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(Article begins on next page)

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A scoping review of gambling policy research in Europe

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Abstract

In Europe, gambling policy is conditioned by different administrative levels, including national authorities and the EU, as well as institutions of the European Economic Area (EEA). The legal framework of the EU/EEA requires Member States to pursue evidence-based policy. The current scoping review focuses on what kind of policy research is available on gambling in the European context to support evidence-based policy. We searched three scientific databases for research literature on gambling regulation and policy in the European context. The final sample consists of 88 papers. We analysed the corpus with Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency mapping, and, narratively, by applying the policy cycle phases (agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation). Overall, the results show that gambling policy research is a growing field in Europe, and the policy cycle describes the available literature amply. The largest part of the existing research concerns the evaluation phase, while the formulation and implementation phases are under-represented. The findings are discussed in terms of the main outcomes, as well as in terms of the gaps in the existing research.

KEYWORDS

Europe, gambling policy, policy cycle, regulation, scoping review

INTRODUCTION

The regulation of gambling on the part of the public authorities involves a variety of policy choices. These choices include what types of gambling are legal, who are authorised to provide them, and under what conditions, how the damage caused by gambling is to be prevented or treated, and how the proceeds from gambling are to be re-distributed (cf. Sulkunen et al., 2019). Regulatory choices are important because gambling causes widespread damage to individuals, to communities, and to society (Langham et al., 2016; Marionneau et al., 2023). Regulation should, therefore, be capable of addressing, preventing, and controlling this damage.

Policy approaches to gambling vary across jurisdictions. Globally, the trend is towards increased liberalisation. Gambling is an expanding industry. The global gambling market was estimated at 759 billion USD in 2022, and is expected to grow to 876 billion USD by 2026 (Research and Markets, 2023). Much of the growth is

Abbreviations: CJEU, Court of Justice of the European Union; EC, European Community; EEA, European Economic Area; EGMs, electronic gambling machines; PRISMA, Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses; TF-IDF, Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency.

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currently taking place in online environments and in jurisdictions of the Global South (Sichali et al., 2023). The more established markets of the Global North, including Europe, focus more strongly on the regulation of the existing markets and the prevention of damage (Reith et al., 2019). Moreover, the changing landscape of the gambling industry has important implications for policy. In Europe, regulation needs to tackle complex issues related to maintaining a balance between profits and health risks, addressing the threat of the offshore gambling industry, and adapting to changing codes at different administrative levels, including that of the EU.

International research on gambling regulations and policies has focused on issues such as availability and accessibility, the structural and situational characteristics of gambling products (Auer & Griffiths, 2023), responsible gambling tools and pre-commitment, as well as regulatory regimes (e.g. monopolies and licences; see Velasco et al., 2021 for an overview). In terms of policies aiming to limit gambling harm, policies and their framing have ranged from the so-called "responsible gambling policies" to public health approaches (Livingstone & Rintoul, 2020; Reith & Wardle, 2022). Evidence with regard to the effectiveness of the various policies has, however, been inconsistent due to varying implementation. However, more support has been given to public health-oriented regulations that target the provision side (e.g. Livingstone, 2019; Sulkunen et al., 2019; Velasco et al., 2021). These include, for example, restrictions on availability and accessibility. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the limited availability of land-based gambling resulted in reduced damage in most contexts (Brodeur et al., 2021; Sachdeva et al., 2022). Other effective regulations target the harmful characteristics of gambling products or gambling environments, such as game intensity and speed, immersivity, or pay-outs (e.g. Newall, 2022; Sulkunen et al., 2019; Tanner et al., 2017).

Europe is a particularly relevant context for gambling policy research because European countries are impacted by the multi-level requirements for gambling policy, including local, national, and European norms, recommendations, and laws. Within the EU, gambling falls within the scope of Article 49 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union on the freedom of services. This is confirmed in the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), according to which gambling is a form of economic activity in the sense understood in the European Community (EC) Treaty Article 2. The principle of the freedom of establishment (as defined in Articles 43 and 48 of the EC Treaty) prohibits the discrimination of companies established in other Member States (cf. Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, 2006). Discriminatory measures can be justified if they fall within the exceptions provided in Articles 55 and 46 of the EC Treaty: public order, security, health, or public interest (Swiss Institute of Comparative Law, 2006). The criteria for acceptable justifications and proportionality have been further defined in the CJEU case law. In addition to being justified in acceptable terms, restrictions on gambling provision must be proportional and non-discriminatory (see, also, Littler, 2011). However, when the internal market has been regulated with legislative instruments, gambling services are typically excluded from their scope (Miettinen, 2022). The EU has not harmonised gambling legislation across Member States.

The EU legal framework requires Member States to pursue *evidence-based* policy. Member States must show that the chosen regulations are *proportionate* to their aims (Miettinen, 2022). Member States also need to show a 'causal link' between restrictive gambling legislation and their justifications. Although the burden of proof is not onerous, it can put pressure on Member States to provide research evidence on gambling policies and their potential to reduce harm (Littler, 2011). Furthermore, the Commission has issued recommendations to Member States, particularly in the field of regulating online gambling (European Commission, 2012, 2014, 2018). Although these recommendations are non-binding in nature and give leeway to Member States with regard to whether, and, if so, how they are applied (Marionneau et al., 2018), they exert further pressure on choosing appropriate policies. The nexus between public policy and the evidence that they are based upon has not, however, been previously addressed in research literature.

Research on gambling policies, similarly to public policy studies more generally (cf. Peters et al., 2016), stems from an intersection of disciplines such as policy analysis, public health, economics, law, and sociology. However, the issue of gambling policy, it would appear, has rarely been the focus of public policy literature in the European context. The field has been unsystematic and somewhat under-developed. To our knowledge, there have been no previous reviews on gambling policy research literature in Europe (or globally, for that matter). The existing reviews on gambling policy have focused on the effectiveness of concrete measures to reduce the damage caused by gambling (Livingstone, 2019; Sulkunen et al., 2019; Tanner et al., 2017; Velasco et al., 2021). There have also been no reviews that address how policies are developed, what challenges are faced during the policy process, who the actors involved are, and what the implementation gaps are.

