



A SPECIAL REPORT FROM

The **LIFE, LIBERTY, and**
HAPPINESS PROJECT

AFTER MURPHY v. NATIONAL COLLEGIATE ATHLETIC ASSOCIATION

THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION ON THE LEGALIZATION OF
PROFESSIONAL SPORTS GAMBLING

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THE CENTER FOR SURVEY RESEARCH

Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences
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For additional information about the Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project, see:
surveyresearch.ecu.edu/lifelibertyhappiness

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The Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project involves five additional principal investigators: Mark Bowler (Department of Psychology), Bob Edwards (Department of Sociology), Melinda Kane (Department of Sociology), Joseph Lee (Department of Health Education and Promotion), and Ann Rafferty (Department of Public Health). It also includes research assistance from Toby Board and Randy Knebel of the Center for Survey Research; Jermaine McNair and Monica Calderon in the Department of Sociology; and Hunter Whittington in the Department of Political Science. The principal investigators of this report, Peter Francia, Jonathan Morris, and Toby Board, acknowledge and thank the entire team involved in the Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project for their work and contributions.

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REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

■ AMERICANS NATIONWIDE ARE SIGNIFICANTLY MORE LIKELY TO AGREE THAN TO DISAGREE THAT GAMBLING ON PROFESSIONAL SPORTS SHOULD BE LEGAL.

- Those who agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal outnumber those who disagree by a sizable 21-point margin, 47% to 26%.

■ SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES IN OPINION EXIST BETWEEN MEN AND WOMEN, BY AGE, AND BY INCOME, BUT NOT ALONG POLITICAL LINES.

- A majority of men (57%) agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal compared to only 38% of women.
- Older Americans (age 75 and older) are the least likely to agree (28%) that gambling on professional sports should be legal. By comparison, 57% of younger Americans (age 18 to 24) agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal.
- Americans with household incomes of \$120,000 or greater are more likely than less-affluent Americans to agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal.
- Republicans (50%) and Democrats (48%) are almost equally likely to agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal, with agreement lowest for self-identified Independents (41%).

“AMERICANS HAVE NEVER BEEN OF ONE MIND ABOUT GAMBLING, AND ATTITUDES HAVE SWUNG BACK AND FORTH.”

- Justice Samuel Alito in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*, No. 16-476



*Life, Liberty,
and Happiness*

Attitudes Toward Legalized Sports Gambling

Earlier this year in a decision written by Justice Samuel Alito, the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, a federal law that prohibited states from authorizing sports gambling. As Justice Alito observed for the Court’s majority, there often has been considerable disagreement and controversy surrounding the issue of legalized gambling, especially legalized sports gambling, in the United States. In the aftermath of the ruling, the state of New Jersey, which led the court battle, legalized full-scale sports betting, as have several other states, which include Delaware, Mississippi, and West Virginia.¹

With nearly half of the U.S. states, as well as the U.S. Congress, now currently considering sports betting legislation, the issue of legalized sports gambling is likely to remain a major legislative issue at the state

