

## Classifying differences in public opinions towards gambling policy goals

### What this research is about

Public opinions for gambling regulation and harm-reduction policies can vary. Policy measures that are less restrictive (such as education campaigns) usually have more support from the public. In general, greater participation in gambling predicts lower support for restrictive measures. However, past research has shown mixed results regarding attitudes towards gambling policies, including among people who gamble.

In the current study, the researchers used data from the 2023 Finnish Gambling Study to explore public opinions towards gambling policy goals. Participants were grouped into distinct profiles based on their opinions.

### What the researchers did

Data for this study came from the 2023 Finnish Gambling Study, which surveyed people aged 15–74 years living in mainland Finland. Participants were randomly selected from the general population and either completed the survey online, through the post, or through telephone. Those living in an institution or experiencing homelessness, expatriates, and those who did not speak Finnish, Swedish, or Sámi were excluded.

Participants were asked to select 1–4 gambling policy goals they thought to be the most important for the Finnish government. They selected from a list of 10 policy goals:

- Preventing and reducing gambling-related harms
- Reducing gambling-related crime
- Ensuring protection for consumers

### What you need to know

Public opinion towards gambling policies can vary based on factors such as gender, age, and gambling engagement. In the current study, the researchers used data from the 2023 Finnish Gambling Study to examine people's attitudes towards different gambling policy goals. They identified profiles of people who prioritized different gambling policy goals.

Generally, most participants in this study prioritized harm prevention and reduction, preventing gambling with unauthorized operators, and reducing crime. Three different profiles emerged: Traditionalists (support for generating revenue for the state and reducing crime and harms), Harm-reducers (support for reducing harms and gambling overall), and Libertarians (support for freedom of choice and competition).

- Restricting gambling marketing
- Preventing the operation of unauthorized gambling companies
- Steering gambling toward authorized offerings
- Increasing people's freedom of choice
- Fostering competition between operators
- Generating revenue for the state
- Reducing gambling

Participants also completed the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI), which asked about gambling behaviours and harms experienced in the past year; the Attitudes Towards Gambling Scale (ATGS); and demographic questions, including age, employment, past-year gambling, offshore

gambling, and experiences of being negatively affected by someone else's gambling.

The researchers performed a latent class analysis to create distinct profiles based on opinions of what the most important gambling policy goals should be. They then examined if these profiles could be predicted by demographic factors, attitudes towards gambling, and gambling behaviours.

### What the researchers found

Data came from 5,997 participants. Most participants endorsed policy goals focusing on harm prevention and reduction (83%), preventing gambling with unauthorized operators (53%), and reducing gambling-related crime (52%). There were some gender differences, with women prioritizing harm prevention and reduction, crime reduction, preventing gambling with unauthorized operators, and reducing gambling. Men prioritized consumer protection, freedom of choice for those who gamble, and encouraging competition between operators.

Differences also emerged based on past-year gambling. Those who gambled within the past year prioritized consumer protection, preventing gambling with unauthorized operators, generating state revenue, and increasing freedom of choice. Those who did not gamble favored restricting gambling marketing and reducing gambling.

Three profiles emerged from the latent class analysis:

- **Traditionalists (54.8% of respondents):** People who prioritized steering gambling toward the domestic market, preventing gambling with unauthorized operators, reducing crime, generating revenue for the state, and preventing gambling-related harms.
- **Harm-reducers (32.5% of respondents):** People who prioritized reducing gambling, preventing gambling-related harms, and restricting unauthorized gambling and gambling marketing.
- **Libertarians (12.7% of respondents):** People who prioritized freedom of choice for those who gamble and fostering competition.

Compared to Traditionalists, Harm-reducers were typically younger, less likely to gamble, and had

more negative attitudes towards gambling.

However, they were more likely than Traditionalists to report using both government-owned and offshore gambling operators.

Those in the Libertarian profile were more likely to be men, experience at-risk or problem gambling, and use offshore gambling operators. Younger age and positive attitudes towards gambling were also associated with the Libertarian profile.

### How you can use this research

The findings suggest that the public supports harm reduction and restrictions on gambling.

### About the researchers

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