

# **MORAL POLICYMAKING AND INDIAN GAMING: NEGOTIATING A DIFFERENT TERRAIN**

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## Abstract

As the fastest growing segment of the legalized gambling industry in the U.S., in just two decades Indian gaming has become a \$25 billion industry. Approximately 230 tribes own and operate some 400 casinos in about 30 states. Tribal gaming is transforming the quality of life on many reservations. Yet the spread of Indian gaming has given rise to contentious and polarizing debates over its policy rationale, socioeconomic impacts, and morality. The moral policymaking landscape for Indian gaming is largely uncharted. In this Paper, we explore that terrain and map its contours. We argue that Indian gaming requires adjustment to the models typically used to explain or guide morality or social regulatory policymaking concerning gambling. Indian gaming is distinct from other forms of legalized gambling for three fundamental reasons: (1) Indian gaming is an exercise of tribal sovereignty, which reflects tribes' unique status in the American political system; (2) conducted by tribal governments, Indian gaming is public gaming; and (3) Indian gaming is an effective means to address continuing socioeconomic deficits in many Native communities. We conclude that regardless of the substantive policy outcomes, policymakers have an obligation to take these differences into account in the *process* of developing morally sound public policy on Indian gaming.

## INTRODUCTION

Histories of gambling indicate that risk-taking and faith in luck are part of the shared human experience (e.g., Schwartz 2006). Varying degrees of moral objection to gambling have co-existed alongside gambling throughout history and across cultures. In modern times, the tension between gambling's popularity and moral objections to the same have greatly influenced how government treats gambling.

Debates over the morality of gambling are fairly predictable. Some people oppose gambling on religious principles, as the concept of "luck" may be inconsistent with divine power or gamblers may exercise poor stewardship of godly gifts. Others believe that gambling is harmful, emphasizing that it undermines a societal work ethic, leads to crime, or creates human and economic costs related to problem and pathological gambling. Still others argue that the costs of gambling fall disproportionately on the poor. On the other side are arguments related to economic development, "voluntary" taxation to benefit worthy causes or subsidize the public fisc, or the state's appropriate role in maximizing individual freedom.

At different times and in different jurisdictions, government responses to gambling have run the gamut from enforced blanket prohibitions to nominal prohibitions to regulation of select games to state-sponsored lotteries to full-scale casino gambling with the market as the primary constraint. Skolnick (1988) notes that the moral ambivalence toward gambling makes law and policy governing gambling dynamic, unpredictable, and less tethered to either consensus or evidence. As a morally and politically contested "normal vice,"<sup>1</sup> many object to gambling while many more enjoy it.

Collins (2003a, p. 23) wryly notes that an individual's perspective on gambling policy "will depend on whether you think gambling is most relevantly similar to going to the movies, ingesting cocaine, watching soap operas, eating candy, playing golf, consuming pornography, smoking, having a massage, attending a ball game, visiting a brothel, riding a roller coaster, shopping, or having a drink." All such activities result from individual choices, whether based on free will or on compulsion or addiction. All may afford pleasure, require some form of payment, result in overindulgence, or cause harm to the individual or others. The aggregate effects of each behavior affect society to varying degrees and with disparate results. Given their potential harms to individuals or to society, some such behaviors suggest the need for stringent government regulation or even outright prohibition.

Morality or social regulatory policymaking involves the "use of authority to modify or replace social values, institutional practices, and norms of interpersonal behavior with new modes of conduct based upon legal proscriptions" (Tatalovich & Danes 1984, p. 207). Gambling regulation invokes elements of social regulatory policymaking in which the state redistributes values, but that is not its only rationale. The public policy concerning legalized gambling also involves the goal of facilitating the purposive allocation and reallocation of economic resources to different populations and economic sectors. In other words, gambling regulation also involves

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<sup>1</sup> Skolnick (2003, pp. 313-19) characterizes gambling as a "normal" rather than "deviant" vice. Normal vices are

the type of distributive and redistributive





simple and straightforward as attempting to prevent underage gambling or as ambitious and contentious as promoting traditional social values.

If this basic responsibility is to be adequately met, government decisions regarding the introduction and regulation of legalized gambling would best be made according to a well-defined public policy, one formulated with specific goals and limits in mind. . . . Generally, what is missing in the area of gambling regulation is a well thought-out scheme of how gambling can best be utilized to advance the larger public purpose and a corresponding role for regulation. Instead, much of what exists is far more the product of incremental and disconnected decisions, often taken in reaction to pressing issues of the

negative externalities, even at the expense of economic growth, by limiting the size and scope of gaming. The state's comprehensive regulatory sche



outgrowth of the prior two models. Unlike most legalized gambling, which is authorized and regulated by state law, the Indian gaming industry is a product of federal and tribal authority. Importantly, IGRA's regulatory scheme is most markedly influenced by tribes' status as governments.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a number of tribes opened high-stakes bingo palaces as a means of tribal economic development. Because federal Indian law generally precluded state regulation of tribes, tribal bingo operations frequently did not comply with state restrictions on jackpot amounts and use of gaming profits. In California, the Cabazon and Morongo Bands of Mission Indians operated bingo halls and a card club on their reservations. When the state threatened to shut down the tribes' gaming operations, the tribes challenged the state's enforcement of its gaming regulations on the tribes' reservations, and the case culminated in the U.S. Supreme Court's landmark 1987 decision in *California v. Cabazon Band of Mission Indians* (480 U.S. 202 (1987)).