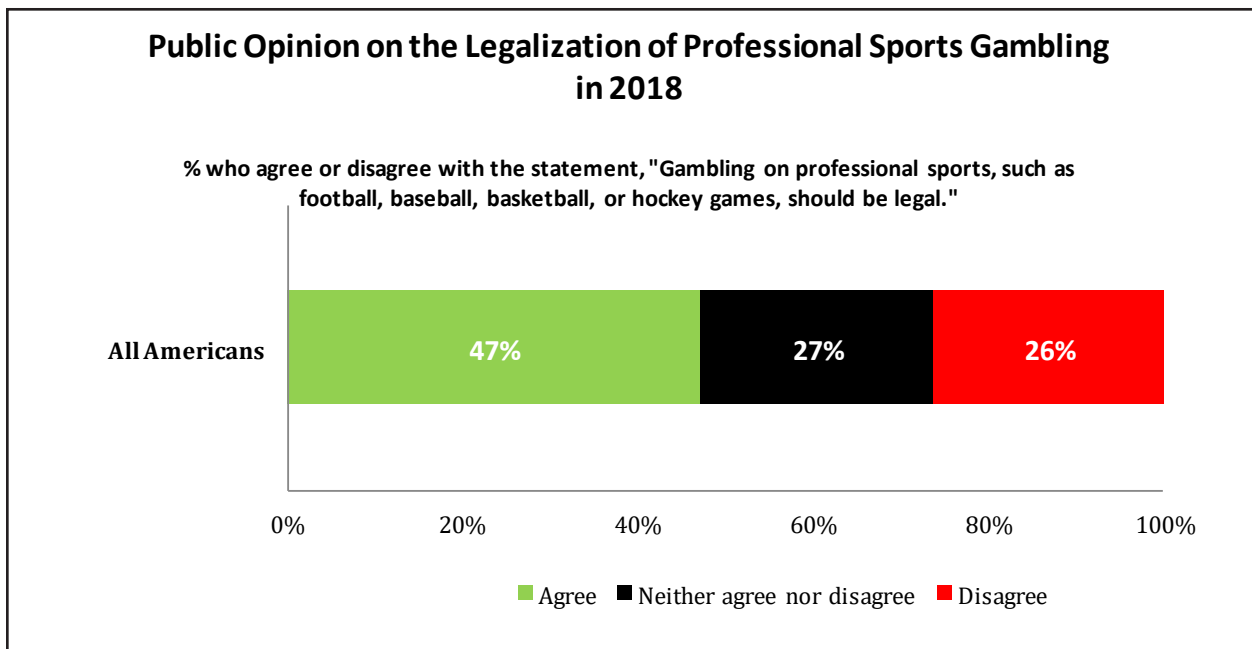
¹ Nevada also allows full-scale sports betting, but had legalized sports betting decades before the U.S. Supreme Court’s ruling in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*.

and federal levels for months, even years to come. The current state of public opinion on legalized sports gambling is thereby an important political matter. Americans’ attitudes about this issue will likely have at least some effect on the laws that are ultimately passed (or not passed) on sports gambling—a \$67 billion to \$150 billion a year industry.²

This report, from the Life, Liberty, and Happiness Project, conducted by the Center for Survey Research (CSR), in the Thomas Harriot College of Arts and Sciences at East Carolina University (ECU), attempts to shed some new light on the current state of public opinion towards legalized sports betting. Using data from a recent nationwide and demographically representative survey of more than 1,100 Americans that the CSR conducted in 2018, our findings reveal the following:

► **More Americans agree than disagree that gambling on professional sports should be legal—and by a considerable margin of 21 percentage points.**

