toys, sweets, and sugary drinks.⁵ The display of tobacco products is another marketing strategy³ that presents similar effects and influence on consumers as traditional media advertising, such as increasing smoking susceptibility and experimentation.⁶ In this context, the cigarette pack itself is an important marketing tool. Reviews of tobacco industry documents have shown that the pack design and features are manipulated in order to communicate brand image and increase their visibility at the point-of-sale.⁷ The industry is also able to communicate flavors and increase the appeal of the product at the POS by manipulating pack features and including descriptors.⁸ The availability of flavored cigarettes is especially relevant in the Mexican market where the consumption of flavored cigarettes has significantly increased in the past years.⁹

When only certain types of TAPS are restricted, the tobacco industry is still able to use other marketing strategies to promote its brands.¹⁰ With the implementation of the GLTC, Mexico has banned tobacco sponsorship of events, activities, and individuals as well as advertisements on national television and radio, billboards and outdoor ads. However, advertisements in magazines and places, including POS, restricted to adults over 18 years of age are still allowed.¹¹ GLTC also prohibits indirect advertisement such as promotional discounts and brand stretching, but allows brand sharing and placement of tobacco products on television and in films. While advertisement at the POS is partially banned, the same is not true for the display of tobacco products. With a graphic health warning label that covers only 30% of the front of the pack (far below the 50% minimum recommended by FCTC to be effective¹²), the tobacco industry has ample space to advertise its brands when displayed at tobacco retailers in Mexico.

Considering these partial restrictions on TAPS, the goal of this study is to identify current tobacco marketing techniques that might exploit loopholes in the law, and to assess compliance with specific regulations relating to tobacco advertising and promotion at points-of-sale around schools in neighborhoods of Mexico City.

