



Gambling Freedom Index (GFI) 2026

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Freedom is tested not only in the choices we applaud, but also in those some may personally regard as unnecessary, risky or unwise. Gambling belongs to this second category. It combines leisure, uncertainty, competition, money and personal judgement in a way that has always attracted both enthusiasm and suspicion. For millions of adults, however, gambling is simply one among many forms of entertainment: a voluntary activity in which people choose to spend part of their income in exchange for excitement, anticipation, competition or the possibility of winning.

A free society should begin from a simple presumption: competent adults are entitled to make such choices for themselves. That principle does not require us to ignore fraud, addiction, the protection of minors or other genuine concerns. Nor does it imply that every form of gambling regulation is necessarily incompatible with freedom. It does require, howe-

ver, that restrictions on peaceful adult behaviour be justified rather than assumed, and that regulation should protect rights without unnecessarily replacing individual judgement with that of the state.

Gambling also represents a significant part of the modern service economy. Across the world, the sector generates substantial employment, investment, technological innovation, tourism, tax revenue and commercial activity. It supports not only casinos, betting operators and lotteries, but also software developers, payment providers, hospitality businesses, media, professional services and a growing digital ecosystem. The existence of a large and sophisticated gambling industry is therefore relevant not only to those who gamble. It is also part of the modern societies allowing legitimate businesses to innovate, compete and respond to consumer demand.

This Index does not seek to judge whether gambling is a good or bad personal choice. Nor does it rank countries according to the profitability or size of their gambling industries. It asks a more fundamental question: to what extent does the law allow adults to decide for themselves whether, how and with whom they wish to gamble? In answering that question across 161 countries, we hope to contribute to a more serious discussion about gambling policy – one that distinguishes consumer protection from paternalism, regulation from prohibition, and legitimate oversight from unnecessary restrictions on individual and economic freedom.

*Roxana Nicula, President,
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Why Gambling Freedom Matters

Gambling as a dimension of individual freedom

Gambling freedom is a specific expression of a broader principle: competent adults should normally be free to decide how to use their own time, money and judgement, provided that they do not violate the rights of others. This principle is widely accepted in most areas of private life. Adults may spend money on travel, sport, entertainment, luxury goods, speculative investments, hobbies or countless other activities that may be economically unproductive, emotionally driven or financially unwise. Gambling is unusual because many legal systems still treat the introduction of a monetary stake as if it fundamentally changed the moral status of otherwise voluntary play. The contrast is striking. Games of chance, cards, competitions, predictions and recreational risk are tolerated almost everywhere when no money is involved. Yet in some countries the same activity becomes criminal once two adults voluntarily place a financial stake on the outcome.

And that is unjustified. The mere possibility of losing money cannot by itself be sufficient. Financial risk is present in many lawful activities. Nor does the fact that some people may make poor decisions establish a general right of the state to prevent all adults from making those decisions. The presumption of a free society is the opposite: adults are entitled to make choices that other people may dislike or consider imprudent.

An old paternalism in very different ideological traditions

One of the most revealing characteristics of gambling prohibition is that it appears under political and cultural traditions that

otherwise have very little in common. In several states governed by strict interpretations of Islamic law, gambling is prohibited as maysir or qimar and the religious prohibition has been incorporated into criminal or public law. Strongly conservative Christian traditions have also produced prohibitory gambling cultures in some jurisdictions. At the other ideological extreme, communist and Marxist-Leninist systems have frequently treated gambling as an antisocial, speculative or morally corrupt activity incompatible with the state's preferred economic and social order.

The similarity of the legal outcome is striking. Religious traditionalism and revolutionary socialism begin from profoundly different views of society, economics and human purpose. Yet both can converge on the same paternalistic proposition: individuals should not be permitted to engage voluntarily in an activity that the governing moral doctrine regards as improper.

This convergence helps explain why gambling freedom deserves to be measured separately from other forms of political or economic liberty. The Index also shows that such traditions are not deterministic. Countries sharing similar religious, cultural or political backgrounds can adopt very different gambling laws. Legal policy remains a political choice.

There is an additional contradiction in some restrictive systems. Private gambling may be condemned while state lotteries or other state-controlled games remain lawful. In those cases, the objection cannot simply be to gambling itself. The distinction increasingly becomes who is permitted to organise it, who receives the revenue and under whose control the activity takes place. A government that prohibits private gambling while operating its own lottery is not eliminating gambling. It is monopolising it.

Freedom does not require approval

A liberal defence of gambling does not require believing that gambling is always wise. Some people gamble frequently, others occasionally and many never gamble at all. Some forms of gambling involve substantial financial risk. A minority of gamblers develop serious harmful behaviour. None of this is trivial. But freedom is meaningful precisely because it protects choices without requiring collective approval of their wisdom.

The value of an activity does not depend on whether legislators, regulators or other citizens consider that expenditure sufficiently useful.

Millions of people derive entertainment, excitement, sociability and anticipation from gambling. A lottery ticket may provide not merely a mathematical probability of a prize but also the pleasure of possibility. A sports wager may add interest to a match. Poker combines chance, strategy, competition and social interaction. Casino games, betting and lotteries

GAMBLING FREEDOM INDEX – FOUR AREAS, TWELVE INDICATORS	
A. FREEDOM TO GAMBLE (25%)	A1 Land-based legality 10% A2 Online legality 10% A3 Age relative to majority 5%.
B. FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND MARKET ACCESS (25%)	B1 Private provision and competition 14% B2 Choice of domestic operators 6% B3 Cross-border/offshore access 5%.
C. REGULATORY AND COMMERCIAL FREEDOM (25%)	C1 Licensing burden 10% C2 Advertising and sponsorship 5% C3 Product and promotion restrictions 10%.
D. FINANCIAL AND PATERNALISTIC RESTRICTIONS (25%)	D1 Mandatory limits 6% D2 Payment freedom 5% D3 Gambling-specific taxation 14%.



form part of the leisure choices of adults across very different cultures. These forms of subjective satisfaction are difficult to quantify, but that does not make them economically or morally irrelevant. A liberal society normally allows the individual, not the government, to decide whether such experiences are worth the price paid for them.

A major global industry

Gambling is also far from an economically marginal activity. Industry estimates cited by the World Health Organization suggest that global gambling revenues could approach US\$700 billion by 2028.

The European gambling market alone generated approximately €123.4 billion in gross gaming revenue in 2024, according to the European Gaming and Betting Association. Online gambling accounted for almost €48 billion of that total.

In the United States, the American Gaming Association estimates that the gaming industry supports approximately 1.8 million jobs and generates around US\$329 billion in annual economic impact. Commercial gaming revenue reached a record US\$78.7 billion in 2025, while state and local governments collected more than US\$18 billion in gaming-specific taxes.

These figures should not be interpreted as an argument for gambling freedom merely because gambling produces revenue. Economic freedom should not depend on whether an activity maximises tax receipts. But they do demonstrate that gambling is a major sector of the modern service economy. It supports employment in hospitality, technology, payments, software, en-

tertainment, tourism, compliance, marketing and professional services, as well as in gambling operations themselves.

A restrictive gambling regime therefore affects more than the gambler. It also limits entrepreneurship, investment, employment and competition.

Regulation versus prohibition

Recognising gambling as a legitimate activity does not imply that every regulation is illegitimate. Rules against fraud, cheating, manipulation of games or refusal to pay lawful winnings protect individual rights and contractual freedom. Age restrictions that prevent minors from gambling can likewise be consistent with the legal distinction between children and competent adults. Disclosure requirements may improve informed choice.

The more difficult liberal question begins when regulation moves from protecting rights to substituting the state's judgement for that of the adult. Mandatory loss limits, blanket advertising prohibitions, state monopolies, bans on foreign operators, arbitrary restrictions on legal payment methods or outright prohibition do not merely ensure fair play. They narrow the range of choices that competent adults are allowed to make.

The existence of gambling-related harm does not eliminate this distinction. The World Health Organization estimates that around 1.2% of adults worldwide experience gambling disorder. That is a serious policy concern. But the existence of a vulnerable minority does not automatically justify treating every adult gambler as incapable of choosing freely.

A modern, individual freedom-respecting approach can support information, voluntary self-exclusion, treatment, effective enforcement against fraud and strong protection of minors while remaining sceptical of restrictions imposed indiscriminately on the entire adult population.

Gambling freedom as economic and personal freedom

The case for gambling freedom ultimately rests on the same principles that support other forms of individual liberty. Adults own their income. They are ordinarily entitled to choose how to spend it. They may pursue entertainment, excitement, specula-

tion or competition even when others regard those choices as unnecessary or unwise. Businesses should similarly be free to offer lawful services to willing adults unless a compelling rights-based reason justifies prohibition. This does not make gambling uniquely important. It makes gambling revealing. Because gambling combines money, risk, pleasure and moral controversy, it exposes how far a legal system actually trusts individual adults when their choices depart from conventional ideas of prudence.