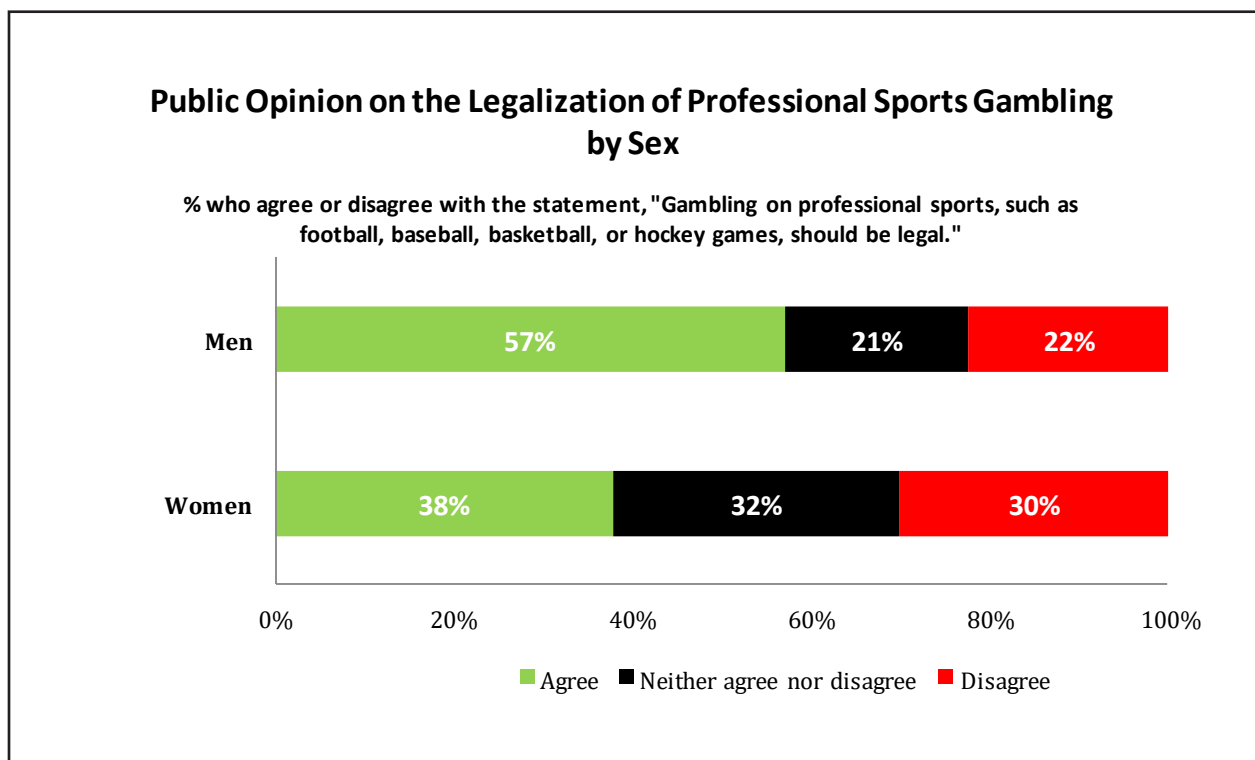
When asked, “Please indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: Gambling on professional sports, such as football, baseball, basketball, or hockey games, should be legal,” nearly half (47%) of Americans reported that they strongly or somewhat agree compared to 26% who strongly or somewhat disagree. The remaining 27% answered that they neither agree nor disagree, suggesting that many Americans have yet to form an opinion on the issue. On the one hand, the much stronger public support for legalized professional sports gambling may foreshadow more states following the lead of New Jersey, Delaware, Mississippi, and West Virginia. On the other hand, the high percentage of Americans who express no preference also makes the legalization of professional sports gambling a potentially volatile political issue.



² The economist, Jay Zagorsky, estimates the sports betting industry at \$67 billion a year, whereas the American Gaming Association cites the total at \$150 billion a year (see <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/the-us-market-for-sports-betting-is-nowhere-close-to-150-billion-no-matter-what-proponents-say-2018-05-15>).