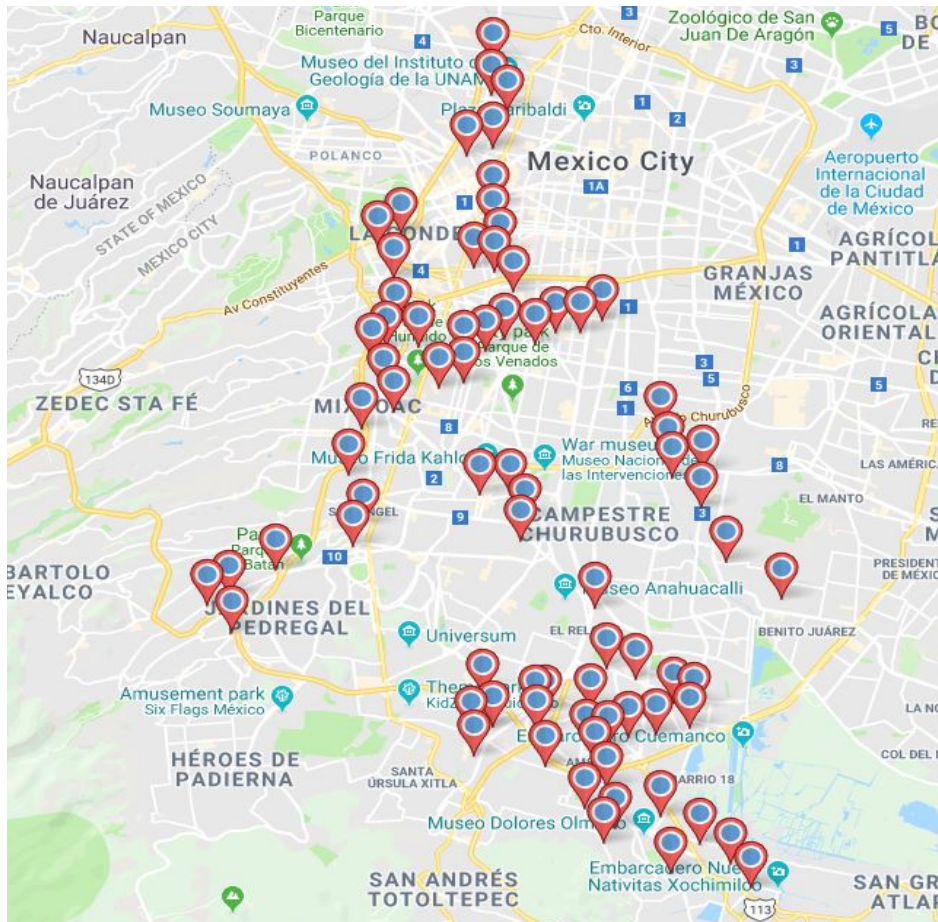
Methods

This report describes an observational study to characterize tobacco advertising and promotion, compliance with the GLTC's mandatory age restriction sign for sales to minors (under 18-years-old), prohibition of single stick sales, and visibility of cigarette health warning labels at points-of-sale in Mexico City, Mexico. The work was led by the Institute for Global Tobacco Control (IGTC) at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health (JHSPH). IGTC partnered with the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids (CTFK), an international public health NGO, and Comunicación, Diálogo y Conciencia S.C (Códice), a Mexican NGO. IGTC designed the survey instrument and data collection protocol in collaboration with CTFK and Códice. The sampling framework was designed by IGTC with guidance provided by CTFK and Códice. IGTC trained 10 paid data collectors from Códice to conduct the fieldwork and remained on site after training to supervise data collection and troubleshoot any logistical or technical issues. CTFK supported training and data collection as well. Data cleaning, validation, and analysis were carried out by IGTC.

Sampling Approach

Out of the 16 municipalities comprising Mexico City, our local partners selected nine of them (Álvaro Obregón, Benito Juárez, Coyoacán, Cuauhtémoc, Iztacalco, Iztapalapa, Miguel Hidalgo, Tlalpan, and Xochimilco) based on accessibility and convenience for data collectors traversing the city by foot and via public transportation. Within these municipalities, 133 public and private schools were selected, with the sampling area being defined as a 250 m radius surrounding each school. An online mapping and distance tool was used to create navigation maps and to ensure that none of the sampling areas would overlap. A total of 77 schools, including primary, secondary, and high schools, comprised the sample (Figure 1). Data collectors were not able to collect data from three of these schools because they were either not safe to walk or they were within gated communities. All existing POS within each sampling area were observed. For this study, the following types of stores were included: (a) chain convenience stores; (b) small/independent grocery stores; (c) kiosks/newsstands; (d) pharmacies; (e) street vendors; and, (f) tobacco specialty stores/vape shops. Only those that displayed or advertised tobacco products were observed.

Figure 1. Map of Sampled Schools (N=77) across the Nine Selected Municipalities in Mexico City



Training and Data Collection Protocol

A day prior to training, the IGTC study team met with CTFK and Códice to field test the survey instrument and make any needed refinements. On March 5, 2019 a group of 10 data collectors attended a full-day training to learn about tobacco promotion, advertising, and regulation in Mexico, including sales restrictions and HWLs. The IGTC study team supported by CTFK also explained the purpose of the study, the survey content, key terms and definitions, and data collection procedures in detail. As part of the training, data collectors field tested the instrument and mobile application and had the opportunity to ask further questions regarding procedures.

From March 6-8, 2019 (immediately following the training) data collectors visited all POS within the 250 m radius of the 74 schools and recorded their observations using the Magpi mobile data collection application. Magpi automatically captures the date, geographic coordinates, and the data collector's identification for each record uploaded to the dataset. The IGTC and CTFK study teams were available during data collection to answer questions from data collectors. The IGTC study team monitored data collection to ensure data integrity.

Survey Instrument

The survey instrument was designed to verify compliance with key articles of the Mexican General Law on Tobacco Control that regulates tobacco product placement, promotion, health warnings, and sales restrictions, as well as to record information on POS marketing that may target youth and to assess the availability of electronic cigarettes and heated tobacco products (Table 1). The survey also asked whether the store was within eyesight of the school and provided fields for data collectors to enter the sampling area code, retailer address, and other notes or comments about the retailer.