The question is therefore larger than whether a person should place a bet. It is whether peaceful adults require permission to take voluntary risks with their own resources. For a society committed to individual freedom, that question matters.



Gambling is increasingly permitted, but rarely left alone

The most important global finding of the Gambling Freedom Index is that outright prohibition is no longer the dominant model of gambling regulation. Of the 161 countries assessed, 21 fall into the Very High Gambling Freedom category and another 69 into High Gambling Freedom. Taken together, 90 countries provide a high or very high degree of legal gambling freedom. A further 36 countries fall into the medium category. Only 35 countries score below 40 points, and only 20 of them score zero. This produces an unusually uneven distribution. The global median is 66.6 points, comfortably within the High Gambling Freedom category, while the arithmetic mean is only 55.0. The difference is largely explained by a relatively small but substantial prohibitionist bloc at the bottom of the ranking.

The world of gambling is therefore not best described as a continuum running smoothly from prohibition to freedom. It looks more like a world in which most jurisdictions have accepted some form of legal gambling, while a smaller group rejects it almost completely. Once a country decides that adults may gamble, the political question becomes how much control the state retains over the gambler, the provider, the product and the money. This second question explains much of the variation.

Governments are more willing to allow gambling than to allow a free gambling market

One of the clearest findings appears when the four areas of the Index are compared. Globally, Freedom to Gamble averages

63.2 points and Financial and Paternalistic Restrictions 64.8. By contrast, Freedom of Choice and Market Access averages only 48.8 and Regulatory and Commercial Freedom just 43.1.

In other words, governments are generally more willing to say “you may gamble” than they are to say “you may choose freely who provides the service, and competing firms may freely offer it to you”. This is perhaps the central structural feature of contemporary gambling regulation. The lowest-scoring individual indicator in the entire Index is Cross-border and Offshore Access, with an average of only 36.5. Licensing Burden follows at 37.9, and Advertising and Sponsorship Freedom at 41.4. By contrast, the least restrictive indicator globally is Gambling Age Relative to the Age of Majority, averaging 79.5.

Modern gambling control is therefore less about denying adulthood altogether than about channelising adult behaviour into state-approved markets.

The new frontier of gambling restriction is jurisdiction

The particularly low result for cross-border gambling reveals another important development. The Internet has weakened the traditional relationship between gambling and territory. A gambler no longer needs a casino, betting shop or racetrack nearby. An operator may be located in another country altogether. Governments have generally responded not by accepting this geographical freedom, but by attempting to reconstruct national borders digitally. Website blocking, payment blocking, domestic licensing requirements and prohibitions on using foreign operators have become central instruments of gambling policy.

This creates a striking pattern: many countries have liberalised online gambling domestically while simultaneously becoming more restrictive towards international gambling competition. Thus, legal online gambling should not automatically be interpreted as digital gambling freedom. A highly regulated domestic platform combined with aggressive blocking of foreign alternatives may represent legalisation without genuine consumer choice.

Europe is broadly permissive – but far from uniform

Europe is one of the world’s most gambling-permissive regions. Across the European countries in the Index, the unweighted average is approximately 68.9 points, and no European jurisdiction falls into the Low or Very Low categories.

But the regional average conceals major differences in regulatory philosophy. At one end are Malta, Estonia, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland, Ireland and Slovenia, all of which fall within Very High Gambling Freedom. Malta ranks first globally at 92.3 points.

At the other end of the European spectrum are countries such as Finland and Norway, both in the Medium category despite their otherwise highly developed legal and economic systems. Denmark and Sweden exceed 82 points, while Finland and Norway remain below 47 and 45 respectively. Similar geography, comparable levels of development and related welfare-state traditions have produced radically different gambling regimes.

The difference is principally institutional: monopoly structures, entry barriers, channelisation and paternalistic regula-

tion remain substantially stronger in Finland and Norway. The Nordic comparison is therefore one of the strongest pieces of evidence in the Index that gambling freedom cannot simply be inferred from a country’s broader economic or social model.

The Monaco paradox: casino prestige is not gambling freedom

Perhaps the clearest example of the difference between a gambling industry and gambling freedom is Monaco. Few places in the world are more culturally associated with gambling. The Casino de Monte-Carlo is internationally synonymous with casino gaming. Yet Monaco scores only 50.5 points, placing it in Medium Gambling Freedom.

Andorra shows how rapidly a prohibitionist tradition can change

Andorra provides almost the mirror image of Monaco. For much of its modern history, the country maintained a highly restrictive approach to gambling. Yet its contemporary legal framework now places it at 69.5 points, within High Gambling Freedom. Its position is not exceptionally liberal in relation to competition and licensing – concessions, tenders and regulatory controls remain important – but the change in the underlying legal attitude towards gambling is substantial. Andorra illustrates that gambling law is not necessarily anchored permanently in national culture or religious tradition. A country may move from prohibition to regulated acceptance within a relatively short period when the political and economic rationale changes.



The UAE is becoming the major regional exception

The Middle East and North Africa constitute by far one of the most restrictive geographical clusters in the Index. On an unweighted country basis, the regional average is only about 22 points. Many countries in the region prohibit gambling almost completely. Against that background, the United Arab Emirates, at 68.3 points, is an extraordinary outlier. Its emerging federal system permits regulated land-based gambling, Internet gaming and sports wagering, although the market remains highly concentrated and participation in unauthorised gambling remains restricted. The UAE therefore do not resemble a fully open gambling market. Nevertheless, the distance between its

current legal framework and the prohibitionist model prevailing across much of the Arabian Peninsula is enormous.

This may become one of the most important gambling-policy developments to observe in future editions of the Index. If the new market expands, develops genuine competition and normalises gambling as part of the country's tourism and entertainment industries, the UAE could move still further away from its regional peers.

The UAE example also demonstrates that religious and cultural traditions do not mechanically determine a certain gambling policy. Political and economic priorities can produce very different legal outcomes within broadly similar cultural environments.



Religious prohibition: the leading foundation of absolute ban

The group of countries scoring exactly zero is nevertheless geographically and culturally distinctive.

The overwhelming majority of the twenty zero-score jurisdictions are Muslim-majority countries. They include Afghanistan, Bahrain, Brunei, Comoros, Indonesia, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Libya, Maldives, Mauritania, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Somalia, Sudan and Yemen, among others. This does not mean that Muslim-majority societies inevitably prohibit gambling. The UAE provides the clearest counterexample, while countries such as Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan and several Central Asian states occupy intermediate positions.

Nor is every prohibition legally structured in the same way. In some jurisdictions gambling is directly criminalised through legislation strongly influenced by Islamic prohibitions on maysir or qimar. In others, religious norms operate alongside secular penal law, licensing policy or constitutional principles. The important finding is narrower: where religious opposition to gambling has been fully translated into positive law, it remains one of the strongest predictors of complete or near-complete prohibition. At the same time, the existence of a couple of non-Muslim zero-score countries, plus other non-Muslim low score countries, demonstrates that prohibition is not uniquely Islamic.

Cuba represents a radically different political and historical route to the same legal outcome. Other communist countries also perform very poorly. Tonga reflects a strongly prohibitionist Christian (Methodist) tradition. Other cases arise from distinctive authoritarian, moral or historical legal traditions.

The Index therefore measures the legal result rather than attempting to assign a single motive to prohibition.

East Asia remains unusually restrictive

East and Southeast Asia form another relatively restrictive cluster, although for very different reasons from the prohibitionist Middle East. The regional unweighted average is approximately 37 points. Several of the world's largest and most economically sophisticated Asian economies occupy surprisingly modest positions in our ranking: Singapore scores 54.5, Taiwan 47.6, Japan 44.9 and South Korea 37.9. What is not surprising is the poor performance of totalitarian countries like China and North Korea.

In the democratic countries of the region, restrictions often take the form of monopolies, tightly controlled product categories, resident restrictions, licensing constraints and strong state direction of the gambling market.

Taiwan illustrates this particularly well. It permits lotteries and sports betting, including a lawful online channel, but the legal market remains narrow and concession-dominated. Its Medium classification therefore reflects neither prohibition nor broad market freedom. Singapore also demonstrates the difference between permitting a highly visible gambling industry and permitting an open gambling market. Large integrated casino resorts coexist with a tightly channelised domestic regulatory structure. The East Asian pattern is therefore better characterised as controlled permission than simple prohibition. But the level of that control is strikingly rigid.



