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The Framing of Gambling and the Commercial Determinants of Harm: Challenges for Regulation in the UK

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Disclosures

- HW served as independent advisor to UK government on gambling policy (2015-20). HW is co-chair of the Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling. HW has worked on one project on gambling and suicide for GambleAware in last 4 years.
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- Check out www.grg.scot @glagamres @shwardle @gerdareith

1. Why Framing Matters



Why focus on framing

“Whoever frames the debate has power over the ways that we can and cannot think about gambling, as well as what we can do about it.”



- Market ideology of minimal state intervention, individual responsibility, economic competition
- Framing in terms of consumption, leisure and economic activity – ‘harmless fun’ for ‘responsible majority’ vs harm for minority
- Framing underlies commercial landscape that produces harm



Whose Freedom is it anyway...?

- Who frames? For whose benefit?
- Focus on power
- Focus on consumption aligns harm with individuals rather than producers of harm



*“Having our freedoms restricted by politicians – even ones we voted for – is not a long-term solution to any problem. Put simply, I firmly believe people should be trusted to get on with their lives and act in a sensible way that does no harm to themselves or pose a danger to others.....
Govt restrictions [are part of a] culture war Nanny state gone mad”*

Mark Jenkinson, MP; available at <https://www.conservativehome.com/sponsored/2021/07/mark-jenkinson-freedom-day-should-mean-personal-responsibility-replacing-state-control-of-our-lives.html/>

Sponsored by Betting and Gaming Council



Common arguments used by industry to resist regulatory change

1. Gambling harms as individual, not corporate or state, responsibility
2. Gambling industry generates growth and economic prosperity
3. Greater regulatory protections will increase the 'Black Market'

2. The central tension and its economic antecedents



Changes to framing gambling policy in the UK

Permit but not promote (1960s-2005)



Gambling as leisure;
heavy promotion;
individual responsible
(2005-present day)



Gambling Act Review:
Protect people from
harm AND gambling
to **contribute** to the
economy



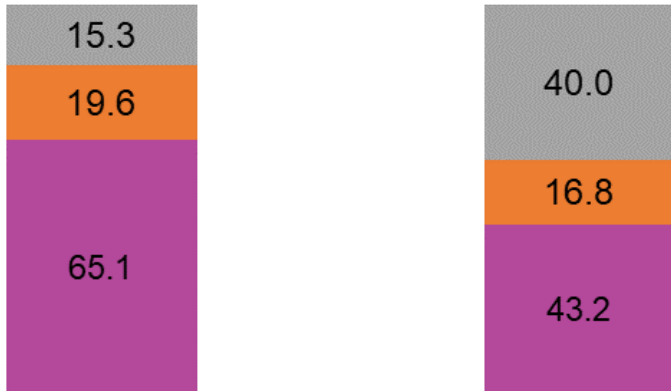
Who generates money for gambling companies?

[it's a fundamental truth that] “a very small part of the population, and of those who gamble, account for a very large share of the total spending”



An unhealthy reliance on a minority for profits?

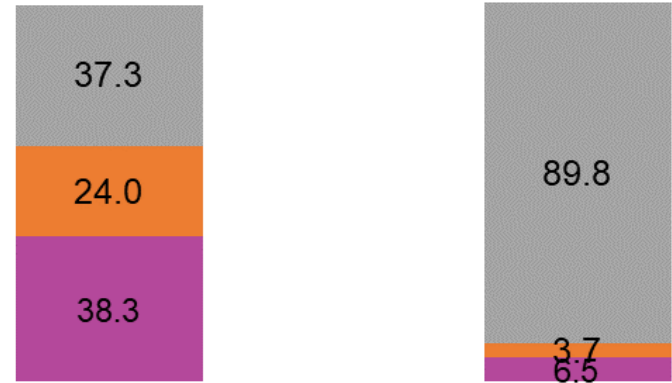
■ PGSI score 3 or more ■ PGSI score 1-2 ■ PGSI score 0



Problem gambling status Proportion of expenditure

Online sports bettors

■ PGSI score 3 or more ■ PGSI score 1-2 ■ PGSI score 0



Problem gambling status Proportion of expenditure

Online casino games



Government complicity

Illinois Gambling Act – Legislative Intent 2019

“This Act is intended to benefit the people of the State of Illinois by assisting economic development, promoting Illinois tourism, and increasing the amount of revenues available to the State to assist and support education, and to defray State expenses”

Money flows...