The current scoping review focuses on identifying what kind of policy research is conducted in and on EU/EEA countries. Analytically, we apply a policy cycle approach (Howlett et al., 2020). The approach allows us to identify how research addresses the different phases of the

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policy cycle (agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation). We also identify the key actors and the dimensions of the policy cycle, as well as the main gaps in our current knowledge for each phase.

DATA AND METHODS

The scoping review was conducted using the methodology set out in the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Page et al., 2021). In line with the principles of scoping reviews (Grant & Booth, 2009), the aim was to map what kind of gambling policy research is conducted in Europe, how research is situated within the policy cycle, and what the main findings are.

Study and report eligibility

Type of studies: The items included in the review should focus on national gambling policy, including policy development and implementation, and descriptions of policies.

Study design: We have included theoretical and empirical research literature. We have also included all the literature on gambling policy where at least one EU/EEA country or the UK was present.

Language: We only included literature produced in English. This may have contributed to a bias towards English-speaking countries (UK, Ireland, Malta). However, the choice was necessary because of our inability to read all European languages for a balanced review, and to limit the results to papers that would be available to the wider academic and regulatory audiences. English has long been established as the lingua franca in the academic public policy research. A focus on English-language literature also increases the replicability of this review.

Publication status: We have included academic articles and books. We have excluded reports and other grey literature.

Year of publication: The search was conducted in February 2022. We have included all the literature published before 2022. We did not include a start year to capture fully the body of academic research covering gambling policy.

Information sources and search strategy

At the first stage of the review, we searched three scientific databases: Scopus, Web of Science (Core Collection, KCI, MEDLINE, RSCI, SciELO), and EBSCO Host.

To account for the disciplinary and jurisdictional diversity in the policy literature, we adopted a broad set of keywords: (A) gambl* AND regulat* AND NOT emot*; B) gambl* AND 'public policy'. The use of the asterisk (*) allows us to include variations of the search terms (e.g. gamble, gambling, gambler, etc.). The exclusion criteria for emot* was added to filter out the clinical psychology literature on emotion regulation. The keyword 'public policy' was chosen to target the relevant literature from the policy studies. The use of quotation marks limits the search to exact matches only, excluding unrelated content using the word 'public' or 'policy'. The keywords needed to be present in the title, abstract, or keywords of prospective articles.

Selection process

We identified a total number of 3856 records (Ebsco Host: 1553, Web of Science: 798, Scopus: 1058). After removing all duplicates, the number of records was reduced to 2250. These records were screened in three phases: first based upon titles only, second, based upon the abstract, and third, based upon full text. The following inclusion criteria were used at all screening stages: (1) Gambling was the main subject of the paper; (2) The paper addresses the question of gambling policy or gambling regulation; and (3) The policies or regulations are discussed within the context of the EU, the EEA (Iceland, Lichtenstein, Norway), or the European single market (Switzerland). We also included the United Kingdom, as—during the post-Brexit transition—EU law continues to apply to it. To limit the scope of the review, we excluded papers that (1) focused on emotion regulation; (2) focused on treatment-related policies; and (3) focused on the allocation of gambling proceeds or taxation.

During the title-only screening, we excluded 1620 records. After screening the abstracts of the remaining records ($N = 630$), we excluded a further 487 papers. The remaining sample consisted of 143 records (115 journal articles + 28 book chapters). At this stage, we included additional chapters from two books (Egerer et al., 2018; Meyer et al., 2009). Only some of the chapters from these books were found during the initial screening. We also included four other articles based upon our prior knowledge. We read the full texts of the remaining 162 records. At this stage, we excluded another 74 papers based upon the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The final corpus consists of 88 records (A BibTeX with the full reference list in the online appendix). The PRISMA flow chart is presented in Figure 1. The full list of the included papers as well as the relevant categorisations, references, and main results can be found in the Supporting Information (Annex 1).

Analysis

We use two different approaches to analyse the material: a narrative approach to chart the results of the scoping

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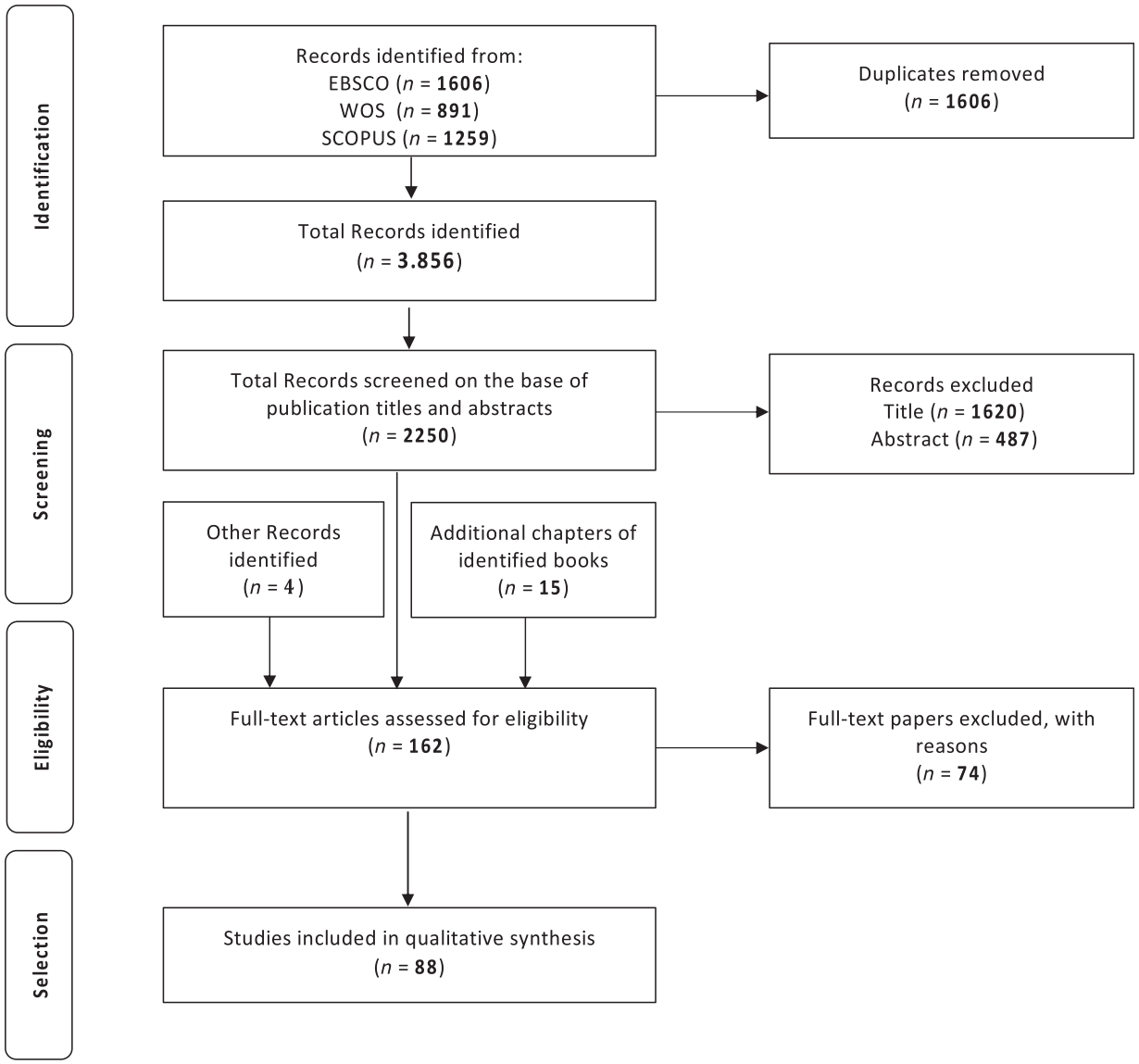

