

The use of research by stakeholders in public hearings on gambling law and regulations in Norway

What this research is about

Research evidence from scientific studies has often been presented to policy makers and used in different ways to influence policy making. Pelz (1978) outlined three ways research evidence is used. First, research can serve to directly inform a course of action to guide a policy decision (instrumental use). Second, research can be used to enhance understanding of a problem (conceptual use). Third, research can be used to demonstrate that a policy problem exists or to persuade others that a particular approach is appropriate (symbolic use). However, it is less clear how stakeholders on different sides of a disputed issue use research findings to advocate for their positions.

This study examined how different stakeholders use research findings to advocate for specific policy solutions. Specifically, it looked at a case study involving the development of a new law and regulations for commercial gambling in Norway. The narrative policy framework (NPF) was applied. The NPF is a research framework for examining how narratives are constructed and used strategically to influence policy processes.

Case studies applying the NPF have been conducted on a wide array of policy initiatives, ranging from school policy decisions in Switzerland to vaping policies in Australia, Canada, and the European Union. In recent years, increased focus has been directed towards understanding how research evidence is used to construct policy narratives. The types of evidence most often used are scientific

What you need to know

Scientific research findings have often been used by stakeholders in debates on public policy. The present study examined stakeholder submissions to two public hearings in Norway on the new gambling law in 2020 and proposed gambling regulations in 2022. Applying the narrative policy framework (NPF), it was found that stakeholders often cited research evidence to construct certain narratives and to support their position on gambling in Norway. The same research evidence was used in such narratives to advance different policy solutions. These findings could be of interest to researchers and policy makers in Norway and other jurisdictions where gambling policy is being debated.

studies, statistics, polls, ipso dictum, laws or legal rulings, and expert opinions.

The present study applied the NPF to understand the setting, characters, plot, and the moral of the story that stakeholders constructed in their narratives during two public policy hearings regarding commercial gambling in Norway in 2020 and 2022. The aim was to explore how stakeholders participating in these public hearings used research evidence to construct their identities and to advance different policy solutions.

What the researchers did

The author examined datasets from two public policy hearings. The first hearing was on the new

gambling law in 2020, and the second was on proposed gambling regulations in 2022. The datasets consisted of official Norwegian government position papers and 163 stakeholder submissions from 124 organizations. Stakeholders included government agencies, industry associations, private firms, and charitable or non-profit organizations.

The submissions were coded according to four categories: (1) research that was used and cited in the submission; (2) normative statements of scientific statements that were not cited; (3) references to tools such as scales used in research; and (4) use of scientific methods by non-academics.

What the researchers found

Across the two public hearings, 39% of the submissions used research. The research most cited by stakeholders was the most recent gambling prevalence study conducted by researchers at the University of Bergen. This prevalence study provides estimates of rates of gambling participation and problem gambling in the Norwegian population.

The author used a two-step qualitative assessment to explore how stakeholders made use of research in their submissions. In the first step, the main characters and the moral of the story or policy solution favoured by each submission's narrative were identified. Citing the gambling prevalence study, the existence of a subgroup of the population at risk for gambling harms was presented as fact, thus establishing the 'victims'. Research findings that the number of people experiencing gambling harms was rising were often mentioned. The 'villain' was framed as unlicensed internet-based gambling companies. In contrast, Norway's national monopoly gambling providers were framed by government agencies and most charitable organizations as the necessary counterbalance to illegal gambling. Many stakeholders also used research to position themselves as neutral or ethical actors, and to distance from the harms produced by gambling.

The second step focused on the strategic use of research to support a certain 'moral of the story' and advance certain policy solutions. The same research findings were often used to support opposing narratives. For instance, government agencies cited

evidence of a rising rate of problem gambling in support of the existing state monopoly as being best to ensure strong 'care' and 'responsibility'. In contrast, industry stakeholders used the same evidence to suggest that the state monopoly had failed in protecting the Norwegian population from gambling harms. Industry stakeholders also cited the recent change to a licensed model in Sweden and Denmark to advocate for regulatory change.

How you can use this research

The findings of this study highlight the utility of the NPF for understanding the nuances of gambling policy development. These findings could be of interest to researchers and policy makers in Norway and other jurisdictions.

About the researchers

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