SOME PARTICULARLY SURPRISING RESULTS		
1	MALTA	Malta combines broad legality, extensive private provision and comparatively moderate restrictions, placing it first globally.
3	CANADA	Canada illustrates the effect of legal pluralism: competitive provincial markets such as Ontario and Alberta provide the benchmark under the best-jurisdiction rule.
16	USA	The U.S. reaches Very High Gambling Freedom once permissive state regimes and relevant tribal gaming jurisdictions are recognised, while federal rules still count.
65	ANDORRA	A country with a long prohibitionist tradition has moved within a relatively short period towards a regulated gambling market. It is a clear example of how historical or religiously influenced restrictions need not determine contemporary policy.
73	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	The UAE is the major liberalising outlier in an otherwise highly restrictive region where religious law normally annihilates gambling freedom.
104	MONACO	The Principality of Monaco is a paradox: a world-famous casino destination where residents themselves face major restrictions and the market remains concession-dominated.
142	CUBA	Gambling prohibition in Cuba reflects the enduring influence of communist and anti-liberal economic thinking, showing that very different doctrines can converge on the same restriction of adult choice.
142	TONGA	The Kingdom of Tonga is one of the rare non-Muslim countries with a complete prohibitionist outcome. Its case illustrates how strongly conservative Christian traditions can produce a legal result similar to that found in much stricter Islamic jurisdictions.

Sub-Saharan Africa: freer than the stereotypes might suggest

One of the more surprising results of the Index is the position of many Sub-Saharan African countries. The region's unweighted average is approximately 61 points, well above East Asia, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. Nigeria ranks fourth globally, under the methodology that recognises the most permissive valid internal jurisdiction in legally decentralised countries. Ghana and Guinea also reach the Very High category, while Kenya, Cameroon, Angola, Liberia, Malawi and South Africa score highly.

This does not mean these countries necessarily possess better institutions, stronger consumer protection, more effective regulators or more mature gambling industries than lower-ranked developed economies.

A jurisdiction can have limited administrative capacity yet impose relatively few legal restrictions on adult gambling and private provision. Conversely, a wealthy state with sophisticated institutions may deliberately construct a monopoly, impose mandatory limits and restrict competition. This distinction is essential when interpreting African results

High gambling freedom should not be confused with high regulatory quality, just as strict gambling regulation should not automatically be interpreted as effective or desirable regulation.

Latin America and the Caribbean:regulation over prohibition

Latin America and the Caribbean constitute another broad-ly permissive region, averaging approximately 66.7 points.

Several countries appear near the top of the global ranking: Peru, Nicaragua and Argentina are all within Very High Gambling Freedom, while Brazil, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Colombia and several Caribbean jurisdictions fall within the High category.

The regional pattern is striking because it crosses large differences in income, political history and institutional development. With the conspicuous exception of Cuba, the dominant regional approach is not comprehensive prohibition but some form of legalisation and regulation. Even countries with restrictive elements generally permit substantial gambling markets. This suggests that gambling has become relatively detached from the major ideological divisions that have historically structured Latin American politics. Governments of very different political traditions have generally accepted gambling as a legitimate legal economic activity, even while disagreeing over taxation, concessions and regulatory intensity.

Political freedom and gambling freedom: different phenomena

The global ranking also demonstrates why the Gambling Freedom Index should never be interpreted as a proxy for political freedom, economic freedom in general or institutional quality. Countries that would rarely be grouped together under any conventional political classification frequently obtain similar gambling-freedom scores. Belarus scores 72.7, while Spain scores 73.1. Nicaragua scores 84.6, close to Peru and Portugal. The UAE scores considerably above Finland and Norway in this particular field. These comparisons do not imply equi-



valence between their broader political or economic systems. They demonstrate something more interesting: freedom is domain-specific.

A government may be interventionist or restrictive in many areas while permitting considerable autonomy in gambling. Another may protect extensive civil and economic liberties while maintaining a highly paternalistic gambling regime. The Index therefore adds information that cannot safely be inferred from broader freedom indices.

The same observation applies to wealth. Rich countries appear at both ends of the regulatory spectrum. Canada and Malta rank near the top; wealthy Gulf states including Qatar and Saudi Arabia score zero. Monaco is only medium. Meanwhile Nigeria, Ghana and several lower-income African economies score highly. National income is therefore clearly insufficient as an explanation of gambling freedom.

Post-socialist European experience is rather permissive

Another notable geographical-historical pattern appears across Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe. Estonia ranks second globally. Bulgaria, Serbia and Slovenia all achieve Very High Gambling Freedom. Croatia, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Romania, Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina also rank strongly. Whatever their differences today, many of these countries inherited twentieth-century systems characterised by extensive state control of economic activity. Their contemporary gambling regimes are often substantially more open to private provision and consumer choice.

This contrasts with the much more restrictive approaches that remain visible in some Asian states. The results suggest that the transition towards competitive private markets in much of post-socialist Europe extended strongly into gambling.

Small service economies often treat gambling as an export

A second cluster appears among small states whose economies depend heavily on tourism, international services or cross-border business. Malta, Seychelles, Saint Lucia and the Bahamas all perform strongly; Mauritius and Andorra also rank highly. For these jurisdictions gambling can be more than a domestic leisure activity. It can form part of an internationally oriented service sector. That creates an economic incentive to build licensing regimes rather than prohibitory ones.

Malta is the most complete example. Its first-place position reflects not just tolerance of gambling, but the development of a legal environment in which gambling provision itself is treated as a legitimate internationally tradable service. Yet Monaco again provides the warning against overgeneralisation. A tourism economy can cultivate gambling commercially while denying equivalent freedom to its own citizens. Economic dependence on visitors may encourage gambling provision without necessarily producing gambling freedom.

Federalism and legal pluralism create islands of freedom

The results for the United States, Canada, Argentina, Nigeria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and India highlight another important

phenomenon: internal legal diversity. The Index follows Fundalib's established methodology for comparable recent indices. Where constitutionally meaningful internal jurisdictions regulate gambling differently, the country receives the score of its most permissive lawful internal regime for the relevant indicator. The purpose is deliberate. The Index asks how much legal freedom the country's constitutional order is capable of permitting within its territory, rather than calculating the experience of an average resident. This significantly affects several rankings.

The United States reaches 81.3, entering Very High Gambling Freedom. State diversity is central, but so too is the distinctive role of federally recognised tribal gaming jurisdictions. American law permits legal environments in which gambling provision can be exceptionally broad even though other states remain highly restrictive. Canada reaches 86.0, reflecting highly competitive provincial regimes such as Ontario and Alberta rather than monopoly-based provinces.

Nigeria's fourth-place position similarly reflects the highly permissive regime available in Lagos rather than an assertion that every Nigerian state offers identical gambling freedom.

India provides the opposite lesson. The best-jurisdiction methodology substantially improves its result because states such as Sikkim permit forms of casino and online gaming prohibited elsewhere. Yet India still reaches only 55.2, because even its most permissive regimes contain substantial restrictions.

These cases demonstrate the importance of federalism and legal pluralism as mechanisms through which freedom can exist locally even when nationwide political consensus for liberalisation does not exist.

Direct paternalism is less common than indirect control

Another unexpected global result is that governments generally rely more heavily on market architecture than on direct compulsory limits on gamblers. The Mandatory Limits indicator averages almost 70 points globally, considerably above licensing freedom, advertising freedom or offshore access. This suggests that many governments remain reluctant to tell every adult directly how much they may deposit, lose or wager. Instead, they intervene upstream: deciding which firms may operate, which products may be offered, how they may be advertised and which foreign services may be accessed.

From Fundalib's pro-freedom perspective, the distinction is significant but not necessarily reassuring. A state need not impose a personal spending limit to constrain individual choice if it has already limited the providers, products and contractual terms from which the person may choose. Contemporary gambling paternalism is therefore often institutional rather than explicitly personal.

Taxation is an important but highly uneven constraint

Gambling-specific taxation produces another layer of divergence. Some otherwise liberal gambling markets impose substantial taxes on operators, stakes or winnings. Others deliberately maintain relatively favourable fiscal regimes. This helps explain why countries that look similar in terms of legal product availability can diverge meaningfully in their final scores. It also explains why taxation must be considered separa-



tely from prohibition. An activity can be entirely lawful while being treated by the state as a fiscal exceptionalism: subject to special taxes that would not apply to ordinary economic transactions. The strongest gambling-freedom jurisdictions therefore tend not merely to legalise gambling. They combine broad legality with relatively open competition and moderate gambling-specific fiscal extraction.

The age of adulthood is generally respected

One area produces a comparatively encouraging finding. With a global average of almost 80 points, Gambling Age Relative to the Age of Majority is the least restrictive indicator in the Index. Most countries that permit gambling do not impose a large additional period during which a legally competent adult remains legally incapable of choosing to gamble. There are important exceptions — including jurisdictions where most gambling begins at 21 despite general adulthood beginning earlier — but the dominant international practice is broadly to align gambling access with legal adulthood.

This is notable because it suggests that even governments willing to regulate gambling intensively usually accept, at least formally, that gambling is an adult activity rather than a privilege reserved for an older category of adult.