FIGURE 1 PRISMA flow chart for database searches. *Source*: Page et al. (2021).

review (cf. Arksey & O'Malley, 2005; Ritchie & Spencer, 2002), and an adapted version of the Term Frequency-Inverse Document Frequency (TF-IDF) method to check for consistency.

We first noted which phase of the policy cycle (Howlett et al., 2020) included papers focused on: agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, or evaluation. Each policy-phase coding was verified and agreed upon by two researchers. In cases of disagreement, we sought an intersubjective agreement.

The policy cycle, also referred to as the *stage model*, is one of the most acknowledged theoretical models in the policymaking process (Lasswell, 1956). There are many versions of the model, but the basic principle relies on the distinction of the policymaking process in a series of *stages* or *phases* (typically agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation). The policy cycle continues to be relevant to academic debate on public policies (Deleon, 1999; Hoefer, 2021), despite some criticism (Nakamura, 1987; Sabatier, 2007). The model provides a theoretical and heuristic tool that allows us to simplify the policy process, outlining the boundaries of empirical observation, and presenting the key elements for each phase. As the model is often familiar to policymakers, it also supports the adoption of evidence-based policies. In our analysis, we adopted the policy cycle model to identify the crucial issues discussed in European gambling-policy literature and their idiosyncratic emergence both in and across the phases.

Most of the included literature fits well within the five phases of the policy cycle. The exception was a set of purely descriptive papers that outline domestic policies

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without an analytical dimension. We did not attribute any policy cycle phase to these papers. Instead, we categorised them as 'descriptive'. Descriptive papers were included in the overview of the results, but not in the analysis of the policy phases. Descriptive analyses are nevertheless an important category of academic literature on gambling policy. The main sources of descriptive articles in this review consisted of articles in an overview book of gambling in Europe (Meyer et al., 2009) as well as journal articles published notably in *Addiction* in a series on gambling regulations that ran between 2012 and 2016 (Billieux et al., 2016; Binde, 2014; Goudriaan, 2014; Jiménez-Murcia et al., 2014; Ludwig et al., 2013; Orford, 2012; Rossow & Hansen, 2016; Szczyrba et al., 2015; Tammi et al., 2015; Valleur, 2015), or in the journal of Gaming Law Review (Hamar, 2017; Malischnig et al., 2018).

We also check for internal consistency in the corpus by using an adapted version of TF-IDF. The methods allowed us to check automatically idiosyncrasies of words both within and across phases. The standard TF-IDF provides a numerical representation to assess the importance of a term within a collection of documents. The process entails the identification of TF and IDF. TF measures the frequency at which a specific term (word) appears in a document. A higher term frequency means the word is more prevalent. IDF calculates the rarity of a term across the entire document collection. We calculated TF-IDF[1] in the six sub-corpora based upon policy cycle phases. We applied the TF-IDF formula to compare the presence of a word within a sub-corpus and across the whole corpus using a Python script. In our analysis, the TF-IDF penalises words that occur commonly across subgroups or rarely in a document, and rewards words that are frequent in a subgroup but unique or specific to it. If a term appears in many documents, it might not carry much discriminative or informative power. The TF-IDF score of a term within a group is calculated as the product of the term's TF and IDF values. The higher the TF-IDF score, the more relevant the term is to that specific group, as compared to the entire collection.

RESULTS

Overview of European gambling policy research

Gambling policy literature in the European context has increased in volume significantly since the 1980s (see Figure 2). Seventy-eight per cent of the corpus was published after 2013. The years 2013–2017 stand out particularly, owing particularly to the descriptive gambling-policy series published in *Addiction* during the period and the increased attention paid to the issues of liberalisation and policy convergence in the field (cf. Adam & Raschzok, 2014).

Some concentration is also visible in terms of the geographical distribution of gambling policy literature (see Figure 3). Descriptive literature is available for most European countries (left-hand panel). In contrast, empirical policy has not been conducted on many Central and Eastern countries (right-hand panel). Overall, the countries of Western and Northern Europe are better represented than the countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Three countries stand out in terms of highest volumes of research: The UK, Italy, and Finland. The UK and Italy are the two largest gambling markets in Europe in terms of gross gambling revenue (Research and Markets, 2023). Despite the prevalence of gambling-policy research in the UK, the influence of Brexit on gambling policy was not addressed in the literature. Overall, the EU was not discussed as a factor in UK gambling policy literature. Finland, on the other hand, has had high per capita gambling consumption (Sulkunen et al., 2019) and the country invests in research on gambling-related harms and policies to prevent them (Hellman, 2019).

