



# **National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences 3.0**

## **Key Findings**

### **Introduction**

In 2018, the National Council on Problem Gambling conducted the first **National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences** (NGAGE) (Feeney, 2021). The report followed a ruling by the United States Supreme Court. In this decision the court concluded that "Congress lacks the authority to prohibit a state from legalizing sports gambling," thus opening the door for the expansion of legalized sports betting in the United States. NGAGE 1.0, conducted at the outset of what is likely to be "the largest and fastest expansion of gambling in our nation's history," (ibid) was designed as a baseline assessment of the gambling behavior and beliefs of the American public, prior to the expected widespread legalization of sports gambling.

A second NGAGE survey followed in 2021, when sports betting was legal and operational in 21 states (Feeney, 2023). However, in addition to being taken at a time of rapidly expanding sports betting, the survey was conducted near the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic. While the 2021 survey found a disturbing increase in the number of people displaying risky gambling behavior, it could not determine the degree to which this was due to the expansion of sports betting or due to factors resulting from the pandemic.

This report presents the key findings of the third **National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences** (NGAGE 3.0), conducted in April 2024. The pandemic had substantially eased, and in many ways (though not all) society has returned to some semblance of 2018 norms. Legal sports betting has continued to expand to 38 states and the District of Columbia as of this writing, with online betting available in 30 of those jurisdictions (Pempus, 2024). In addition to assessing the effects of the continuing growth in sports betting, the survey was also designed to help differentiate pandemic-caused changes from longer-term trends.

After growing significantly during the pandemic and the continued expansion of sports betting, as of early 2024, risky gambling behavior has leveled off. However, it is too early to assume that rates of problematic play are stable. Many components may impact these rates, including risk factors like increased advertising and mobile betting, as well as protective factors such as increased public funding

for prevention, expanded education, and greater public awareness of gambling addiction, as experienced by friends or family or reported on in the media.

While sports betting has garnered enormous public attention recently, the data presented here shows most Americans did not place a sports bet in the 12 months preceding the survey. It remains important to recognize that problematic gambling behavior extends well beyond sports.

The frequency of gambling of any type and involvement in multiple forms of gambling are the strongest predictors of problematic gambling found in this survey, more than involvement in any particular gambling activity. Additionally, a large share of the population continues to misunderstand and stigmatize problem gambling. A majority of the adult population attributes gambling problems to moral weakness and/or lack of willpower. A belief that gambling problems are not serious remains a common misconception. Gambling problems are indeed serious. They result in a wide range of emotional, financial and even physical consequences to many individuals, families and communities. This report finds that the number of people experiencing problems with their gambling is significant.

**The National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experiences is not designed to assess the prevalence of gambling disorders, as defined by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Fifth Edition (DSM-5).**

## **Key 2024 Findings**

1. **Levels of problematic play have returned to the levels seen in 2018.** After growing substantially from 7% in 2018 to 11% in 2021, the number of adults reporting experiencing at least one of four potentially problematic gambling behaviors "many times" was 8% in 2024. Other indicators of problematic play showed similar trends. These findings suggest that the 2021 increase in problematic play may have been driven more by the COVID-19 pandemic than by the expansion of sports betting.
2. **8% of American adults, almost 20 million people, reported experiencing at least one indicator of problematic gambling behavior "many times" in the past year.**

**Those meeting at least one criterion for problematic play include:**

- 28% of those who bet on 10 or more different gambling activities
- 19% of those who bet on at least one activity weekly or more often, and 35% of those who gambled on three or more activities weekly or more often
- 24% of fantasy sports and 17% of traditional sports bettors
- 19% of those making at least some bets online
- 15% who agree "gambling is a good way to make money"

- Low gambling literacy is also strongly correlated with young age. 15% of 18- to 34-year-olds, while only 2% of those 55 or older met at least one criterion for problematic play.
- 10% of males, almost twice the rate of females.

3. **The greatest predictors of risk identified in 2024 include:**

- participation in many different gambling activities
- gambling weekly or more often
- agreeing that gambling is a good way to make money
- participating in sports betting (either traditional sports betting or fantasy sports)
- gambling online, and
- being male and/or under the age of 35.

However, we cannot determine the degree to which these factors cause problem gambling, especially as they are often highly correlated to one another. Most sports bettors, for example, bet on a large number of other activities.

