

Prohibitions and Policy in the Global Gaming Industry: A Genealogy and Media Content Analysis of Gaming Restrictions in Contemporary Russia

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Abstract

In an era of widespread gaming expansion, Russia's recent decision to contract its gaming industry stands out as a global anomaly. This article explores factors informing the 2009 restriction of gambling venues in Russia to four remote zones. After a brief discussion of gambling prohibition history across cultures, a genealogical analysis of the origins and development of gaming laws in Russia follows. The authors then use a qualitative content analysis technique to examine the rationales for this contraction that were expressed in Russian news outlets between 2003 and 2010 – the period when the new restrictions were debated, voted on, and enacted. This analysis revealed four major rationales cited by the media: 1) alleged ties between gambling and organized crime, 2) social cost themes associated with addiction and related problems with youth in Russia, 3) gambling's enforcement of class boundaries, and 4) the protection of a Russian national identity. The results help us better understand anti-gambling arguments generally, and the unique dynamics of Russia's crackdown in particular.

Keywords: Russia, gaming policy, gaming industry, community relations, ethnographic content analyses, anti-gambling movements

Introduction

Although gambling is not as widespread a phenomenon as researchers once believed, it is fair to say that during the last twenty years we have witnessed a tremendous quantitative and qualitative expansion of the global gaming industry (Binde, 2005; Eadington, 2009; Bernhard, et al., 2009). Over the years, gambling formats have evolved dramatically, from the talus bones of hoofed animals discovered at the oldest human settlements, to the highly complex cathedrals of consumption that house modern casinos in Las Vegas, Macau, and Singapore (Schwartz, 2006; Ritzer, 2009). Some scholars argue that the success of the gaming industry is explained by the constitutive and perhaps atemporal significance of play in many human cultures, while other contemporary theorists focus on these types of ludic (or “playful”) activities as a major theme during our current transition period away from the previous “serious” chapter of modernity (Huizinga, 1938; Baudrillard, 1988). Theoretical differences aside, the triumphant growth of gambling and a globalizing gaming industry is undeniable.

At the same time, the normalization of gambling associated with mass participation has not magically erased all of the old anti-gambling anxieties, nor has it prevented

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new discourses from challenging the view of gaming as an acceptable form of popular entertainment (Bernhard, 2007; Conrad & Schneider, 1992). Of particular interest in this context is the recent Russian ban on all gambling establishments outside of specifically designated zones, because clearly this represents a deviant international case. That is, the 2009 exile of gambling to remote areas stands in sharp contrast to the prevalent US and international trends toward mainstreaming, legalization, and normalization of various games of chance. For example, between 1931 and 1977 Las Vegas was the only place in the continental U.S. which allowed legal casinos, while today all but two states allow some form of gambling – and this expansion extends at a similar pace worldwide (Eadington, 2009; Sallaz, 2006; Smith & Campbell, 2007).

Furthermore, the recent restrictions of gambling in Russia contradict the prevalent logic of gaming legalization – logic which was reflected in the more or less typical gaming industry expansion and regulation favored by Russian governments prior to 2006. Due to a lack of scholarly accounts on the history of gambling in Russia as well as this sudden policy reversal, this article focuses on establishing Russia's unique gambling history leading up to this ban, and then in developing a methodology for understanding the ban's rationales, as expressed in the country's major news outlets.

Methods

Methodologically, this paper relies upon historically-informed unobtrusive research to explore Russia's unique gambling landscape. First, we provide a historical account of the genealogy of current gambling restrictions in Russia. This portion of the paper relies upon conventional syntheses of historical documents, focusing first upon the broad topic of gambling legalizations and prohibitions, and then narrowing our focus to provide what we believe is the first academic history of gambling in the new Russia.

Second, we analyze anti-gambling rhetoric via a content analysis method first proposed by historical sociologist Max Weber (Krippendorff, 1980). Specifically, we employ an ethnographic content analysis to explore the representations of gambling in Russian online newspapers between 2003 and 2010, focusing on themes, orientations, vocabulary, and other linguistic strategies that were used to justify the 2009 crackdown on the gaming industry (Altheide, 1987). Because gaming industries rely upon public and governmental permission to operate, analyses of media portrayals help researchers understand the unique relationships that each gaming jurisdiction has with its own community (Eadington, 2009; Bernhard, et al., 2009). All media accounts were translated by the first author of this article, who is bilingual in English and Russian, and reviewed by a separate reviewer also fluent in English and Russian.

Methodologically, ethnographic content analysis (ECA) is a qualitative technique that seeks to uncover themes rather than count occurrences. ECA recasts texts as a social scene, and are conducted in much the same way that an ethnographer conducts field work in "real" human spaces: by analyzing "texts as field" in search of both major thematic developments as well as the prevalent social processes reflected in these texts (Altheide, 1996; Altheide, 1987). With the explosive growth in availability of online news accounts, conventional "sampling frames" become increasingly complex (and even untenable) in content analyses. In our instance, the search engine google.ru returned roughly 56,000 results to the query "igorni biznes i azartnie igri" (gaming business and gambling), so we opted for a non-probability two-stage purposive sampling technique. During the first stage, we used the online news service Gazeta.ru because it is the leading on-line news resource that caters to businesses in Russia. Its significance has been recognized by a "Best 2010 Business Mass Media Award" given by the Russian Union of Industrialists

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and Entrepreneurs. We first sought every single article in Gazeta.ru between 2003 and 2010 using the more restrictive search term “*igorni biznes*” (gambling business) and discovered 50 articles.

