



Betting shops, arcades and casinos have an impact on local crime rates

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Using data from the ONS, the UK Census, the UK Police Street-level Crime Dataset, and the POI Ordnance Survey, we analyse the association between gambling outlets as an example of a commodity industry and crime events across England and Wales and explore the possibility of a heterogeneous effect dependent upon the level of deprivation and residential stability of an area. Our findings show that gambling outlets are significantly and positively associated with different types of crime even when controlling for other businesses, the areas' demographic and socio-economic characteristics. Small businesses provide distinctive shielding effects. Our results have significant policy implications.

The results of our study suggest that the criminogenic impact of residing closer to gambling premises is not limited to providing criminal opportunities for perpetrators but very importantly such criminogenic attractors may hinder

guardianship within the community – areas with high proportion of homeowners who also are typically long-term residents experience increasing social disorganization with the increase in number of land-based gambling premises. The presence of small business owners can however mitigate the negative association with high gambling outlets density.

We find that deprivation may make matters worse in terms of theft and burglaries, but not in terms of violent crime, anti-social behaviour or property damage. There are several reasons for this result. The data shows that exposure to gambling outlets is not much higher in local areas marked by high levels of deprivation compared to non-deprived areas. Thus, many of the very deprived local areas which are most susceptible to violent crime have not been affected by gambling density in the analysis. Furthermore, our data suggests that at high levels of deprivation, the impact of

gambling outlets is focused on opportunistic types of crimes such as thefts and burglaries.

Premise

Do gambling outlets have crime-producing impact? Although land-based gambling is becoming overshadowed by online betting, in the case of Great Britain, land-based premises (such as casinos, betting shops and arcades) produced a Gross Gambling Yield of £4.5 billion in 2022/23 and there were 8,301 registered premises in this year (the latest available data on the sector (Gambling Commission, 2024)). In fact, the Gross Gambling Yield of online betting surpassed that of remote betting only in 2019 which attests to its importance for the UK economy (Department for Culture, 2023).

Our data analysis has been guided by reports produced by local authorities concerned about land-based gambling premises and their effect upon local communities. A report for the Southwark Council completed in 2014 shows that the focus in studies of gambling outlets is usually on individual health outcomes, problem gambling and the positioning of gambling outlets and pay-day loan shops (BenCaveAssociates, 2014). Although the report acknowledged that there could be a variety of wider and broader effects, it ascertained that there are considerable difficulties in quantifying the impact of gambling outlets on community well-being. The borough of [Barking and Dagenham](#) also completed a review that identifies areas of high multiple deprivation as potential problematic areas in which to place gambling activities. The recommendation of the review is that gambling facilities should not be located in areas with high levels of deprivation.

Our study provides further insights as to the question of the positioning of different gambling outlets since we consider potential confounders and further investigate whether deprivation can re-enforce or whether residential stability can alleviate the negative impact of high gambling outlet density.

Data and methods

To capture the levels of social disorganization in the local community (measured as police data on crime), in this paper, we consider a wide range of crime events and distinguish between anti-social behaviour, interpersonal crimes (such as violent crimes and theft), burglaries, property damage and vehicle theft.

Second, we take into account a variety of criminogenic localities. Previous research has shown that several types of outlets and local area amenities might be related to heightened levels of crime (Hipp, 2016), and as these may be in proximity to gambling outlets we need to control for such establishments and local social structures in order to be able to see whether gambling outlets resemble or differ from other established criminogenic spaces such as evening economy industries.

Third, we control for a range of social ecological factors that are known to be associated with crime rates such as the deprivation levels of the local area or its levels of ethnic diversity. Thus, the impact of gambling outlets may be more pronounced in deprived and residentially unstable areas than in less deprived or more residentially

stable ones as socio-economic disadvantage is associated with a neighbourhood's capacity to provide social control or guardianship (Krivo and Peterson, 1996, Sampson, 2012).

Policy implications

Policy makers have growing concerns about exposure to high gambling density. This study establishes a significant positive association between gambling premises and neighbourhood social disorganization which is on par with other established criminogenic places such as evening economy outlets. Moreover, this negative impact is not restricted just to deprived areas, and increased guardianship through homeowners does not shield the local community. Small business owners however do play a protective role, and this study concludes that they are important for the well-being and resilience of the local area.

Our results make an important sociological contribution to the current explanation of social disorganization in local areas as well as provide empirical identification of institutions which can support efforts to reduce criminality. Further work should aim to better understand and map all the possible pathways through which collective efficacy at the local level can be successfully encouraged and sustained.

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Other information

Cite this research

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Further information

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