Congress had granted California criminal and some civil authority over the tribes within its borders through a federal statute known as Public Law 280.<sup>5</sup> In the state's view, this authorized application of California's bingo regulations on the tribes' reservations. In an earlier case, the Supreme Court had ruled that Public Law 280's civil provision conferred only adjudicatory authority, rather than general regulatory jurisdiction.<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, the *Cabazon* Court explained, while Public Law 280's broader grant of criminal jurisdiction would allow California to enforce state criminal prohibitions against gambling on tribal lands, the state did not have authority to enforce its civil gambling regulations against the tribes.

Relying on this "criminal/prohibitory-civil/regulatory" distinction,<sup>7</sup> the Court examined the state's public policy concerning gambling, not

California regulates rather than prohibits gambling in general and bingo in particular” (ibid., pp. 210-11).

In its decision, the *Cabazon* Court noted that the relevant federal interests in the case were “traditional notions of Indian sovereignty and the congressional goal of Indian self-government, including its ‘overriding goal’ of encouraging tribal self-sufficiency and economic development” (ibid., p. 216). The tribes’ own interests paralleled those of the federal government:

The Cabazon and Morongo Reservations contain no natural resources which can be exploited. The tribal games at present provide the sole source of revenues for the operation of the tribal governments and the provision of tribal services. They are also the major sources of employment on the reservations. Self-determination and economic development are not within reach if the Tribes cannot raise revenues and provide employment for their members (ibid., pp. 218-19).

In the end, *Cabazon* was a victory for tribes, as the Court held that tribal gaming was a manifestation of tribes’ governmental authority and thus states could not regulate reservation gaming enterprises. Rather than resolving the issue, though, the Court’s decision raised the stakes of the contest between tribal and state interests and power; the next year, Congress struck a compromise through IGRA.

Congress’s declaration of policy in IGRA reflects its intent to create a comprehensive regulatory framework that ostensibly balanced tribal sovereignty and reservation economic development with state interests in controlling the crime assumed to be associated with high-stakes casino gambling. Thus, the congressional purposes served by IGRA were to codify tribes’ right to conduct gaming on Indian lands as a means of promoting tribal economic development, self-sufficiency, and strong tribal governments, while providing sufficient regulation to ensure legality and to protect the financial interests of the tribes (25 U.S.C. § 2702).

IGRA’s key innovation was its categorization of three classes of gaming for regulatory purposes: Class I, or social or traditional tribal games, to which IGRA does not apply; Class II, or bingo and similar games as well as non-house-banked card games, which are regulated primarily by tribal governments with federal oversight; and Class III, or casino-style games, which requires both tribal regulation and a tribal-state compact (ibid. §§ 2703(6)-(8), 2710(b), (d)). Class II and Class III gaming are legal only in states that “permit such gaming” (ibid. §§ 2710(b)(1)(A), 2710(d)(1)(B)). For Class III gaming, Congress intended the tribal-state compact requirement to encourage states and tries to negotiate, on a government

## **MORAL POLICYMAKING AND LEGALIZED GAMBLING**

Moral policymaking can be examined on two levels: process and outcome. As observed by political scientists, the process for considering and adopting policy regarding issues of morality is distinct from that of economic policy. Citizens' involvement in the process of morality policymaking reflects heightened interest in the outcomes, which can be informed by public policy goals (as discussed in the preceding section on gambling regulatory models) as well as principles of moral governance.

### **Explaining the Process**

Lowi's (1964; 1972) landmark insight into the policymaking process was that different types of policy generate different types of politics.<sup>8</sup> Pierce & Miller (2004) explore the evolution







dependent on Federal funding (Sen. Rep. No. 100-446, reprinted in 1988 U.S.C.C.A.N. 3071, 3072 (1988)).

Congress, as did tribes, saw Indian gaming as a tool for tribal governments. As the







on direct or indirect distributions of tribal gaming revenue to fund state and local public policy initiatives. The potential for partnership and cooperative policymaking is clear, yet may be overlooked.

In short, descriptions of morality policymaking in the area of legalized gambling do not readily apply to Indian gaming. Further, tribal gaming's differences make the strong influence of state citizens' moral beliefs more problematic. The process of morality policymaking in the area of Indian gaming needs to be adjusted to account for these important differences as well as any shared interests among political jurisdictions or between the public and private sectors.

### **Informing the Outcome**

Too, principles guiding moral government action do not adequately account for Indian gaming's differences. Here, the public policy goals related to legalized gambling serve as a starting point.

Sound and responsible policy for legalized gambling generally incorporates some balance between individual freedom of choice and the state's interests in raising funds to accomplish legitimate policy goals as well as minimizing social and economic harms to individuals or to the public interest (e.g., Collins 2003a; Smith & Wynne 2000, p. 28). Gambling regulations typically share two key social-control f



however, are not best implemented in a vacuum—they require sufficient evidence to back them up.

The systematic and scientific study of gambling is relatively new and has yet to reach consensus on how best to specify key questions

*What is the moral responsibility of **tribal** governments to serve the public interest?*

*What is the moral responsibility of **non-tribal** governments to serve the public interest, including that of tribal governments and tribal members?*

Each of the three fundamental differences between Indian gaming and legalized gambling that we identify should guide non-tribal governments' consideration and adoption of policy that impacts Indian gaming. Sound policymaking regarding tribal gaming cannot rely simply on moral views of gambling. Instead, Indian gaming requires specialized knowledge of its differences and the particular public policy goals it is intended to serve. The reality of tribes' unique status within and without the American political system means that non-tribal governments must be cognizant of public policymaking that accounts for tribal interests, not just their own.

## **CONCLUSION**

Legalized gambling has always been and most likely always will be a part of America's moral landscape and therefore of American public life. Given the unique policy rationale and regulatory framework governing Indian gaming, one might reasonably assume that that it, too, is around for the long term as the industry matures and tribal governments become increasingly well-equipped to provide for their members, engage in effective tribal-state intergovernmental



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