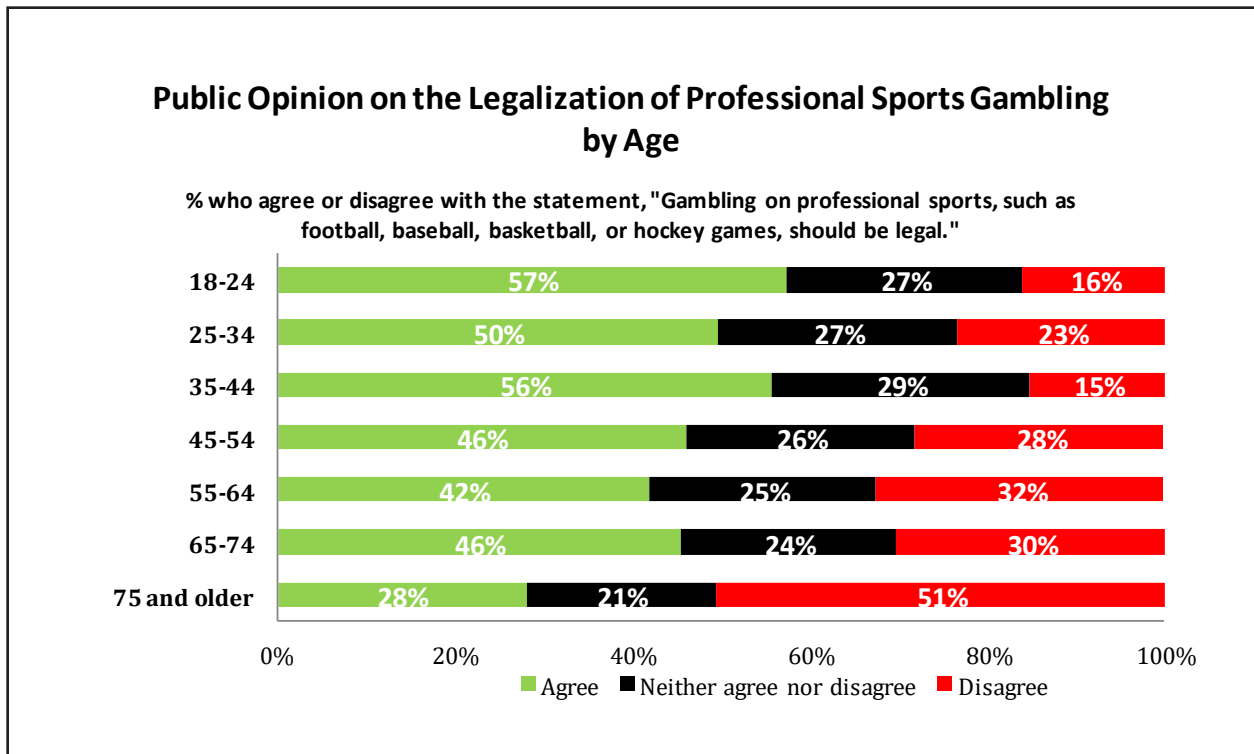
► **Men are more supportive of legalizing professional sports betting than women.**

The survey results reveal that a majority of men (57%) agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal compared to only 38% of women. These differences may stem from the fact that men already tend to gamble more frequently than women, [as noted in one recent study](#). While there is a significant gender gap between men and women on this issue, it should be noted that a plurality of women still support the legalization of professional sports betting, with those in agreement for legalization outnumbering opponents by a 38% to 30% margin (with 32% of women expressing no preference).