There is no global model — but there is a global direction

Taken together, the 161 countries reveal no single relationship between gambling freedom and geography, wealth, religion,

political tradition or economic development. Each matters, but none is sufficient. Religious legal traditions explain much of the prohibitionist bloc but not the UAE. Wealth cannot explain Canada and Qatar simultaneously. Northern European social models produce both Denmark and Norway. Casino tourism produces both Malta and Monaco. Federalism produces both highly liberal American jurisdictions and highly restrictive Indian ones.

The most defensible worldwide conclusion is therefore not that one culture or political system produces gambling freedom. It is that the global centre of gravity has moved from prohibition towards regulated permission. Most governments now accept that adults will gamble and that some legal market should exist. The unresolved argument is increasingly about the terms on which that freedom is exercised.

Who may provide the service? How many providers may compete? May the gambler choose a foreign operator? What products may be offered? May firms advertise? How heavily should gambling be taxed? And how far may the state override an adult's own judgement in the name of protecting that adult from risk?

Those questions explain much more of the contemporary international variation than the older binary distinction between legal gambling and prohibition. The Gambling Freedom Index therefore reveals a world in which gambling itself is widely tolerated, while gambling freedom remains much less complete. That may be the most important finding of all. An adult's legal ability to place a bet has become relatively common. The willingness of governments to trust that adult — and the market around them — remains far rarer.



Gambling Freedom Index 2026

How to read this table

This table ranks the 161 countries in the Gambling Freedom Index (GFI) 2026. It shows each country's overall score, its scores in the four equally weighted areas – A. Freedom to Gamble, B. Freedom of Choice and Market Access, C. Regulatory and Commercial Freedom, and D. Financial and Paternalistic Restrictions – and its final classification. Overall scores run from

0 to 100. Area scores are also shown on a 0–100 scale before their 25% contribution to the final result. Countries with identical scores share the same rank, and the next rank is skipped accordingly. Ranks are calculated from unrounded scores, while displayed scores are rounded to just one decimal.

In countries with different internal gambling regimes, the most permissive one is used for the relevant indicator, while federal or national rules remain binding.

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
1	Malta	92.3	100.0	95.0	79.0	95.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
2	Estonia	87.4	95.0	85.2	79.0	90.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
3	Canada	86.0	100.0	90.0	73.0	81.0	Very High Gambling Freedom
4	Nigeria	85.4	100.0	90.0	66.0	85.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
5	Portugal	85.2	100.0	85.0	79.0	76.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
6	Peru	85.0	90.0	85.2	79.0	85.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
7	Nicaragua	84.6	100.0	76.8	71.0	90.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
8	Argentina	83.9	100.0	81.8	63.0	90.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
9	Bulgaria	83.8	90.0	85.2	79.0	81.0	Very High Gambling Freedom
10	Serbia	83.7	90.0	85.2	73.0	86.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
11	United Kingdom	83.6	100.0	90.0	74.0	70.4	Very High Gambling Freedom

AREAS REMINDER (ALL FOUR AREAS ACCOUNT FOR 25% OF THE COUNTRY'S OVERALL SCORE EACH):							
AREA A: FREEDOM TO GAMBLE				AREA B: FREEDOM OF CHOICE AND MARKET ACCESS			
AREA C: REGULATORY AND COMMERCIAL FREEDOM				AREA D: FINANCIAL AND PATERNALISTIC RESTRICTIONS			

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
12	Sweden	83.5	100.0	85.0	74.0	75.0	Very High Gambling Freedom
13	Saint Lucia	82.7	90.0	77.0	73.0	90.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
13	Seychelles	82.7	90.0	77.0	73.0	90.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
15	Denmark	82.3	100.0	85.0	74.0	70.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
16	United States of America	81.3	100.0	90.0	73.0	62.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
17	Switzerland	80.8	100.0	76.8	69.0	77.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
18	Ireland	80.7	90.0	81.8	64.0	87.0	Very High Gambling Freedom
19	Slovenia	80.3	100.0	76.8	66.0	78.4	Very High Gambling Freedom
20	Guinea	80.2	90.0	72.0	73.0	85.6	Very High Gambling Freedom
21	Ghana	80.1	90.0	80.4	69.0	81.0	Very High Gambling Freedom
22	Bosnia and Herzegovina	78.0	100.0	76.8	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
23	Montenegro	77.9	90.0	71.6	68.0	82.0	High Gambling Freedom
24	Cameroon	77.8	90.0	76.8	66.0	78.4	High Gambling Freedom
25	Netherlands, The	76.6	100.0	85.0	62.0	59.4	High Gambling Freedom



#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
26	Brazil	76.5	90.0	85.0	56.0	75.0	High Gambling Freedom
27	Philippines	75.8	90.0	72.0	60.0	81.0	High Gambling Freedom
28	Kenya	75.4	90.0	80.4	69.0	62.4	High Gambling Freedom
29	Croatia	75.0	90.0	76.8	64.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
30	Slovakia	74.9	90.0	71.8	64.0	73.8	High Gambling Freedom
31	Czech Republic	74.3	100.0	80.2	56.0	61.0	High Gambling Freedom
32	Belgium	74.3	85.0	71.8	56.0	84.4	High Gambling Freedom
33	Angola	74.2	80.0	81.8	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
34	Liberia	74.2	75.0	77.0	73.0	71.6	High Gambling Freedom
35	Malawi	74.1	70.0	76.8	64.0	85.6	High Gambling Freedom
36	Honduras	73.9	65.0	70.8	69.0	90.6	High Gambling Freedom
36	Mexico	73.9	90.0	65.8	63.0	76.6	High Gambling Freedom
38	Armenia	73.6	75.0	71.8	60.0	87.8	High Gambling Freedom
39	Romania	73.3	90.0	85.0	62.0	56.4	High Gambling Freedom
40	Bahamas	73.2	80.0	61.0	66.0	86.0	High Gambling Freedom
41	Zimbabwe	73.1	90.0	76.8	66.0	59.8	High Gambling Freedom
42	Spain	73.1	90.0	85.0	72.0	45.4	High Gambling Freedom

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
43	Panama	73.0	90.0	60.8	63.0	78.4	High Gambling Freedom
44	Belarus	72.7	75.0	66.8	66.0	83.0	High Gambling Freedom
45	Paraguay	72.5	90.0	61.0	52.0	87.0	High Gambling Freedom
46	Australia	72.2	80.0	71.8	56.0	81.0	High Gambling Freedom
47	South Africa	72.0	70.0	60.8	67.0	90.4	High Gambling Freedom
48	Georgia	72.0	70.0	72.0	63.0	83.0	High Gambling Freedom
49	Rwanda	72.0	90.0	76.8	66.0	55.0	High Gambling Freedom
50	Mozambique	71.7	70.0	81.8	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
50	Ukraine	71.7	75.0	76.8	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
52	Ecuador	71.6	70.0	76.8	66.0	73.8	High Gambling Freedom
53	Solomon Islands	71.4	60.0	66.0	69.0	90.6	High Gambling Freedom
54	Costa Rica	71.3	70.0	56.8	63.0	95.4	High Gambling Freedom
55	Uzbekistan	71.2	70.0	66.4	64.0	84.4	High Gambling Freedom
56	Mauritius	71.1	60.0	66.8	66.0	91.8	High Gambling Freedom
57	Trinidad and Tobago	71.0	80.0	66.4	58.0	79.6	High Gambling Freedom
58	New Zealand	70.8	85.0	65.8	42.0	90.4	High Gambling Freedom
59	Latvia	70.5	90.0	80.2	52.0	59.6	High Gambling Freedom



#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
59	Sri Lanka	70.5	70.0	76.8	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
61	Dominican Republic	70.3	90.0	56.0	66.0	69.0	High Gambling Freedom
62	Colombia	70.2	90.0	85.0	68.0	37.6	High Gambling Freedom
63	Guyana	70.1	70.0	56.8	63.0	90.6	High Gambling Freedom
64	Italy	69.6	90.0	76.6	46.0	65.6	High Gambling Freedom
65	Andorra	69.5	90.0	60.8	50.0	77.4	High Gambling Freedom
66	Central African Republic	69.1	70.0	54.8	63.0	88.6	High Gambling Freedom
66	Guinea-Bissau	69.1	70.0	54.8	63.0	88.6	High Gambling Freedom
68	Equatorial Guinea	69.1	90.0	50.6	50.0	85.6	High Gambling Freedom
69	Papua New Guinea	68.9	80.0	56.0	54.0	85.6	High Gambling Freedom
70	El Salvador	68.8	70.0	65.6	66.0	73.8	High Gambling Freedom
71	Uganda	68.7	70.0	80.4	60.0	64.4	High Gambling Freedom
72	Haiti	68.7	80.0	66.4	58.0	70.4	High Gambling Freedom
73	United Arab Emirates	68.3	80.0	41.2	57.0	95.0	High Gambling Freedom
74	Jamaica	68.2	60.0	61.0	66.0	86.0	High Gambling Freedom
75	Gambia, The	68.1	70.0	70.8	69.0	62.6	High Gambling Freedom
76	Suriname	67.8	80.0	61.0	54.0	76.4	High Gambling Freedom