Descriptive articles formed 36.4% ($N = 32$) of the total corpus. The remaining 56 articles fit within the standard five policy phases. Figure 4 presents the corpus of non-descriptive articles in terms of their main policy phase focus across agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, and evaluation. Quantitatively, the evaluation phase, and, to a lesser degree, the adoption phase stand out. Implementation and formulation have received less attention.

The policy cycle phases

We ran the TF-IDF analysis according to the identified policy cycle phases. Using a cogent threshold of 0.1 (see Annex 2), we identified the idiosyncratic term for each phase to check for consistency with topics of the policy cycle. We also ran a second analysis using, as a threshold, two standard deviations above the average, but the results did not change (see Annex 2).

The *descriptive* articles, as expected, are among those with less idiosyncratic words. The focus of *descriptive* articles is on the 'pathological' aspects of a 'problem' faced by 'gamblers'. Owing to their broad scope, descriptive papers also consider the 'treatment', while the

[1]Six documents were not included because paper-based: Borch (2018), Loer (2018), Ludwig et al. (2012), Orford (2012), Spapens (2008), and Wieczorek and Bujalski (2018).

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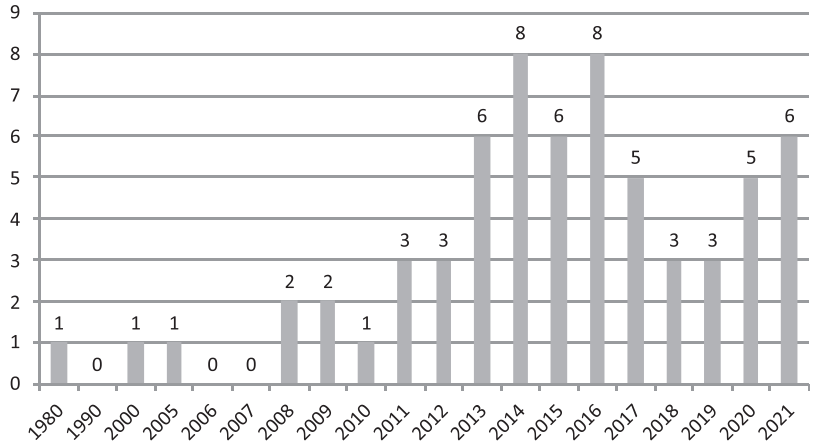

FIGURE 2 Academic production of gambling policy literature per year (absolute values).

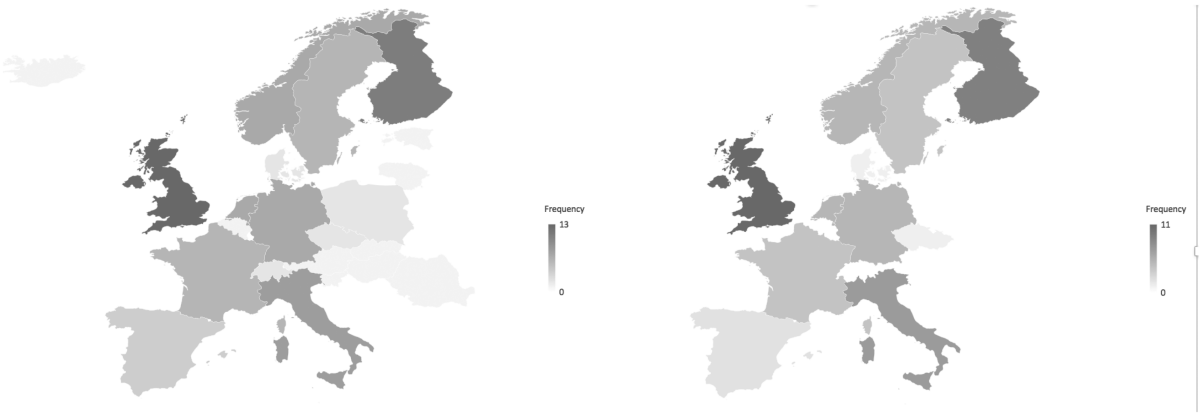

FIGURE 3 The geographical distribution of academic literature on gambling policy (absolute values), all documents (left-hand panel), non-descriptive works only (right-hand panel).

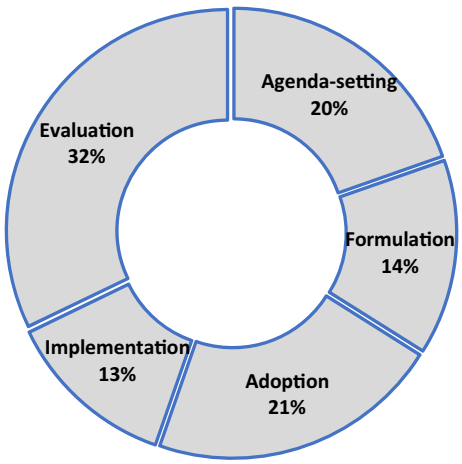

FIGURE 4 Academic production per policy phase (percentage).

empirical articles focused on the regulatory side only. Unsurprisingly, the literature on *agenda-setting* focuses on 'morality' perspectives, and gambling as 'social problem'. The framing and morality of gambling-policy has received much attention (e.g. Ferraiolo, 2013; Reith & Wardle, 2022). The sub-corpora with the highest TF-IDF scores are those focusing on the formulation phase. Formulation papers are the only category that include terms such as 'sports', 'online' 'betting', and terms related to the nation-state and the EU. The focus on these topics reflects the traditional argumentations policymakers have employed during the formulation phases when comparing policies implemented in other contexts. Not surprisingly, articles belonging to the following *adoption* phase are the least characterised. This is because policy choices have already been made and the papers describe circumstances that impact upon the full cycle. The *implementation* phase of the policy cycle has the highest number of idiosyncratic terms. Implementation papers are the only category focused on policy compliance, thus including terms such as 'money laundering', 'age', or 'mystery shopping'. Finally, the *evaluation* phase uses terms such as 'online' gambling;

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this suggests that evaluation papers are quite recent and discuss the challenges posed by evaluating national policies which try to regulate the transnational online gambling sectors.