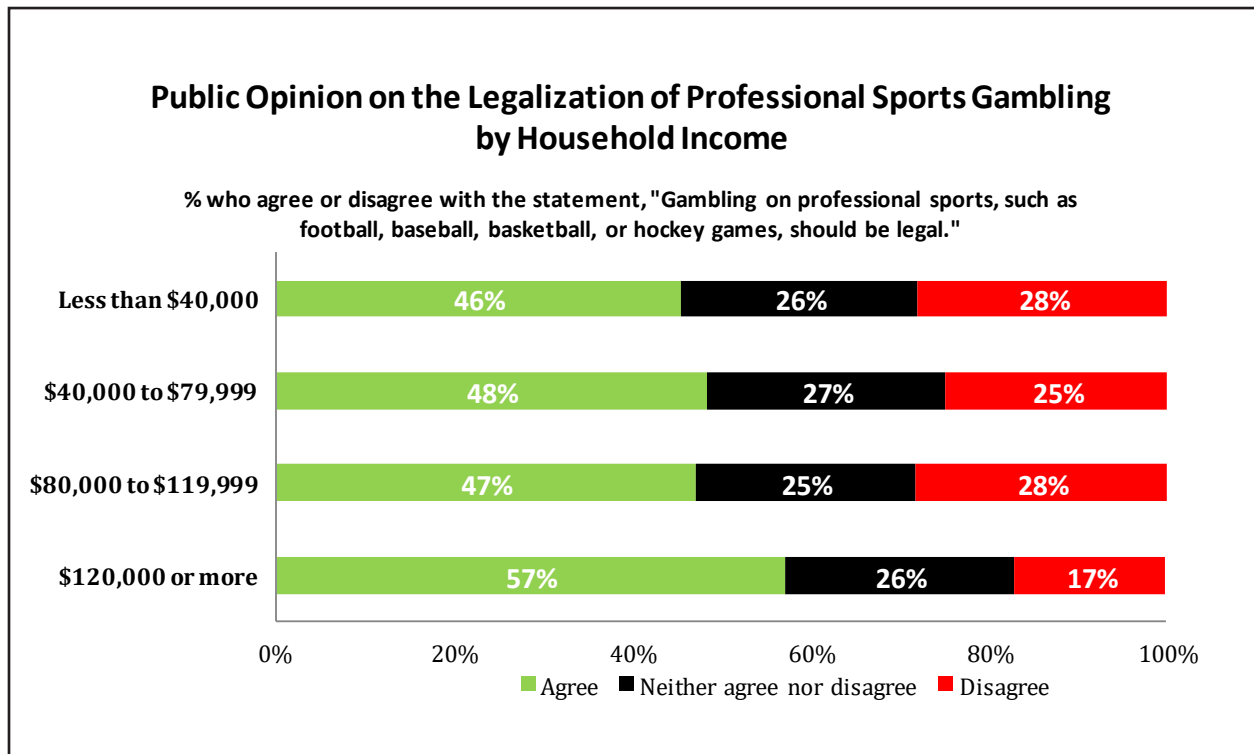
- ▶ The oldest Americans (age 75 and older) are the least supportive of legalized gambling on professional sports, while the youngest adults (age 18 to 24) are the most supportive.

Americans who are 75 years of age or older are the least likely to agree (28%) that gambling on professional sports should be legal. By comparison, 57% of Americans between the ages of 18 and 24 agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal. Patterns are less consistent across other age categories, but support for legalization reflects the plurality or majority position of every age group, except those 75 years of age or older.



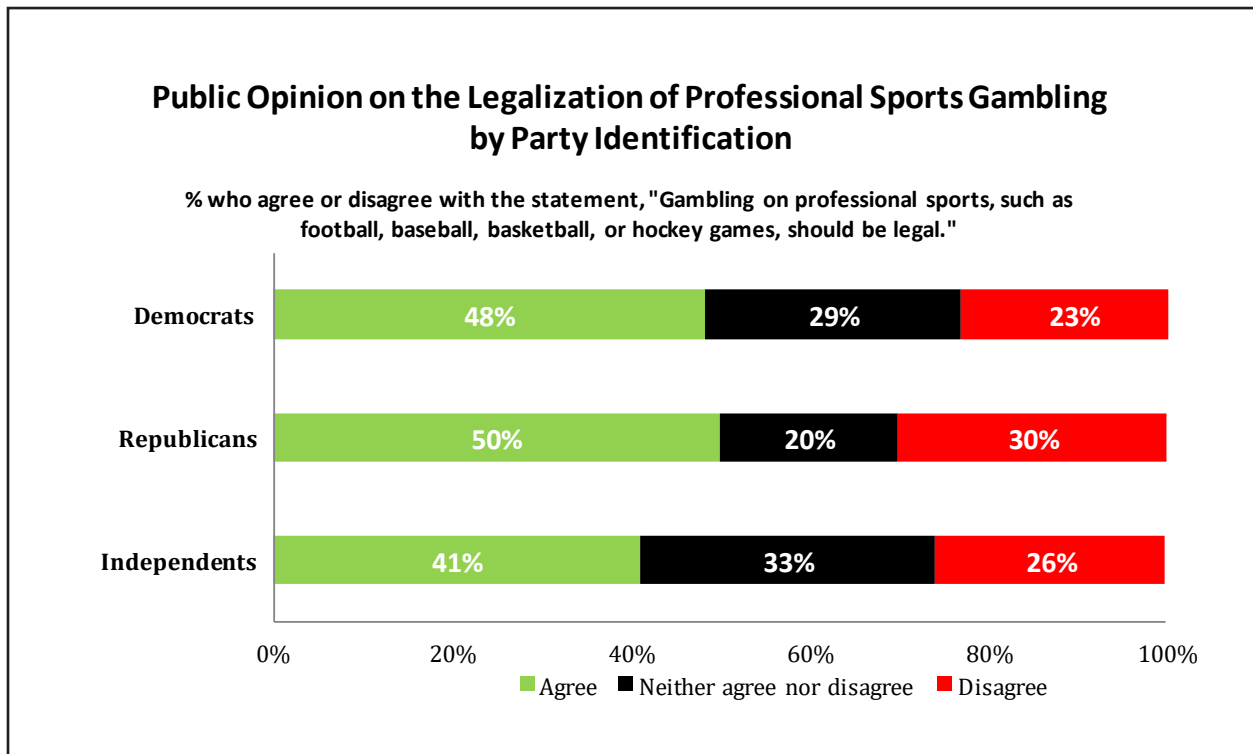
► **The most affluent Americans are the most supportive of legalized gambling on professional sports.**