Table 1. POS in Mexico Checklist Content

Key Component	Characteristic	Variables Included	Regulation
Product Availability	Product Type	Tobacco cigarettes	Allowed
		Flavored cigarettes*	Allowed
		Single sticks*	Prohibited
		Foreign cigarette packs*	Prohibited (allowed only when legally imported)
		E-cigarettes*	Not regulated
		Heated tobacco products*	Not regulated
Tobacco Product Display	Location	At the cashier zone*	Not regulated
		Branded stand or cabinet	Not regulated
		With or near sweets, snacks, or sugary drinks	Not regulated
		At the eye-level of children*	Not regulated
		Visible from outside the store	Not regulated
	Features	Using lights, reflective materials, or holograms	Not regulated
		HWL not visible (excludes foreign packs)	Prohibited
Tobacco Advertising & Promotion	Advertising Signage	Mentioning flavor/menthol	Allowed
		Using English text	Prohibited
		Display of product	Allowed
	Promotion	Imitation cigarettes (toys or candy)	Prohibited
		Presence of brand representative	Prohibited
Compliance	Sales Restriction	Age restriction sign	Mandatory

**See Key Terms and Definitions for further explanation of these terms*

Results

In total, 723 points-of-sale were observed around the 74 sampled schools. The majority of the points-of-sale around these schools were small/independent grocery stores (39.3%), followed by kiosks/newsstands (20.7%), chain convenience stores (16.2%), street vendors (15.4%), pharmacies (7.7%), and tobacco specialty stores/vape shops (0.4%). Of these 723 points-of-sale, 80.8% (n=584) sold tobacco products, and 26.2% (n=153) were within eyesight from the school.

While heated tobacco products and e-cigarettes were found in less than 1.0% of the tobacco retailers, flavored cigarettes were available among the greatest majority (86.3%) and over half of the tobacco retailers (50.9%) sold single sticks (Figure 2). While selling flavored cigarettes is allowed by law, selling single sticks is not. The sale of single sticks was mainly observed among kiosks/newsstands (22.4%), street vendors (16.1%), and small/independent grocery stores (11.6%).

Figure 2. Product Availability among All Tobacco Retailers (n=584 Tobacco Retailers)

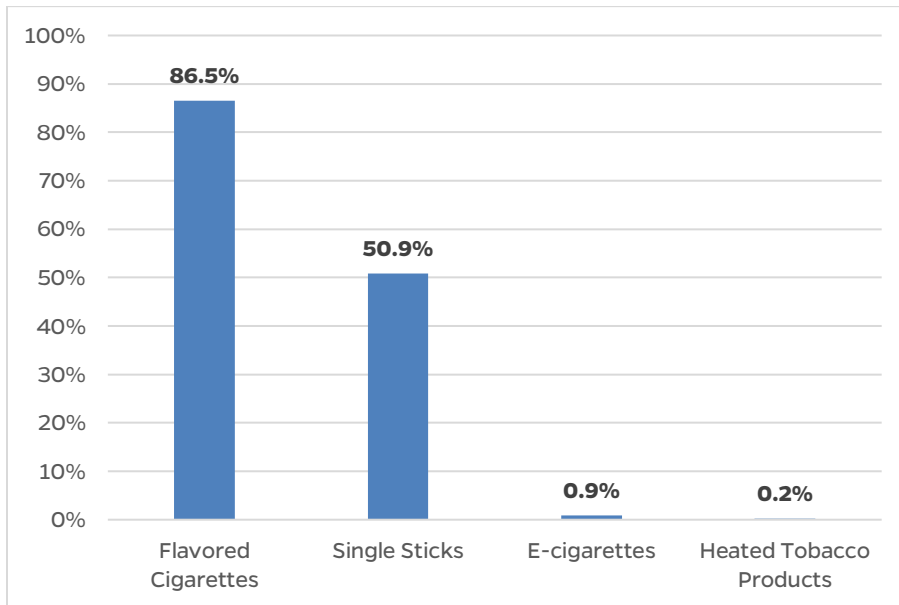


Figure 3. Display of cigarette packs with price in different retailers. The sale of single sticks at \$6 MXN each (left) compared to packs varying from \$30-65 MXN (right)

Tobacco Advertising and Promotion among Retailers

Product display was found to be the primary method of advertising tobacco products (Figure 4), which in many cases (42.8%) could be seen from the outside of stores. This advertising method is not regulated under the current TAPS restrictions. On the other hand, advertising signage is

allowed only at places restricted to adult population (over the age of 18). The few occurrences of advertising signage focused on the flavors (9.0%) and menthol (8.0%) in tobacco products. Brand representatives were not found in our sample. The minimal occurrences of tobacco promotion were limited to candy imitation cigarettes. Both of these promotion strategies—brand representative and imitation cigarettes—are banned by GLTC.