4. **Many Americans underestimate the seriousness of a gambling disorder.** While almost three in four agree that "addiction to gambling is a lot like addiction to drugs or alcohol," only 39% rate its consequences as "very severe" compared with 55% for alcoholism and 62% for drug addiction. A majority of Americans continue to attribute gambling problems to a lack of willpower or moral weakness.
5. **Many Americans have heard of 1-800-GAMBLER, the National Problem Gambling Helpline number,** and most understand its purpose. More than one in three (36%) have heard of the number, rising to 59% among those betting on seven or more gambling activities. 80% believe the number exists to "help people dealing with a gambling addiction," regardless of whether they had heard of it. That percentage rises to 88% of those who have heard of the number. High levels of awareness and understanding are likely due to increased promotion by NCPG, as well as responsible gambling messaging by the gambling industry and sports leagues.
6. **Those who are at the greatest risk of problematic gambling are also those who are the most skeptical about the effectiveness of treatment.** When asked if they agreed that "people with a gambling problem are unlikely to recover or get better," respondents who reported engaging in at least one problematic behavior many times were more than twice as likely to agree (37%) than those who gambled but reported no problematic behavior (15%).
7. **The number of American adults who report having gambled in the past year has remained constant.** The number reporting gambling on at least one activity was 71% in 2018, 73% in 2021, and 71% in 2024.
8. **Despite the increased number of states that have legalized sports betting, the percentage of adults making a sports bet did not show any increase.** After rising from

20% in 2018 to 26% in 2021, sports betting participation leveled off at 23% of the population in 2024. Most adults who want to bet on sports are likely able to do so regardless of its legal status in their state.

9. **The number of sports bettors making parlay bets has almost doubled, from 17% of sports bettors in 2018, to 30% in 2024.** Parlay bets offer a small chance at a large jackpot and have the potential to appeal to a gambler looking to make back large losses in a small amount of time. The NGAGE 3.0 data suggests that both prop betting and parlay betting may be associated with risky gambling behavior, but research in this area is far from definitive.
10. **Participation in online gambling stayed high while most other forms of gambling returned to their 2018 levels.** While 15% of the adult population made an online wager in 2018, this number rose to 25% in 2021, and 22% in 2024

## Policy Implications

The NGAGE 3.0 findings confirm the need for a comprehensive system of care for the estimated 2.5 million adults likely to suffer from gambling disorder, as well as the 5 to 8 million more who exhibit some problematic behavior. There is a critical need for education about the realities of gambling and how to lower its risks for those who choose to gamble, particularly for high-risk groups, including young adults, males, online gamblers, and sports bettors.

The high awareness of the **National Problem Gambling Helpline (1-800-GAMBLER)** demonstrates that such efforts can be effective.

While public funding for problem gambling programs has grown from \$80 million in 2018 to \$134 million in 2023 (NAADGS 2024), there are still 7 states without any appropriations for problem gambling, and the overall national median per capita funding is still only **35 cents**. There remains an urgent need to raise awareness of the seriousness of gambling disorders among the American public and for Federal funding to buttress state efforts and support best practices in treatment and research.

## Methodology

The 2024 NGAGE survey used methodology identical to the 2018 and 2021 surveys. Much of the survey duplicated questions in the first two studies, though some questions deemed less valuable or unlikely to show significant change were dropped in favor of new questions. NCPG designed the survey in consultation with the survey vendor Ipsos. Ipsos conducted an online survey of people in all 50 states and the District of Columbia. They collected a national sample of 3,013 from January 26, 2024, to March 20, 2024.

In addition to the national sample, additional surveys were taken to allow a sample of 300 or more in each state.

The data presented in this report are based entirely on the national sample and do not include any of the supplementary state participants.

The NGAGE 3.0 National Detailed Report provides a more detailed description of the survey methodology.

The 2018 and 2021 NGAGE National Detailed reports can be found at [www.NCPGsurvey.org](http://www.NCPGsurvey.org).

Detailed state reports may be ordered from the **National Council on Problem Gambling**.

*Note: There is a charge for these detailed state reports.*

## References

Feeney, D. (2021). National Detailed Report: National Survey on Gambling Attitudes and Gambling Experience 1.0. Washington DC: National Council on Problem Gambling

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