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
77	Kyrgyzstan	67.6	65.0	65.6	52.0	87.8	High Gambling Freedom
78	Hungary	67.6	80.0	55.2	52.0	83.0	High Gambling Freedom
79	Lithuania	66.7	75.0	80.2	52.0	59.6	High Gambling Freedom
80	Madagascar	66.7	70.0	61.0	50.0	85.6	High Gambling Freedom
81	Greece	66.6	80.0	85.0	56.0	45.4	High Gambling Freedom
82	Germany	66.6	85.0	76.6	56.0	48.6	High Gambling Freedom
83	Venezuela	65.6	70.0	54.8	63.0	74.6	High Gambling Freedom
84	Bolivia	64.3	80.0	61.6	58.0	57.6	High Gambling Freedom
85	Eswatini	64.1	70.0	56.0	46.0	84.4	High Gambling Freedom
86	Cyprus	63.9	70.0	55.2	52.0	78.4	High Gambling Freedom
87	Russia	63.9	70.0	55.0	52.0	78.4	High Gambling Freedom
88	Chile	62.0	70.0	50.8	65.0	62.4	High Gambling Freedom
89	Botswana	61.5	35.0	66.8	66.0	78.4	High Gambling Freedom
90	France	60.6	80.0	50.2	42.0	70.4	High Gambling Freedom
91	Albania	59.8	75.0	50.4	40.0	73.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
92	Djibouti	59.8	50.0	61.0	47.0	81.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
93	Kazakhstan	59.2	55.0	56.0	52.0	73.8	Medium Gambling Freedom



#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
94	St Vincent and the Grenad.	57.6	60.0	36.0	53.0	81.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
95	Dominica	57.4	50.0	36.0	53.0	90.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
96	Luxembourg	57.0	70.0	42.2	31.0	84.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
97	India	55.2	70.0	51.0	42.0	57.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
98	Singapore	54.5	70.0	45.4	27.0	75.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
99	Moldova	53.5	80.0	32.2	31.0	70.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
100	Azerbaijan	52.1	55.0	35.6	37.0	81.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
101	Cambodia	52.1	40.0	50.0	39.0	79.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
102	North Macedonia	50.8	70.0	40.6	31.0	61.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
103	Uruguay	50.7	70.0	32.2	27.0	73.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
104	Monaco	50.5	60.0	28.2	23.0	90.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
105	Iceland	49.0	70.0	18.2	23.0	84.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
105	Mali	49.0	70.0	18.2	23.0	84.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
107	Austria	48.1	70.0	32.2	24.0	66.2	Medium Gambling Freedom
108	Ivory Coast	47.8	70.0	18.2	23.0	80.2	Medium Gambling Freedom
109	Taiwan	47.5	60.0	41.2	32.0	57.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
110	Poland	47.1	80.0	40.6	27.0	40.8	Medium Gambling Freedom

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
111	Egypt	46.8	40.0	42.0	35.0	70.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
112	Finland	46.5	80.0	18.2	24.0	64.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
113	Algeria	46.5	60.0	18.2	23.0	84.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
113	San Marino	46.5	60.0	18.2	23.0	84.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
115	Morocco	45.7	70.0	23.8	23.0	66.2	Medium Gambling Freedom
116	Vietnam	45.0	50.0	39.2	35.0	55.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
117	Japan	44.9	40.0	42.0	37.0	60.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
118	Norway	44.8	70.0	18.2	19.0	72.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
119	Tunisia	44.4	60.0	23.8	23.0	70.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
120	Lebanon	44.3	70.0	18.2	23.0	66.2	Medium Gambling Freedom
121	Israel	42.4	70.0	23.8	19.0	56.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
122	Myanmar	42.0	40.0	29.2	20.0	79.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
123	Tajikistan	42.0	40.0	26.4	27.0	74.6	Medium Gambling Freedom
124	Senegal	42.0	70.0	18.2	23.0	56.8	Medium Gambling Freedom
125	Nepal	41.4	40.0	39.2	35.0	51.4	Medium Gambling Freedom
126	Guatemala	41.0	30.0	28.2	13.0	93.0	Medium Gambling Freedom
127	Malaysia	38.6	25.0	32.0	37.0	60.4	Low Gambling Freedom



#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
128	Tuvalu	38.5	40.0	5.0	9.0	100.0	Low Gambling Freedom
129	Jordan	38.0	40.0	13.2	13.0	86.0	Low Gambling Freedom
130	South Korea	37.9	50.0	24.4	23.0	54.4	Low Gambling Freedom
131	North Korea	35.8	50.0	23.2	8.0	62.0	Low Gambling Freedom
132	Thailand	34.8	40.0	13.2	13.0	73.0	Low Gambling Freedom
133	Turkey	33.0	50.0	13.2	8.0	61.0	Low Gambling Freedom
134	Syria	31.1	30.0	13.2	8.0	73.0	Low Gambling Freedom
135	China	30.8	40.0	13.2	8.0	62.0	Low Gambling Freedom
136	Laos	29.3	30.0	13.2	8.0	66.0	Low Gambling Freedom
137	Ethiopia	28.1	30.0	13.2	19.0	50.0	Low Gambling Freedom
138	Mongolia	24.1	30.0	13.2	8.0	45.0	Low Gambling Freedom
139	Oman	21.5	30.0	0.0	0.0	56.0	Low Gambling Freedom
139	Pakistan	21.5	30.0	0.0	0.0	56.0	Low Gambling Freedom
141	Bangladesh	14.5	30.0	0.0	0.0	28.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Afghanistan	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Bahrain	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Brunei	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom

#	COUNTRY	SCORE	AREA A	AREA B	AREA C	AREA D	CLASSIFICATION
142	Comoros	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Cuba	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Eritrea	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Indonesia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Iran	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Iraq	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Kuwait	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Libya	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Maldives	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Mauritania	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Qatar	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Saudi Arabia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Somalia	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Sudan	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Tonga	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Turkmenistan	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom
142	Yemen	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	Very Low Gambling Freedom



Purpose of the Index

The Gambling Freedom Index measures the extent to which adults are legally free to participate in gambling, choose among providers, access domestic and foreign gambling markets, and use their own money without disproportionate regulatory or paternalistic restrictions. The Index does not seek to measure the popularity of gambling, the size of a country's gambling industry, the quality of its regulatory institutions, the prevalence of gambling-related harm, or the effectiveness of enforcement. Its purpose is narrower: to assess legal freedom.

A country may therefore receive a high score even if gambling is not especially widespread, provided that the law leaves adults and providers relatively free. Conversely, a country may possess a large or internationally famous gambling industry while receiving only a moderate score if access is monopolised, heavily restricted or denied to its own citizens.

The study covers 161 countries, using the same country universe applied in Fundalib's recent international freedom indices. The legal cut-off date is 24 September 2026. Only rules actually in force on that date are scored. Reforms already enacted but scheduled to enter into force later are noted where relevant but excluded from the calculation.

The Index is explicitly designed as a legal and institutional comparison. It asks what adults may lawfully do, not what they in practice succeed in doing despite legal restrictions. Accordingly, the existence of unlicensed offshore gambling, illegal betting markets or widely tolerated informal gambling does not by itself increase a country's score.

Structure and weighting

The Index is composed of four equally weighted areas, each representing 25% of the final score: A. Freedom to Gamble; B. Freedom of Choice and Market Access; C. Regulatory and Commercial Freedom; and D. Financial and Paternalistic Restrictions. These four areas contain twelve indicators. The weighting is intentionally not equal across individual indicators. Greater weight is given to dimensions that most directly determine whether gambling activity and gambling markets are genuinely free. The final score ranges from 0 to 100, where 100 represents the highest degree of gambling freedom. Countries are classified through absolute bands: 80.0–100 Very High Gambling Freedom; 60.0–79.9 High Gambling Freedom; 40.0–59.9 Medium Gambling Freedom; 20.0–39.9 Low Gambling Freedom; and 0–19.9 Very Low Gambling Freedom. Countries with identical scores share the same rank, the next rank is skipped accordingly.

Sources and evidentiary standard

The study gives priority to primary legal and regulatory sources: national legislation, regulations, official gazettes, gambling regulators, licence registers, ministries of finance, tax administrations, central banks, official government portals and, where gambling is regulated subnationally, the relevant state, provincial, territorial or entity-level authorities.