Figure 4. Tobacco Advertising and Promotion at the POS (n=584 Tobacco Retailers)

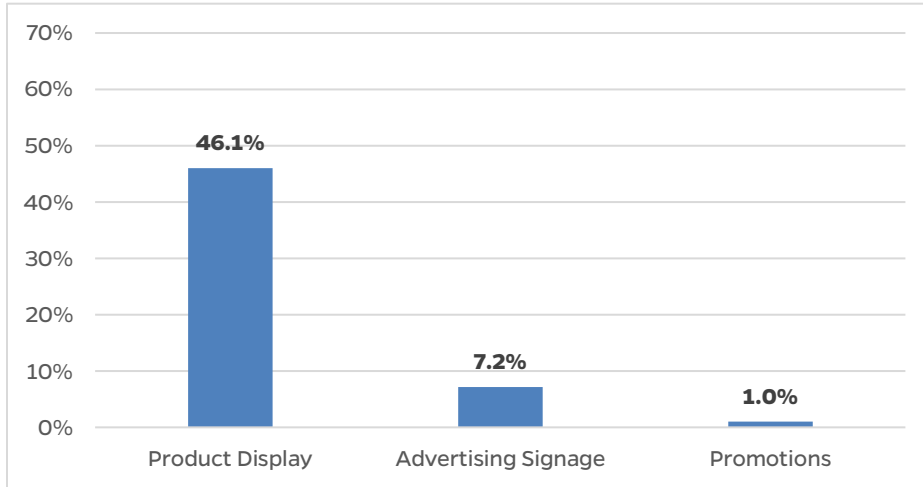


Figure 5. Tobacco display visible from outside of the store

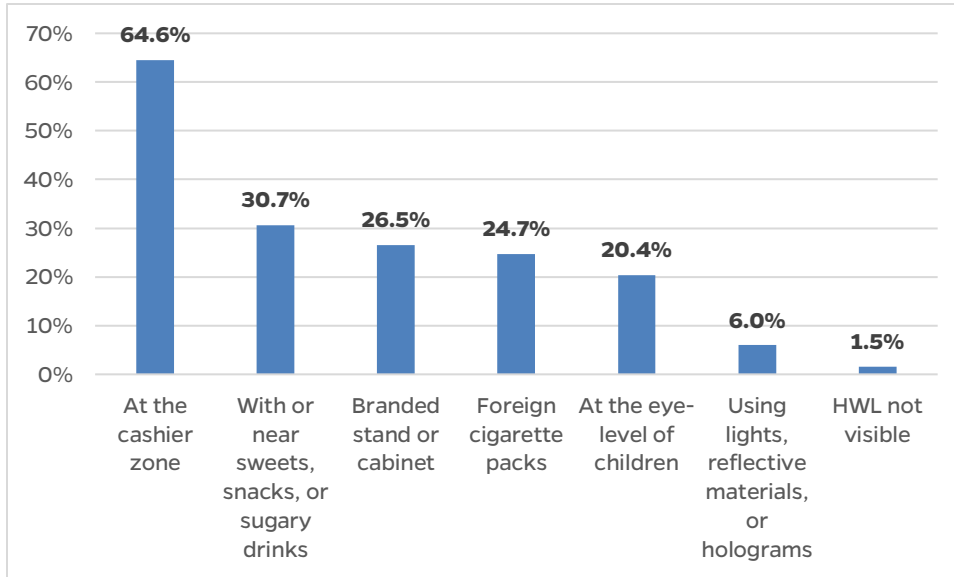


Figure 6. Single stick cigarettes for sale near sweets

Tobacco products were mainly found around the cashier zone (64.6%) (Figure 7). In addition, the placement of tobacco products with or near sweets, snacks, or sugary drinks (30.7%), in branded stands or cabinets (24.7%), and at the eye-level of children (20.4%) were observed. Few

observations noted the use of lights, reflective materials, and holograms. Almost 25.0% of the cigarette packs on display were identified as foreign packs, meaning they did not have the required Mexican health warning labels and, therefore, did not comply with the GLTC. When considering non-foreign cigarette packs, the HWLs were visible at the POS in the vast majority of the time in accordance with the law.