Agenda-setting

In policy research, topics pertaining to the agenda-setting phase are often limited to the 'funnel of causality' (Simeon, 1976) or 'policy windows' (Kingdon, 1984). Here, we also incorporated a general discussion on policy alternatives and the framing of gambling within the institutional agenda (cf. Bleich, 2002). As argued by Bleich (2002), the agenda-setting discussion can be extended to incorporate domestic political debate, foreign pressure (mainly the EU and international gambling corporations) on political actors, and the framing of the issue.

Framings are particularly important, as they allow topics to be put on the agenda. The framing of gambling is widely discussed in Europe. Methodologically, papers address agenda-setting and framing by focusing on legal texts (Euchner et al., 2013; Marionneau, 2015), parliamentary debates (Edman & Berndt, 2016), media coverage (Marionneau & Hellman, 2020; Selin et al., 2019), or interviews with policymakers (Bassoli et al., 2021). The focus varies from more general discussion on morality policy and the moral framing of gambling (Bassoli et al., 2021; Edman & Berndt, 2016; Euchner et al., 2013) to more specific frames for promoting an improved gambling policy.

The framing of gambling policy appears to have shifted increasingly from moral issues to other frames (Di Chio, 2017; Edman & Berndt, 2016). We identified four alternative frames in the literature: (1) *Consumer protection* (Edman & Berndt, 2016; Marionneau, 2015; Marionneau & Hellman, 2020; Selin et al., 2019) is raised particularly in papers addressing the role of the CJEU and the need to justify national restrictions on gambling policy within the internal market; (2) (*Public*) *health*, as the guiding frame, links closely to consumer protection; (Public) health is highlighted particularly in papers discussing external pressures on gambling policy, including the CJEU (Cisneros Örnberg & Tammi, 2011; Marionneau, 2015), civil society, or domestic legislation (Bassoli et al., 2021; Di Chio, 2017; Downes, 1979); (3) *Economic benefits* of gambling are highlighted as a central topic in the provision of legal gambling activities (Bassoli et al., 2021; Selin et al., 2019); and (4) *The entertainment value* of gambling is also visible in some papers. These papers usually criticise the framing of gambling as a 'harmless form of leisure activity' (Orford, 2012, p. 245). Interestingly, the prevention of crime is not highlighted as a main frame in Europe (cf. Bassoli et al., 2021), even though anti-money laundering and criminal activities are recurrent topics in the implementation phase (cf. Levi, 2009; Pepi, 2018; Spapens, 2008).

The specific mode of agenda-setting is rarely addressed in the literature (cf. Cobb et al., 1976). Some papers suggest a cyclical nature of the policy process (A. Downes, 1972), and place the framing within this cycle (Marionneau, 2015; Miers, 1996). Others suggest either an inside initiation model during the liberalisation of gambling policies (Di Chio, 2017; Downes, 1979) or an outside initiation model during restrictions on gambling availability and accessibility (Marionneau & Hellman, 2020). The role of economic and technological changes is also highlighted: as was the case with electronic gambling machines (EGMs) in the 1980s (Sulkunen et al., 2020) and scratch cards in the 1990s (Di Chio, 2017; Goudriaan, 2014).

Formulation

Formulation refers to a phase that addresses the possible solutions to an existing problem, including how these solutions are to be put forward and by whom. Formulation takes place before adoption, but the two also partly overlap. In our review, the formulation phase included studies which considered developments and discussion before the parliamentary debate. Studies on policy formulation are not always as numerous or as advanced as in the other policy phases (Howlett et al., 2020). However, in the current review, formulation was addressed in several papers, and amounted to 14% of the corpus, excluding descriptive papers.

The interest in formulation within the field of gambling-policy research is likely to stem from the fact that the debate, and the available policy models, are constrained, but, at the same time, contested. Within Europe, approaches to formulating gambling policy are seen as a dualistic choice between a monopoly-based operation and a licence-based market. The formulation of policy, then, becomes a question of what the best model is for achieving the agenda (framing), be it consumer protection, the promotion of (public) health, economic benefits, or entertainment. A review by Marionneau et al. (2021) assesses the available empirical evidence on the ability of monopoly or licensing systems to address gambling damage. The results show that neither model appears superior to the other, confirming the problem of introducing evidence-based policymaking in the field of gambling.

The regulatory model for online gambling is a particularly pressing issue in the literature. Offshore gambling provision and the difficulties in channelling online gambling to the national market limit the applicability of the monopoly model online (Marionneau et al., 2021). The role of industry lobbying is particularly crucial

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in pushing for market openings, as shown in a study of lobbying by sports-betting leagues in Germany (Reiche, 2013). The debate therefore focuses more on what kind of concrete tools could be introduced to address the spread of gambling, and particularly online gambling (Devaney, 2009; Häberling, 2012).

Other studies have focused on the formulation of policy changes from more liberal towards more restrictive models. S. F. Kingma (2008) notes that, in the Netherlands, a shift towards a more restrictive formulation in gambling policy resulted from a political shift from a neo-liberal to a more conservative government, alongside pressure from the EU for a more systematic national-gambling regulation. Similar findings have been reported in other country contexts. In Portugal (Adam & Raschzok, 2014), EU-level pressure appears to have been a key, whereas, in Norway (Borch, 2018; Jensen, 2017), the shared importance of consumer protection and earmarked proceeds from gambling contributed to the protection of the monopoly system. This double agenda, alongside other political changes, led to the removal of EGMs in Norway in 2007, but also to their successive re-introduction (Borch, 2018).