Primary material is supplemented where necessary by specialist comparative legal sources, including publications and country guides from organisations and firms such as ICLG, Cham-

bers, Legal 500, CMS, EGBA and other specialist gambling-law resources. Commercial or comparative databases are used as secondary tools for locating relevant rules or identifying issues requiring further verification, not as a substitute for authoritative legal sources.

The research process included systematic cross-checking of apparent total prohibitions, very high-scoring jurisdictions, countries with recent reforms, federal and decentralised states, monopolies and exclusive concessions, online legality, offshore blocking, payment restrictions and gambling-specific taxation. Where a purported regulator, licence or statute could not be corroborated in official legal or government material, it was not accepted as authoritative.

Treatment of decentralised countries

In some countries gambling law differs substantially between states, provinces, entities, autonomous territories or other constitutionally recognised internal jurisdictions. In these cases, the Index follows the same methodological principle used in Fundalib's recent comparative indices: the most permissive lawful internal jurisdiction is used for the relevant indicator.

The purpose is to measure the greatest degree of legal freedom that the country's constitutional and legal order actually permits somewhere within its territory. This rule is applied indicator by indicator.

In the United States, relevant federally recognised tribal gaming jurisdictions are also considered where they possess recognised regulatory authority over gambling.

The approach does not, however, allow a subnational jurisdiction to override rules that apply uniformly at national or federal level. A federal prohibition, national tax or generally applicable payment restriction remains relevant even if one state or province otherwise maintains a highly liberal gambling regime.

Area A – Freedom to Gamble (25%)

A1. Legality of land-based gambling – 10%. This indicator measures the legal availability of major forms of physical gambling, including casinos, betting, gaming halls, lotteries and, where legally relevant, private or social gambling. It evaluates legality rather than physical availability. Scores reflect the breadth of lawful gambling categories. Principal sources include gambling statutes, criminal codes, regulator licence categories and official lists of authorised products.

A2. Legality of online gambling – 10%. A2 assesses whether adults may legally participate in major online gambling verticals, principally online casino, sports betting and poker or comparable interactive games. A maximum score requires broad legal access across the principal forms. One lawful sportsbook, state lottery or single remote-betting product is not treated as equivalent to broad online-gambling legality. Principal sources include gambling regulators, interactive-gaming legislation, official licence registers and blocking or enforcement notices.

A3. Gambling age relative to the age of majority – 5%. This indicator measures whether gambling-specific age restrictions con-



tinue beyond the general legal age of adulthood. The gambling age is compared with the country's own civil age of majority. The standard interval is: same age as majority or lower = 100; one additional year = 75; two additional years = 50; three additional years = 25; four or more additional years = 0. Where product ages differ, identifiable product-level sub-scores are averaged. Principal sources include civil codes, age-of-majority legislation, gambling statutes and regulator guidance.

Area B – Freedom of Choice and Market Access (25%)

B1. Private provision and market competition – 14%. The most heavily weighted individual indicator measures whether gambling services may be provided competitively by private firms or are reserved to the state, a monopoly, a small number of concession holders or another highly restricted structure. Broad anchors are: 100 for open multi-licensing; about 85 for competitive licensing with limited reservations; about 65 for capped or concession systems; about 40–55 for mixed or heavily closed markets; about 15–25 for monopoly or monopoly-dominant systems; and 0 where private provision is prohibited. State monopoly and exclusive private concession are explicitly distinguished. Principal sources include licence registers, concession laws, monopoly statutes and regulator descriptions of market structure.

B2. Choice of domestic operators – 6%. B2 measures the legal breadth of consumer choice within the domestic market. Typical anchors are 100 for 20 or more meaningful lawful providers, 80 for 10–19, 60 for 5–9, 40 for 2–4, 20 for a single provider and

0 for none. Raw counts are not used mechanically when formal caps, regional monopolies or concession structures are more informative. Principal sources include current licence registers, operator lists and statutory caps.

B3. Cross-border and offshore access – 5%. This indicator measures whether adults may legally access foreign or offshore gambling providers. The approximate logic is 100 for lawful or tolerated access without active blocking; 75 for mild restrictions; 50 for local channelisation or limited blocking; 25 for active ISP or payment blocking; and 0 for direct player prohibition or aggressive enforcement. Payment blocking aimed specifically at unlicensed offshore operators primarily affects B3; D2 is reduced only where lawful domestic gambling payment methods themselves are restricted. Principal sources include regulator blacklists, blocking orders, payment legislation, court decisions and enforcement notices.

Area C – Regulatory and Commercial Freedom (25%)

C1. Licensing burden – 10%. C1 examines how difficult it is for a lawful private operator to enter the market. It considers licensing fees, capital requirements, numerical caps, tenders, concession structures, administrative burden and whether a private licence is realistically available. Typical ranges are 80–100 for relatively open and proportionate licensing; about 65 for moderate burden; about 50 for significant financial or administrative barriers; about 30 for capped, tendered or concession-based entry; about 10 for a monopoly-only route; and 0 where no private licence is possi-

ble. B1, B2 and C1 are kept conceptually separate to avoid double-counting the same exclusivity fact.

C2. Advertising and sponsorship freedom – 5%. C2 measures the extent to which lawful gambling firms may advertise and sponsor activities. The broad scale runs from 100 where advertising is broadly permitted, through approximately 75 for moderate restrictions, 50 for heavy restrictions and 25 for near-total prohibition or monopoly-only advertising, to 0 for a total or practically complete ban. Sources include advertising codes, gambling legislation, regulator guidance, broadcasting rules and enforcement decisions.

C3. Restrictions on gambling products and promotions – 10%. This indicator measures direct regulation of the gambling offer itself, including restrictions on bonuses, free bets, cashback, loyalty schemes, game speed, autoplay, maximum stakes, bet types and other product design rules. C3 regulates the product and provider; D1 regulates the behaviour of the individual gambler. Principal sources include technical regulations, responsible-gambling rules, product standards and regulator instructions.

Area D – Financial and Paternalistic Restrictions (25%)

D1. Mandatory limits on adult gamblers – 6%. D1 covers compulsory deposit, loss, stake and time limits, compulsory breaks and other state-imposed behavioural caps. Voluntary self-exclusion or player-selected limits do not by themselves reduce the score. The Index distinguishes tools made available to

adults from limits imposed regardless of their preference. Principal sources include player-protection legislation and regulator account-control requirements.

D2. Payment freedom – 5%. This indicator measures the freedom to use ordinary lawful payment methods for gambling, including credit cards, bank transfers, e-wallets, cash and other instruments. As noted above, payment blocking aimed only at illegal offshore operators is primarily reflected in B3 unless lawful domestic gambling transactions are also restricted. Principal sources include central banks, payment regulators, gambling authorities and financial legislation.

D3. Gambling-specific taxation – 14%. D3 is the second-heaviest individual indicator. It measures exceptional fiscal burdens imposed specifically on gambling. Three distinct tax bases are considered where applicable: taxes on participation, stakes or ticket purchases; taxes on winnings or prizes; and gambling-specific taxes on providers. Provider taxes are further distinguished between gross gaming revenue and turnover where necessary because these bases are not directly comparable.

Raw tax rates are first classified by tax base and only then converted into scoring intervals. Broadly, verified absence of a gambling-specific tax scores 100; low positive rates 75; moderate rates 50; high rates 25; and very high rates 0. Where a component is genuinely not applicable it is excluded from the component average. Failure to locate a published tax rate is not treated automatically as zero tax. Principal sources include mi-



nistries of finance, tax administrations, gambling regulators, tax legislation and specialist tax guides used for cross-checking.

Scoring intermediate cases

The Index uses clear anchor scores but avoids pretending that every legal system fits perfectly into a small number of boxes. Intermediate values may arise where a country contains multiple products, legal channels or internal jurisdictions subject to different rules. Such values are used where they represent a transparent combination of identifiable sub-scores rather than an improvised judgement.

Audit and quality controls

A comparative legal index of 161 countries inevitably encounters inconsistent terminology, recent reforms, incomplete official information and overlapping regulatory structures. The final dataset therefore underwent several rounds of targeted audit.

Quality controls included verifying whether laws were actually in force at the cut-off date; rechecking every zero-score country for overlooked legal exceptions; rechecking unusually high scores; distinguishing online sports betting from broad online gambling; separating state monopolies from exclusive private concessions; avoiding double-counting between mar-

ket structure, provider choice and licensing burden; separating offshore payment blocking from general payment restrictions; verifying raw tax rates before D3 conversion; reviewing decentralised countries separately; and rejecting purported regulatory frameworks that could not be confirmed in official legal sources.

This process resulted in material corrections in both directions. Some jurisdictions initially appeared more restrictive than they actually were; others appeared more liberal because a narrow exception, future reform or single gambling vertical had been incorrectly extrapolated to the entire market.