Figure 7. Display of Tobacco Products at the POS (n=584 Tobacco Retailers)



The GLTC also requires all POS to display an age restriction sign. Only 24.1% of tobacco retailers complied with this requirement (Figure 10). Chain convenience stores presented the highest compliance with displaying the age restriction sign among all types of retailers, yet compliance was low (55.7%). Street vendors and kiosks/newsstands, which comprised slightly over a third of all the tobacco retailers in our sample, did not display the required age restriction sign.

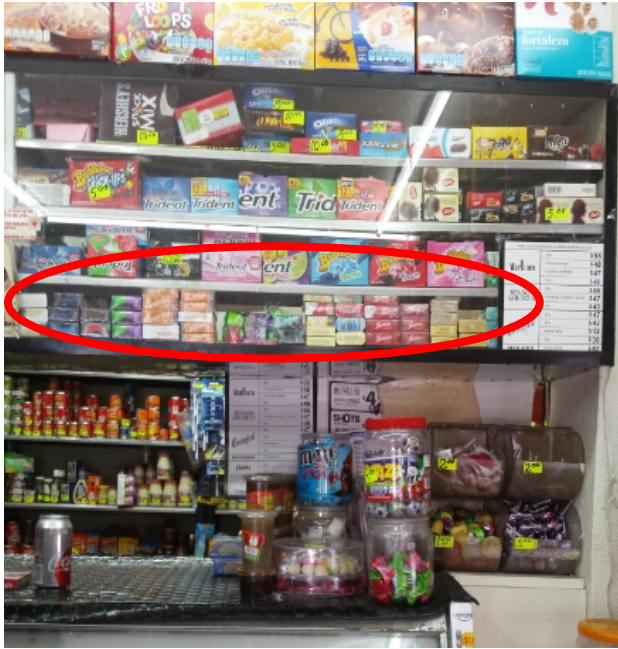
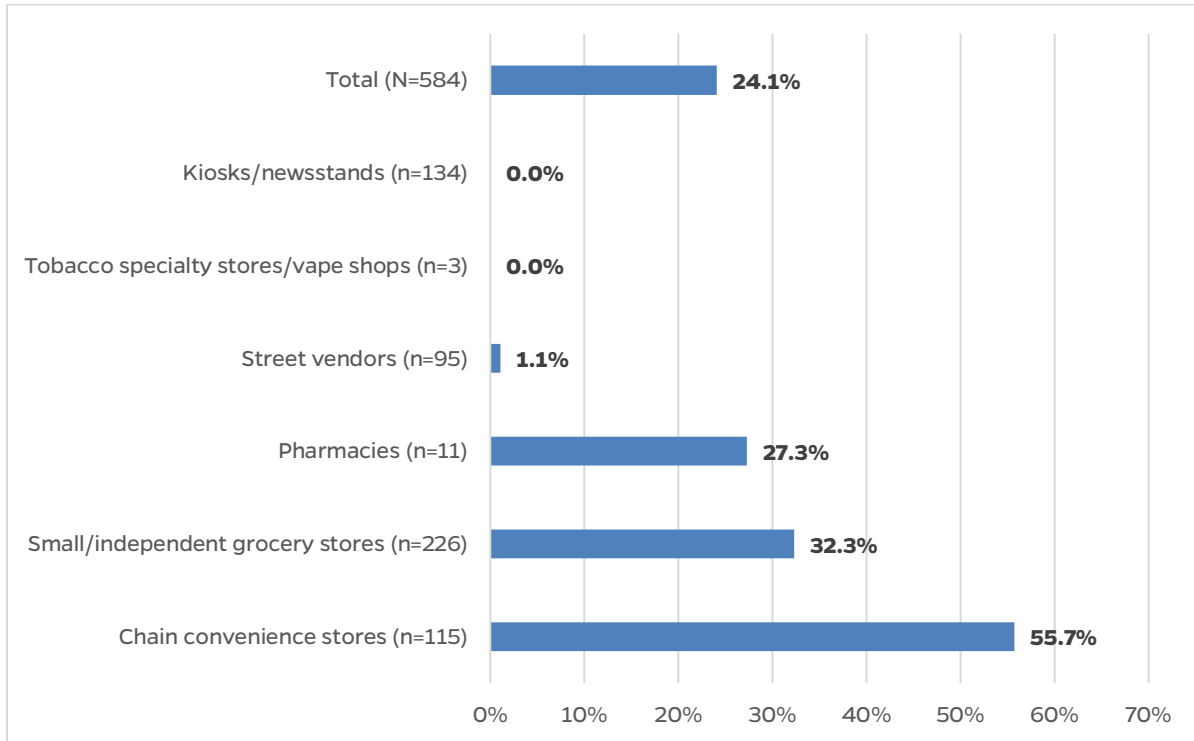