Adoption

The adoption phase of the policy cycle takes place after the agenda has been set and formulated. In the policy literature, adoption-related research focuses generally on decision-making styles and modes (cf. Howlett et al., 2020). The adoption phase is crucial because the way in which policies are adopted has an important influence on whether these policies are sustainable, coherent, or effective (cf. Etches, 2011). In our sample, 22% of papers (excluding descriptive accounts) addressed the adoption phase. However, and despite the comparatively large volume, the scientific focus on adoption is not highly developed. In older work, gambling policy is even presented as a product of the rational choice model (Carley, 1980). Twelve papers in total addressed the adoption of increasingly liberal gambling policies in Europe. Interestingly, all the papers in this category identify consumer protection and (public) health as the main policy goal. No studies are available which consider the adoption of policies to address other policy agendas or framings, such as revenue generation.

Adoption papers in our corpus can be divided into three main categories:

The first category focuses on the slow but constant liberalisation of the gambling market in Europe, in line with the incremental model (Dror, 1968). In most European countries, gambling policies have shared a similar trajectory towards less restrictive models and the dismantling of monopoly structures, with the notable exceptions of Finland and Norway (Borch, 2018; Jensen, 2017; Lerkkanen et al., 2020). A variety of explanations are given to the adoption of liberal policies. In Germany (Loer, 2018), the shift is explained in terms of the coalition equilibrium. In the Netherlands (S. Kingma, 2004), it is attributed to a shift towards a risk society (cf. Beck, 1992). In Italy (Pedroni, 2014), the liberalisation of gambling policies is framed as a 'capital conversion' by which gambling operators transfer economic capital into political capital. In a comparative paper, Beem and Mikler (2011) focus on path dependencies to explain how the UK and the US diverged in their approaches to online gambling. The liberal position of the UK towards the online gambling market is explained in terms of a continuation of existing policies.

The second category of papers focuses on how competing interests—or lack thereof—affect the adoption of more liberal policy. Selin (2016) discusses the importance of corporate social responsibility policies in pre-empting national regulations in Finland. The article sheds light on the efforts of the gambling industry to maintain or expand their markets, suggesting that the adoption phase of a policy is prone to external influence in a similar manner as the framing. A different perspective is provided by Etches (2011), who shows that British casino policy was influenced by unclear aims regarding the number and type of casinos in the country. The formulation phase was therefore extended into the adoption phase. Finally, Laffey et al. (2016) address the adoption of online gambling policies in a comparative paper on Italy and the UK. The authors show that the opening of online gambling markets did not improve consumer protection in either country, but functioned, instead, to increase tax revenue.

The third category of papers focuses on proposals for an improved policy within the changing gambling environment. Liberal gambling policies and increased availability demand new tools to maintain consumer protection. Most of these papers are discussion papers, outlining new regulatory models, rather than analysing the existing ones. Suggestions include wider regulatory and informative principles to improve consumer protection or welfare economics (Chóliz & Saiz-Ruiz, 2016; Forrest, 2013), as well as concrete suggestions such as limiting the availability of EGMs (Järvinen-Tassopoulos et al., 2021) or personal gambling licences (Nikkinen, 2019). A review of the available policy instruments to reduce gambling damage is presented by Sulkunen et al. (2020). The review concludes that the most effective regulations are those that target the full population rather than 'at risk' or 'problem' gamblers.

Implementation

The implementation phase focuses on how policies are executed. Implementation has important implications for the success of policies. However, research on this phase is under-represented in European gambling-policy literature.

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Only seven articles in the review focus on implementation, and some of them come close to evaluation (Gosselt et al., 2013; Marionneau & Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2017; Meyer et al., 2015).

Despite the small number of papers, two important insights can be gained. The first relates to research focusing on barriers to implementation, and the second to possible problems in the implementation.

Four papers focus on barriers to implementation (Levi, 2009; Pepi, 2018; Selin et al., 2020; Spapens, 2008). The main impediments relate to the framing and the aims of law. Two papers (Levi, 2009; Pepi, 2018) focus on anti-money-laundering. The EU anti-money-laundering directive is implemented by using a variety of tools, but conclusive evidence is lacking with regard to their effectiveness (Levi, 2009). The main barriers to effective implementation are the anonymity of gambling, the weakness of the existing measures, and inadequate training of the resale network (Pepi, 2018). Spapens (2008) studied barriers to limiting illegal land-based casino provision in the Netherlands. The findings show that legal loopholes, alongside consumer preferences and stagnating legal offers may limit the success of legislation aiming to curb illegal gambling. Finally, one paper in the context of Finland (Selin et al., 2020) identifies cultural acceptance and the stigma associated with problematical gambling as factors that limit the implementation of effective harm-prevention policies.

Three papers focus on compliance with the existing legislation and possible problems in implementation (Gosselt et al., 2013; Marionneau & Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2017; Meyer et al., 2015). Compliance with regulations is crucial to achieving the set agenda, and depends, notably, on whether providers and resellers adopt and apply the regulations. This is not always the case. Gosselt et al. (2013) show that the resale network does not always comply with the requirement to ask for identification. Similarly, Meyer et al. (2015) argue that additional responsibilities on the resale network, including tasking resellers to identify individuals with possible gambling problems, reduces compliance. In the Netherlands, compliance in the resale network was about 9% (Gosselt et al., 2013), whereas, in Germany, it was only 5% (Meyer et al., 2015). Only one study (Marionneau & Järvinen-Tassopoulos, 2017) investigated compliance in online environments. The study found that while licensed websites in the French market conformed to the legislation, some loopholes were also present in terms of the identification of gamblers.

Evaluation

The evaluation phase is the most researched phase in the available European gambling-policy literature. Thirty-three per cent of the included papers ($N = 18$) focused mainly on evaluation. Most of these studies evaluated specific policies within a single jurisdiction, whereas studies addressing the wider systemic organisation of gambling were not available. The aims and scopes are similar, although the tools and variables of measurement differ. The evaluation papers can be divided into two distinct groups based upon their focus and methodology.

First, four papers discuss how knowledgeable citizens are about gambling policies, and whether these policies are considered acceptable (Håkansson & Widinghoff, 2021; Lerkkanen et al., 2020; Pöysti, 2014; Rolando et al., 2021). The papers by Lerkkanen et al. (2020), Pöysti (2014), and Rolando et al. (2021) focus on the interpretation, understanding, and judgement of policies by the general public. Using qualitative focus group interviews, the three papers show that citizens are well informed about gambling-related regulations in their countries (Finland, France, and Italy), but also that they are critical of issues such as marketing and availability (Lerkkanen et al., 2020; Pöysti, 2014). The paper by Rolando et al. (2021) addresses a legislative change in the Piedmont region in Italy by which the number and availability of EGMs was limited. The results show that citizens react positively to these restrictions, and that the restrictions also led to a reduced engagement with gambling.