What the Index ultimately measures

The Gambling Freedom Index should therefore be read as a measure of the legal space available for voluntary gambling activity. A high score does not mean that gambling is harmless, universally popular or economically indispensable. It means that the legal system places relatively few restrictions on an adult's ability to gamble, choose providers, access markets, use lawful payment methods and interact with private gambling businesses.

A low score indicates that the state exercises substantially greater control over one or more of those choices. The underlying normative question is simple: how far does the law trust adults to make their own decisions about gambling, and how far does it reserve those decisions to the state?

The full GFI 2026 document is available in PDF format at: www.fundalib.org/estudios

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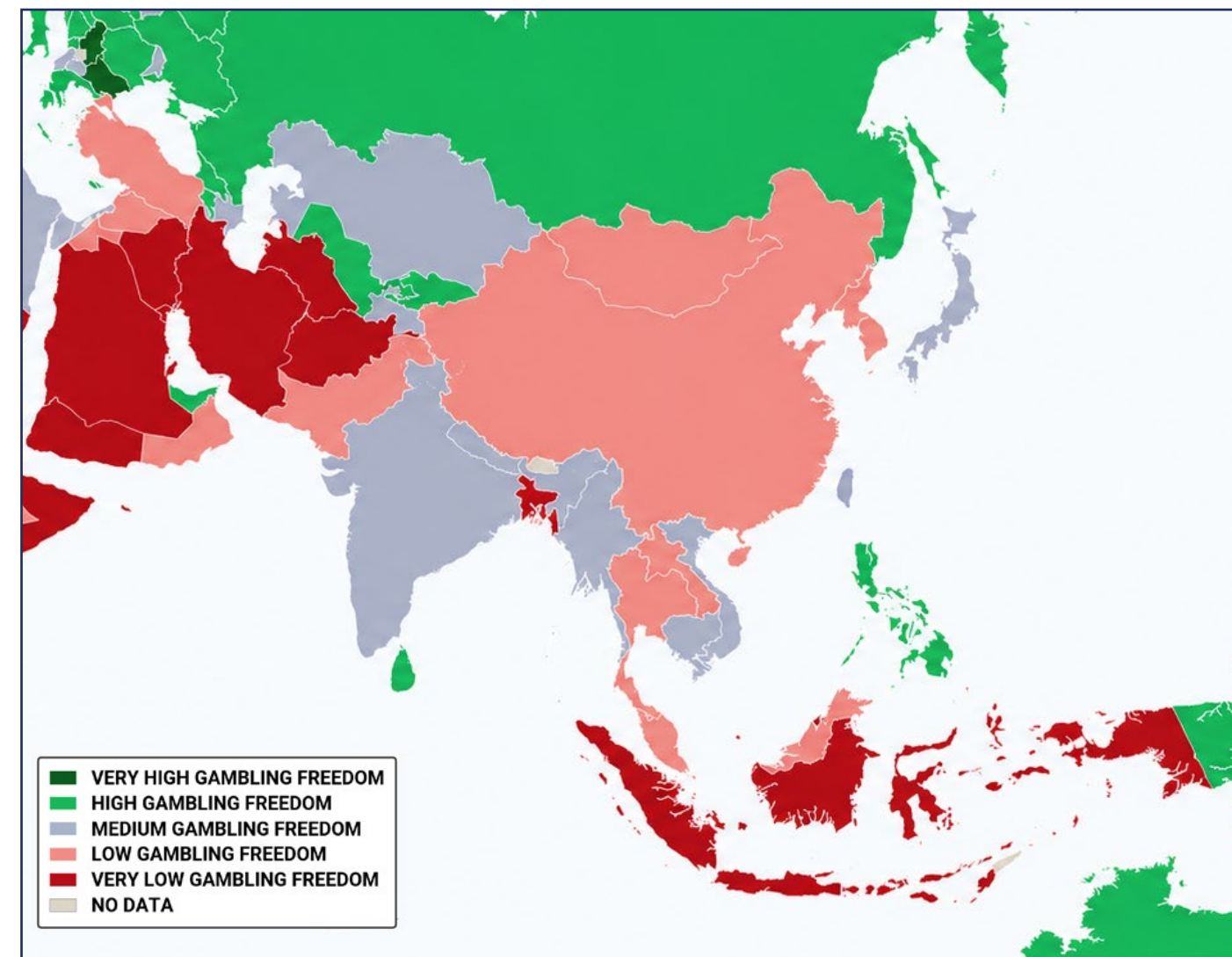
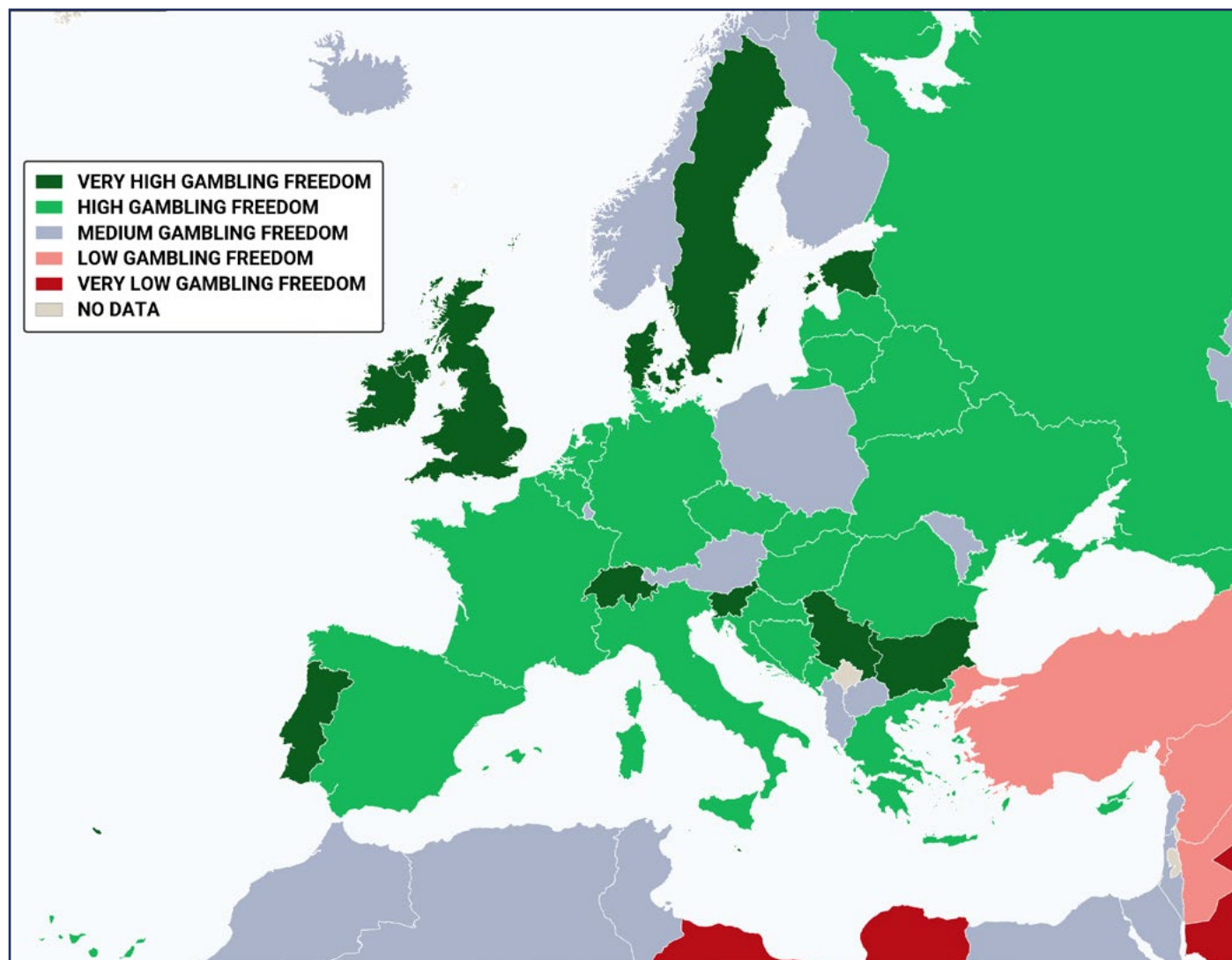
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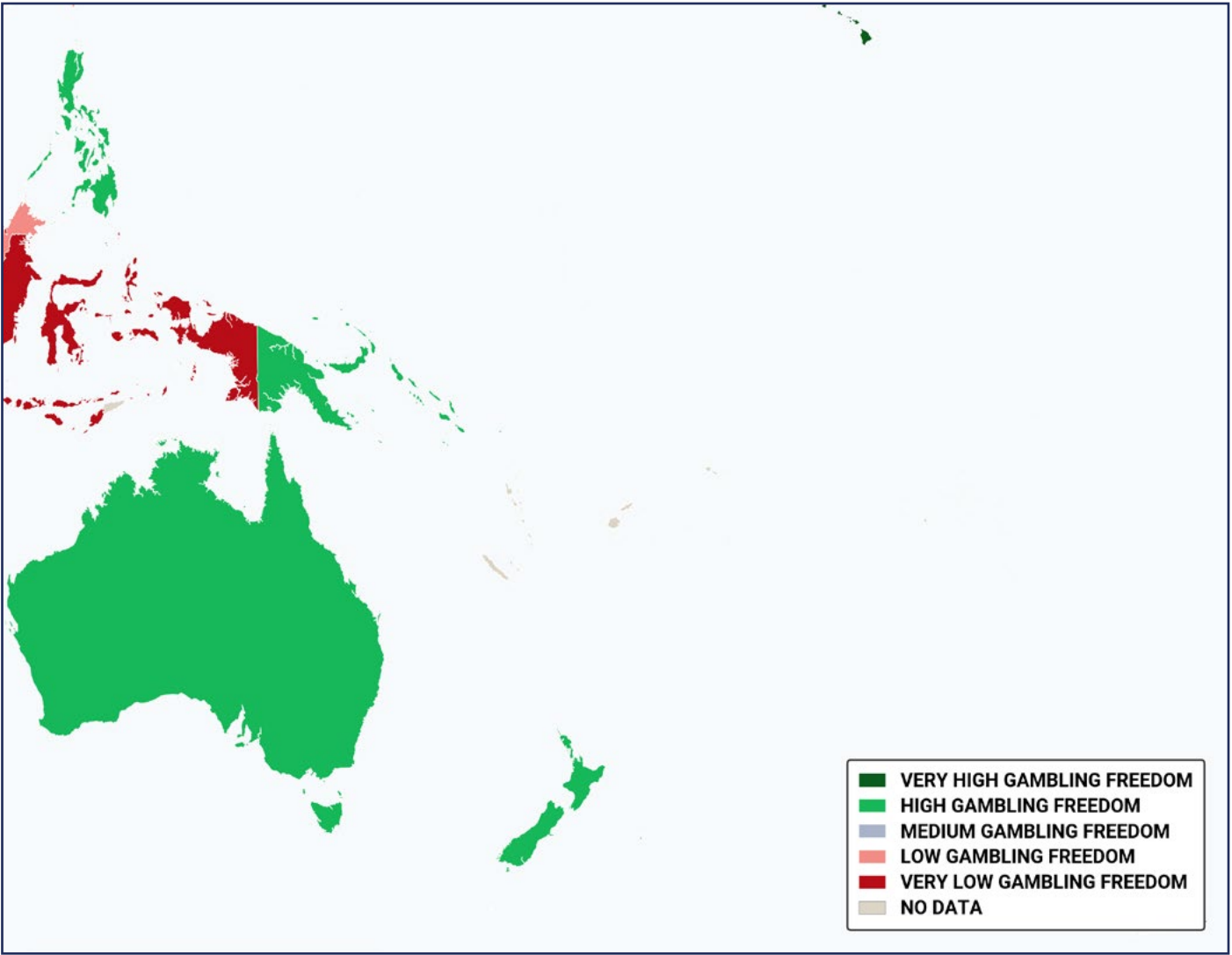
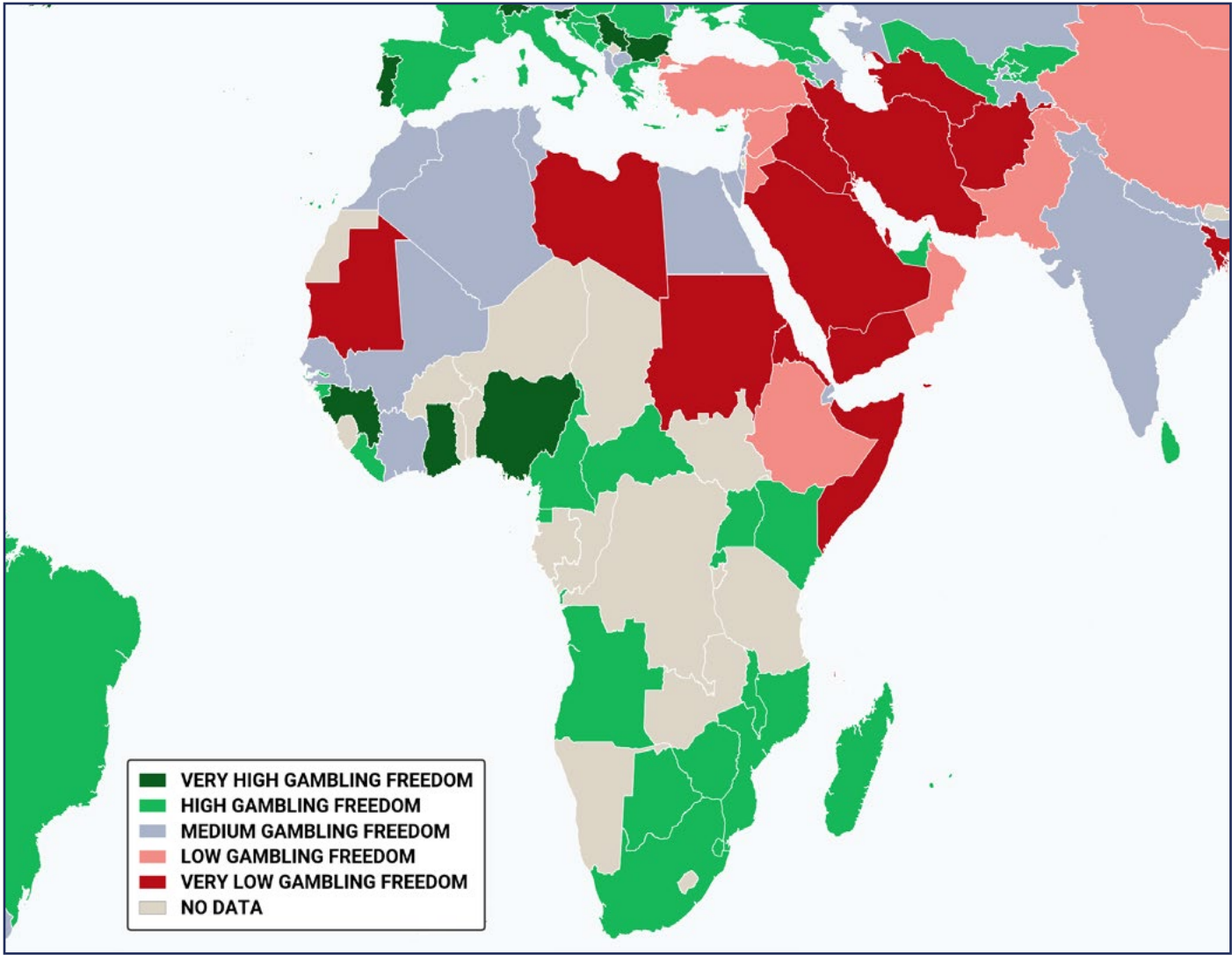
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WIMF 2026**