Figure 7. Cigarette packs displayed near sweets. The HWL is not visible



Figure 8. Display of cigarette packs at the cashier zone

Figure 10. Compliance with Age Restriction Sign, by Tobacco Retailer Type (n=584 Tobacco Retailers)



Discussion

This study found a high availability of tobacco products near schools. This exposes children and adolescents to tobacco products, which can put them at higher risk of initiating use. The lack of age restriction signs might be indicative of weak enforcement of the law prohibiting sales to minors. In addition, the multiple instances of single stick sales found at these points-of-sale around schools are another area of concern not only because they violate the GLTC, but also because the price of one stick is considerably lower than for the whole pack of cigarettes. This situation may be particularly appealing to young people who usually do not have a lot of money to spend. While occurrences of tobacco advertising and promotion at the POS were minimal, the display of cigarette packs was ubiquitous and requires attention. It is important to note that the vast majority of retailers sold flavored cigarettes, another tobacco industry technique known to be appealing to youth. A flavor ban can potentially decrease attractiveness of the product, reducing tobacco use and dependence. Combined with other aggressive marketing techniques focused on youth, such as the placement of products with or near sweets, snacks, and sugary drinks and at the eye-level of children, the point-of-sale in Mexico City raises many concerns. A comprehensive TAPS ban has the potential to restrict these different methods of advertising including at the point-of-sale. The GLTC should be strengthened by prohibiting the display of tobacco products at the point-of-sale, which would decrease the exposure and appeal of tobacco products to Mexican youth.

Limitations

This study has concentrated on the characterization of tobacco product advertising and promotion at the point-of-sale in Mexico City and is limited by the strategic selection of municipalities and convenience sampling of schools. The findings presented here exclude possible tobacco retailers that do not display tobacco products, yet still sell them. The results do not represent all types of tobacco retailers, and they should not be generalized to other areas of Mexico. Despite its limitations, this study does suggest the need for a comprehensive TAPS ban and for further enforcement of the current law.

Key Terms and Definitions

Advertising signage: Posters, banners, panels, or stands that advertise a tobacco brand or product

Cashier zone: Directly on top of, in front of, or to the side of the counter or cash register where consumers make a purchase

E-cigarettes: Electronic devices that deliver an aerosol by heating a liquid containing or not containing nicotine. The liquid also might contain flavoring agents

Eye-level of children: Placement of products one meter or less from the floor

Flavored cigarettes: Cigarettes in which flavoring agents, a natural or synthetic substance or mixture of substances, such as menthol, are added to impart, modify, enhance, or intensify the flavor of tobacco products

Foreign cigarette packs: Cigarette packs without the current required Mexican health warning labels - 30% of the front of the pack (picture), 100% of the back and one side (text). This might include packs with older Mexican HWL, HWL from another country, or no HWL at all

Heated tobacco products: Electronic devices that produce an aerosol by heating tobacco without generating combustion

Single sticks: Sale of individual cigarettes from packs, despite prohibition of the law

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