Second, 11 papers measure the impact of gambling policies or regulations on gambling behaviour. Measurements vary from self-reported data (Auer et al., 2018; Auer & Griffiths, 2020; Engebø et al., 2021; Kairouz et al., 2016; Ludwig et al., 2012; Planzer et al., 2014; Rossow & Hansen, 2016) to multiple impact measurement (Carran, 2013; Miers, 1996; Waugh, 2016) and the financial impact on tax revenue (Gandullia & Leporatti, 2019; Radvan, 2017). Overall, the results of these studies indicate that wide-reaching public health-oriented policies, such as availability restrictions, are effective in preventing gambling harm.

Availability restrictions may be more effective in intensive forms of gambling, such as EGMs and online gambling, than less-intensive forms such as lotteries (Kairouz et al., 2016). For example, the removal of EGMs in Norway in 2007 reduced overall gambling and problem-gambling prevalence to an important degree (Engebø et al., 2021; Rossow & Hansen, 2016). The introduction of the online casino by the Norwegian monopoly holder Norsk Tipping in 2014 resulted in an expansion of online-gambling prevalence (Engebø et al., 2021). Similarly, the liberalisation of the gambling market in the UK since 2005 resulted in increased gambling expenditure as well as increased harm (Waugh, 2016). In Italy, a similar liberalisation process was connected to higher expenditure (Verona, 2010), particularly among lower-income

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populations (Gandullia & Leporatti, 2019). Other research shows that strict rules on the online marketing of gambling are connected to reduced problem-gambling prevalence (Ludwig et al., 2012; Planzer et al., 2014), if well implemented (Buil et al., 2015). In terms of more specific regulatory tools, warning messages were also found to reduce gambling expenditure (Auer et al., 2018; Auer & Griffiths, 2020).

DISCUSSION

The policy cycle follows the gambling-policy process from the initial stages of the agenda-setting and formulation, to its adoption and implementation, and to the evaluation of its effects. Even though policy processes are not very straightforward, and each phase can impact upon others at different stages (Stone, 1988), the policy cycle holds heuristic value for the study of policymaking. In the European gambling-policy contexts, the policy cycle allows us to discern the main issues discussed in the empirical policy literature, as well as the main gaps.

The agenda-setting phase has shown that gambling-policy issues are raised in public debate in recurrent cycles of attention. There are two distinctive initiation models: one during the expansion phase, which stems from an inside initiation, the other during a restriction phase, stemming from an outside initiation. At the same time, there is almost no literature on the windows of opportunity that allow gambling-related issues to enter the institutional agenda (cf. Kingdon, 1984; Marionneau & Hellman, 2020), and there is little evidence as to whether agenda-setting is discretionary or random (Howlett, 1998). Only one study, from Poland (Wieczorek & Bujalski, 2018), suggests randomness, as restrictive change was initiated following a political scandal. The role of different stakeholders, such as policy entrepreneurs and civil-society actors, also needs more research attention at the agenda-setting phase.

Framing is widely discussed in Europe and elsewhere (Ferraiolo, 2013; Francis & Livingstone, 2021; Mooney, 1999; Reith & Wardle, 2022). The main framing of gambling policy in the European context is related to consumer protection and (public) health (cf. e.g. Price et al., 2021; Wardle et al., 2019). The result is somewhat surprising, as the individualisation and medicalisation of problem gambling, as well as the 'responsible gambling' discourse have been connected to framing gambling as legitimate entertainment and harmless fun in other contexts (e.g. Francis & Livingstone, 2021). Some indications of this type of framing are also available in Europe, particularly in studies which focuses on industry lobbying. Morality framing and economic benefits are also visible in the literature. These varying perspectives reflect the multi-dimensionality of gambling policy and a high level of diversity in terms of the interests and actors involved in policy processes. However, there is a gap in the research regarding the interplay between the actors and their interests during the definition of a frame. This represents a major opportunity to increase further our knowledge on agenda-setting.

The formulation phase is limited by policy coherence and how the problem has been initially framed. The need for policies to prevent harm, including diagnostic problem gambling, emerge as a central formulation issue. Consumer protection and harm prevention are also emphasised in the European context due to the requirements of the CJEU and European institutions. The impact of the CJEU is likely to have contributed to the fact that the European gambling-policy formulation debate has been condensed into a dualistic choice between monopoly and licensing systems: market restrictions, such as monopolies, require an acceptable justification as well as proof of a 'causal link' between the restrictions and reduced harm or damage (Littler, 2011). Thus, monopolies have been justified as a solution to prevent harm, even though some research shows that the licensing systems and the monopoly systems differ very little in this regard (Marionneau et al., 2021; Planzer et al., 2014).

Most literature on the formulation phase is not clearly focused on how policies are formulated. Instead, the focus is on evaluating expectations behind legislative choices. More systematic research on different options and different stakeholders at this stage are missing. For example, anti-gambling civil society actors as well as gambling industry lobbies are likely to influence policy formulations (cf. Bassoli et al., 2021; Marionneau et al., 2023). Finally, the different resources that are required for gambling policy have not been studied. These include nodality for communication, exhortation, inquiries, and organisation.

The adoption phase is highly dependent on the framing and the limited choices in formulation. Notwithstanding this, the adoption-related literature in the European context is comparatively rich, notably in terms of the interests of the gambling industry in pushing towards de-regulation and against further restrictions (also Howlett et al., 2009). The role of other actors, however, has been acknowledged to a lesser degree. This may also be because anti-gambling lobbies are, as a rule, less powerful than those supporting the expansion of the industry (Borrell, 2008).