A majority of Americans (57%) with household incomes of \$120,000 or greater agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal, with only a small minority (17%) disagreeing. The relationship between household income and support for the legalization of gambling on professional sports, however, is not linear. Those in households earning less than \$40,000 a year expressed levels of agreement at nearly identical levels to those in households earning between \$40,000 to \$79,999 and to those in households earning between \$80,000 to \$119,999. Again, it is worth emphasizing that across all income groups, there is considerably more agreement than disagreement for the legalization of professional sports gambling. Nonetheless, it does appear that income is relevant to understanding public opinion on the issue, as support does increase when household income reaches a higher level of \$120,000 a year or greater.



► **There are no significant partisan differences on the issue of legalizing professional sports gambling.**

Republicans (50%) and Democrats (48%) are almost equally likely to agree that gambling on professional sports should be legal, with agreement lowest for self-identified Independents (41%).³ (Although, agreement from Independents still largely outnumbers disagreement, 41% to 26%.) Interestingly, opposition to legalized professional sports gambling is higher among Republicans (30%) than among Democrats (23%). Republicans are both the most likely to support and the most likely to oppose the legalization of professional sports gambling because they are the least likely to express neither agreement nor disagreement on the issue (20%), as compared to Democrats (29%) and Independents (33%). Overall, however, those in agreement that professional sports gambling should be legal outnumber those who disagree by large margins, whether one identifies as a Republican, Democrat, or Independent.



³ Independents who report that they lean Republican are classified as Republicans. Independents who report that they lean Democrat are classified as Democrats. Independents are those who identify as Independents and do not lean toward either party.

CONCLUSION

Mark Cuban, owner of the NBA's Dallas Mavericks, told an audience recently, "Across Europe and across the world, people bet on pretty much every sport. Sports gambling is legal in 118 different countries. So, there's a lot of precedent already set. The technology is already there. People enjoy sporting events more because of it, so we don't have to reinvent the wheel - we just have to pick up some best practices."⁴ Cuban's observation points to where government policy may be headed with respect to legalized sports betting across the United States. As noted earlier, elected officials in many states have already taken steps to bring legalized sports betting to their citizens following the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling in *Murphy v. National Collegiate Athletic Association*. This development only seems likely to continue based on the current state of public opinion towards legalized sports betting.

Indeed, public support for the legalization of sports gambling has grown significantly over time. In 1975, for example, only 27 percent of Americans reported that they favored legalized sports gambling.⁵ That percentage increased to 41 percent in 1993.⁶ In 2017, public support registered at 46 percent⁷ - a level of support consistent with this report's finding of 47 percent in 2018. So, while it is true historically that "Americans have never been of one mind about gambling" as Justice Alito noted in his ruling, there is evidence of a growing public consensus in favor of legalized sports gambling.