1. Education assistance fund
2. State Gaming fund
3. Rebuild Illinois Fund
4. To specific cities and counties (% of taxes pre specified)
5. Capital project fund
6. Common School Fund
7. Public Pension Payments
8. Illinois State Police
9. County Home Rule funds (to enhance criminal justice system)
10. Dept of Human Services (administration of treatment).
11. Horse Racind Equity Fund

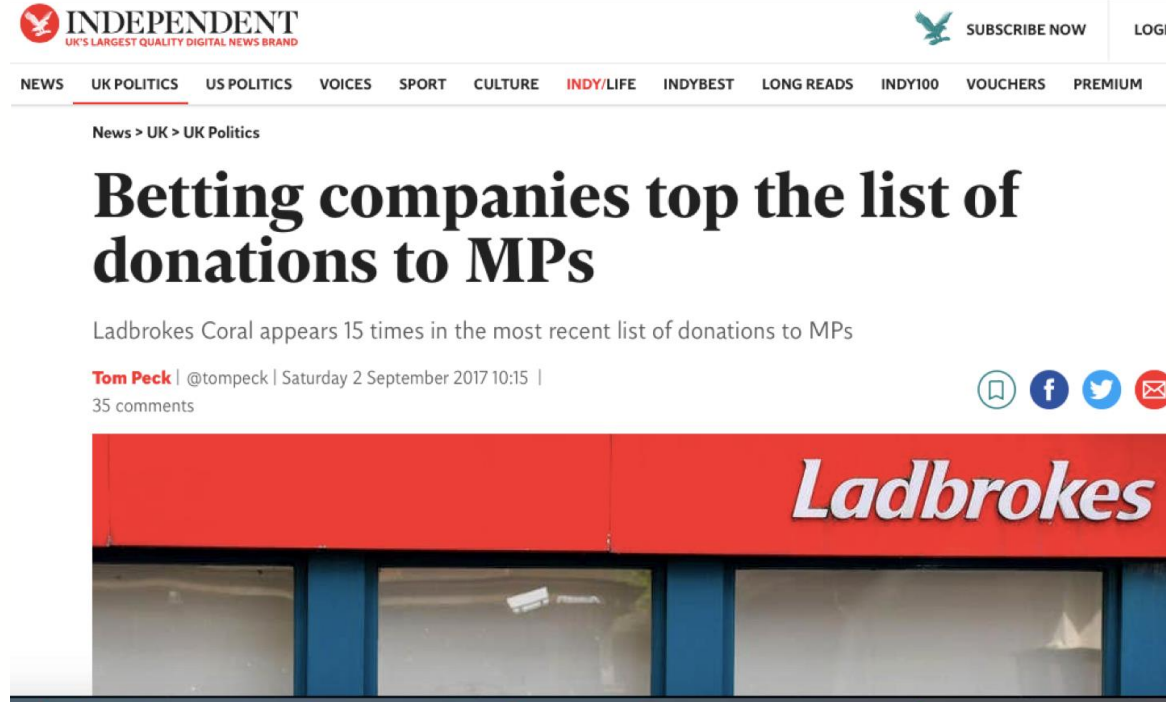
3. Challenges for Regulation

Political Determinants of Harm

- Commercial influence interwoven through political system
- Links industry with policymakers – regulators – academics
- Lobbying; financial donations; ‘revolving door’ of key personnel
 - Shadow Secretary of State for gambling now head of Betting and Gaming Council

Party political connections

Direct financial
donations &
industry
influence



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News > UK > UK Politics

Betting companies top the list of donations to MPs

Ladbrokes Coral appears 15 times in the most recent list of donations to MPs

Tom Peck | @tompeck | Saturday 2 September 2017 10:15 |
35 comments





Vested interests: profits from harms

Gambling

This article is more than 1 month old

Betfred owners make millions from company treating gambling addicts

Exclusive: Tory party donors Fred and Peter Done run health and wellbeing firm offering treatment to government staff

- **Who are Fred and Peter Done, the brothers behind Betfred?**
- **How Britain got the gambling bug**
- **Don't leave us to pick up pieces from gambling firms' tactics, says NHS chief**



Industry influence in committee membership

House of Lords Committee on the Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry

Chair: Lord Michael Grade

- Ex Chair of Camelot (National Lottery provider)
- Ex CEO First Leisure (bingo)
- Current Director: Northern Lights (e-Sports)

- Unexamined form of industry influence
- No questioning of underlying ideology of gambling legislation



5. Implications

Drivers

Underestimation of harms

Political support/complicity

Dominant "leisure/ordinary" framing

Growth imperative for industry

Outcomes

Global expansion and business practices

Super charging of products (incl new products)

Super charging of processes (esp digital turn)

Inadequate regulatory responses/models

Limitations on scale and scope of prevention efforts

How do we reframe the debate?

- Actions are freedom preserving. They impact the minority not the many
- Actions reduce the economic burden associated with harms; places primacy on justified protections
- Proactively encourages businesses to think about long term sustainability – which could increase trust, reduce uncertainty IF they engage.



Global solutions for global industry

- Global implications of Britain's framing and regulatory processes
- Technical and commercial developments mean we need a global solution to global problem

Thank you

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