The implementation phase is constrained by the limited variety of the adopted policies. Thus, crucial questions at this stage do not address different policy options,

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but instead examine compliance with regulations or possible barriers to effective implementation. The resale network is discussed in the literature in terms of having a possible conflict of interest related to their dual tasks of prevention and profit-seeking. In some gambling venues, such as arcades, likely problem gamblers account for up to 50% of the income (Fiedler, 2012). Scholz (1984) has suggested compelled compliance as a 'combative' policy target: the extension of coercive measures and monitoring tools could be used to enforce policy goals.

As also argued by Etches (2011), specific choices at the implementation phase can determine whether a policy is sustainable, coherent, or effective. Ostensibly, minor differences in implementation can be crucial. For example, EGM reduction policies are effective only if they reduce the number of EGMs, as well as EGM venues, significantly (Marionneau et al., 2023), whereas daily closures for EGMs can reduce total consumption if they are at least of 10 h (Benedetti & Molinaro, 2020).

The implementation literature has some important gaps. The issue of stakeholders and their impact is missing. Multi-level governance within the EU, or across public administration and the implementing bodies, is not addressed. There is also no research available on the policy options to address availability, such as zoning and timing, even though these have been used to limit consumption in, for example, Italy (Benedetti & Molinaro, 2020; Marionneau et al., 2022).

The evaluation phase has received the most research attention. The literature mostly focuses on citizen perspectives on gambling policies and systems, as well as evaluations on how regulations or policies impact upon gambling behaviour. More systematic evaluations of policy changes are available from Norway and Italy. The EGM removal policy of Norway is a case of perfunctory learning: the impacts have been evaluated in several studies, and the positive evaluations have resulted in a reinforced policy (Engebø et al., 2021; Rossow & Hansen, 2016). The case of EGM reductions in the Italian Piedmont region is one of contested learning: despite technical evaluation showing effectiveness in terms of reduced damage, political evaluation deviated from this and resulted in a termination of the policy (Benedetti & Molinaro, 2020).

What is missing in terms of the evaluation literature is a wider perspective that addresses the impact of scientific, policy, and judicial evaluation, as well as that of policy learning and policy termination. In addition, while European gambling policies are relatively well defined in terms of their framing, targets and goals, these aims are not systematically reviewed in the evaluation literature. Evaluation by different authorities can have important effects on policies both within and beyond jurisdictions: policies evaluated as being effective are also likely to be adopted by others as 'best practice policies' (Sulkunen et al., 2019, 2020). The production of evaluation-focused gambling-policy research should, therefore, be particularly robust in terms of its goals and targets, quantifiable concepts, and awareness of political and stakeholder pressures.

Overall, there is no research that systematically charts the full policy cycle of any reform, although some key issues are raised in several phases. Notably, the impact of industry interests and lobbying is addressed at least in the formulation, adoption, and implementation phases. The trend towards an increasing liberalisation of gambling policies is also discussed during the early phases of the policy cycle—agenda-setting, formulation, and adoption—but not subsequently evaluated. The CJEU pressure is similarly only addressed in the agenda-setting and formulation phases. In terms of the most effective policies to prevent gambling-related harm, only availability restrictions are discussed at several phases, including the adoption and evaluation phase.

An analysis of available research using the policy cycle shows that, while evidence-based policy has been required by the CJEU, this requirement is not implemented consistently. Instead, the European gambling-policy field is characterised by at least three contradictions: (1) the difficulty in identifying the main goal of gambling policy between economic benefits and public health; (2) the conflict between private and public interests; and (3) the role and different configurations of policy subsystems during the policy cycle.

Future research on European gambling policy would benefit from addressing these gaps, as well as from more comparative and synthesising work that would allow countries to learn lessons from each other, rather than limiting observations to specific jurisdictions and country contexts. The most crucial research gaps relate to stakeholders and governance. Stakeholders, including policy entrepreneurs and civil society, should be actors who are studied across the phases, particularly agenda-setting and formulation. In terms of governance, research needs to address the different levels of local, national, and supranational governance and their interplay. Particularly important policy changes, such as the liberalisation of new gambling sectors, or external changes, such as Brexit, could and should be studied from the perspective of the full policy cycle.

Limitations

The current study has been limited to reviewing the gambling policy literature in the European context. The choice of limiting the observation to Europe was motivated by the need of the Member States to adapt to multi-

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level governance within the EU/EEA context. However, this demarcation has been somewhat arbitrary since central issues in gambling policy cannot be easily reduced to the European debate. Research from other geographical contexts, including notably North America and Australia, tackles very similar aspects related to effective policies and their framing (cf. Sulkunen et al., 2019). Further research is needed to address the state of policy research also beyond the European context.

Another limitation in the current study has been the choice of focusing only on literature in the English language. In Europe, much research is also conducted for the purpose of the national debate, in national languages. We only included English references due to our own limitations in understanding the literature in all the other European languages, but also because the aim was to focus on policy literature that would not just be nation-bound. In further research, this lacuna should be addressed. Furthermore, there is need for nation-specific reviews on the main issues being explored by policy researchers in different European countries.

CONCLUSIONS

This scoping review has charted the state of gambling-policy literature in the European context. The review yielded 88 research papers with a policy focus. The results show that gambling-policy research is an expanding field: most of the available research has been published in recent years. Policy research is concentrated in Western and Northern European contexts, and particularly in countries with high gambling consumption. All phases of the policy cycle (agenda-setting, formulation, adoption, implementation, evaluation) are represented in the literature, but most focus has been put on evaluation. Systematic approaches addressing the full cycle have been missing. Yet, each policy phase depends on the others. How policies are framed is reflected in how they are formulated. Similarly, the adoption phase is limited by how policies are formulated, while implementation focuses on compliance with the adopted policies and their initial agendas. The interdependencies across the policy phases are a likely reason behind the partly inconclusive evidence-base collected in the evaluation phase. The lack of attention being paid to the full policy cycle results in contradictions within gambling policy, including conflicting goals between economic benefits and public health, tensions between private and public interests, and the unclear role of policy subsystems throughout the policy cycle. A systematic approach to gambling-policy research, one which addresses the full policy cycle, would enhance the field and improve the evidence base upon which European gambling policies are built.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available as supplementary material. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: Scopus, Web of Science, and EBSCO Host.

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