Perhaps most interesting is that, unlike so many of today's contemporary political issues, legalized betting on professional sports does not divide Americans along partisan lines. Democrats and Republicans are about equally likely to support legalized gambling on professional sports. While Independents are the least likely to support legalized gambling on professional sports (as compared to Democrats and Republicans), supporters still largely outnumber opponents. Of course, this is not to suggest that public opinion is completely unified on the issue. As the results in this report show, differences do exist between men and women, as well as by age and income. There is also a fairly high percentage of Americans who have yet to form an opinion on whether or not to legalize professional sports gambling. Still, current levels of public support, particularly among both self-identified Democrats and Republicans, suggest that the prospects are clearly more favorable than unfavorable for additional states, and even the federal government, to pass laws that further legalize sports gambling.

⁴ Mark Cuban's remarks come from an interview on the Dan Patrick Show posted on SportsDayDFW.com at <https://sportsday.dallasnews.com/dallas-mavericks/mavericks/2018/05/17/mark-cuban-federal-regulation-league-intervention-could-prevent-sports-betting-descending-chaos>.

⁵ Roper Organization, Roper Report 75-4, April 1975.

⁶ Gallup/CNN/USA Today Poll, September 1993.

⁷ The Sharkey Institute, Seton Hall Sports Poll, February 2017.

SURVEY METHODS

The analysis in this report is based on a mixed mode of responses from mail, telephone, and the Internet. In total, the sample consisted of completed responses from 1,152 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. The mail surveys were delivered to 1,500 randomly selected addresses in the United States. There were 118 addresses that were returned as undeliverable. The selected households were contacted in four waves, starting with an informational postcard that introduced the survey, the survey, a reminder to complete the survey, and a second copy of the survey. One hundred and fifty-six were filled out and returned, producing a response rate of 11%. The mail surveys were collected between May 29 and July 13, 2018.

The telephone portion of the survey was conducted by interviewers under the direction of Qualtrics Experience Management. Random digit dialing was used to contact cell phones and landlines (70% cell phone, 30% landline). One hundred and sixty-seven respondents were interviewed on a cell phone, and 71 were interviewed by landline (total phone interviews = 238). The response rate was 5% for the cell phone sample and 9% for the landline sample. The phone interviews were conducted between May 31 and June 5, 2018. The margin of error for the mail and telephone portion of the sample is plus or minus 5.1 percentage points (at the 95% level of confidence).

The online portion of the survey was conducted among a national sample of 758 adults age 18 or older, living in all 50 states. Respondents for this portion of the survey were selected from a group of over one million people that participate in the Qualtrics survey platform on a daily basis. Participants self-selected into the survey, rather than through random selection. Thus, an estimate of sampling error could not be calculated. To avoid self-selection bias, participants were not told the nature of the survey when asked to participate. The online interviews were conducted between June 1 and June 18, 2018.

The combined sample of mail, telephone, and online respondents were weighted using an iterative proportional fitting algorithm that matches age, sex, gender, and education to population parameters derived from the U.S. Census.

See the comparisons between the unweighted sample and the population parameters from the Census below:

Age	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Census</i>
18-24	12%	12%
25-34	17%	18%
35-44	18%	16%
45-54	14%	17%
55-64	16%	17%
65-74	15%	12%
75 or older	8%	8%

Sex	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Census</i>
Male	45%	49%
Female	55%	51%

Race	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Census</i>
White	57%	60%
Hispanic/Latino/Spanish	15%	18%
Black or African American	14%	13%
Asian	6%	6%
Other or two or more	9%	4%

Education	<i>Sample</i>	<i>Census</i>
Less than high school	4%	13%
High school/some college/ GED/ technical/trade/vocational	63%	48%
Associate’s Degree	8%	8%
Bachelor’s Degree	18%	19%
Graduate Degree	7%	12%

Note: Some categories may not add to 100 percent due to rounding.



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THE STATE OF THE NATION, 242 YEARS AFTER INDEPENDENCE

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