Gloria Álvarez, Juan Pina & Victor Vasilescu



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2026**

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About the authors and the Foundation



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Fundalib

Since 2015, the Foundation for the Advancement of Liberty, or Fundalib, is one of the key private think tanks and activism entities furthering the cause of freedom. It is based in Madrid, Spain. Fundalib works both to boost personal (including moral) and economic freedom in society, as well as its liberal-democratic governance.

To pursue these aims, Fundalib organizes events, conferences and campaigns, runs its own publishing imprint which has already published over 40 books, produces an extensive monthly opinion magazine on freedom (both on paper and online), films audiovisual material including two awarded documentaries, and conducts its own research. The intellectual production emerging from Fundalib's research often comes in the form of indices that compare specific aspects of freedom, whether internationally or within Spain.

The Foundation is keen on acting upon the ideas its research teams produce, and thus engages in permanent advocacy and lobbying efforts to further economic and personal freedom. Thus Fundalib does not limit itself to being a think tank and holds the "think & act" expression dear. Among other ways to promote its ideas in society, Fundalib is the national organiser for the International Economics Olympics. The Foundation conducts permanent activities to advocate for more individual freedom and less state coercion, and to inform politicians, entrepreneurs, media personalities and other stakeholders about its research findings and its policy reform positions. Over the years, Fundalib has received over ten international awards for its academic and advocacy projects on various fronts.

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The Index distinguishes legalisation from genuine freedom. A country may permit gambling while maintaining monopolies, blocking foreign operators, restricting products, imposing compulsory limits or applying exceptional taxation. Conversely, decentralised countries may contain internal jurisdictions where the law permits far greater freedom than the national average suggests.

The result is a global picture of an activity that is increasingly legal, economically significant and technologically sophisticated — but still subject to very different degrees of state control.



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