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Of course, using solely one on-line business-oriented source might lead to a systematic bias, so in the second stage we searched on-line newspapers which also had an off-line (traditional) circulation. These sources included “Rossiiskaya Gazeta,” “Nezavisimaya Gazeta,” “Komsomolskaya Pravda,” “Trud,” and other major newspaper sources – some of which targeted a business audience, but most of which focused upon a mass readership. After reviewing 378 gambling-related articles from this second group of sources, we determined that they did not appear to have any recurrent bias – quite the contrary; they

revealed a strikingly broad range of citations and opinions. We narrowed this sample down to the 154 articles which focused solely upon the gambling business, using the same terms we employed in the first search (“*igorni biznes*,” i.e. gambling business).¹

Hence, our final sample contains exactly 204 articles: 50 from the on-line business-oriented newspaper Gazeta.ru, and 154 articles from on-line newspapers with an off-line circulation. Out of these 204 articles, 89 came from business-oriented sources and 115 came from mass audience sources. We do not claim that our sampling strategy and choice of sources result in absolutely objective snapshot of all Russian media, but we believe that our attempt to focus on these two broad sub-types of mass media introduces enough diversity to disrupt the systematic bias that is potentially present in any particular media niche. The use of this type of sampling technique in conjunction with content analysis is not uncommon (see, e.g., Besel et al., 2009; Gormly, 2004; Stock, 2007) and the size of this sample should allow for both empirical saturation and validity.

After we identified the articles that serve as units of analysis for this study, we printed them out and started coding them, looking for themes that attempted to explain the recent restrictions of gambling in Russia. It quickly became apparent that no empirical justification for the new Russian gaming policy existed, as we found no reference to economic impact studies and even the experts agreed that no systematic analyses were available (Agarkov, 2008; Griffiths, 2009). Since no objective justification of the policy reversal existed, we adopted a more flexible search for emerging themes, common ideas, patterns and experiences, and prevalent sentiments as well as exceptions to popularly held beliefs, as recommended in the methodological literature (Blumer, 1969; Altheide, 1987). We then began developing inductively defined key words that were written on the margins of these articles, and started organizing this data by identifying major recurring ideas and patterns, assigning codes to these ideas and patterns, and grouping the selected portions of text in computer files (Lofland & Potter, 2003).

As the number of codes grew, we sought to organize within categories. This research stage is called “selective coding” and implies a reassessment of codes, an elimination of non-productive codes, and the development of more effective codes that are relevant to larger chunks of data (Lofland & Potter, 2003). During this stage, we wrote interpretive memos and proceeded towards analysis of the interplay between the codes in terms of logical relations such as cause and effect, inclusion, function, and sequence (Lofland & Potter, 2003). For example, we found that several media accounts included the theme of “gambling as corruptor of youth,” focusing on how gambling could become addictive for young people in Russia, and at the very least distracted them from productive pursuits such as education or formation of families. This theme became more understandable given the current demographic crises involving the depopulation of Russia, and especially the shrinking size of Russia’s younger populations (Brainerd, 2010; Pridemore, 2006).

¹ For a more detailed discussion of these newspaper sources, please see Appendix A.

It is our hope that the combination of these two methodological approaches (genealogy and content analysis) contributes to an enhanced intelligibility of anti-gambling discourses and practices generally, and in this unique location particularly (Bernhard, et al., 2010). In the next sections, we will first provide a general historical account of gambling prohibitions and restrictions, and then shift our genealogical focus to the recent case in Russia. We then introduce the ethnographic content analysis to illuminate possible justifications, rationales, and explanations behind this strict ban on all gambling outside of the four remote zones. In our concluding section, we synthesize the historical accounts and the media accounts to provide new insights on gambling prohibitions in general, and this recent restriction in Russia in particular.

Gambling Prohibitions and Restrictions: A Brief General History

Prohibiting or restricting gambling formats is neither a novel nor a culturally-specific phenomenon, and in any case many societies have passed laws to prohibit gambling only to amend or reverse them later. The first known anti-gambling law, *Lex Alearia*, was passed in Rome around 204 BC to ban a game analogous to contemporary dice. Later Roman laws focused more specifically on forbidding dice games except during Saturnalia or feast times (though wagering on horse or human athletic competitions remained legal) (Toner, 1995, p. 98). Revealingly, those directly involved in the gambling act were less protected by these laws; for example, assaults on gamblers and theft from gambling premises were not punishable under Roman law (Toner, 1995; Kovtun & Zharkovskaya, 2008). These prohibitions revealed much about the social status of gamblers and gambling operators, who were deemed less deserving of legal (and presumably social) sympathy.

China followed an early punitive path that sounds startlingly familiar to those who study the China/Macao gaming industry nexus today, and one that was no less sympathetic to those who gambled. As early as the second century BC, Chinese cultures disciplined imperial officials who overindulged in gambling, reflecting a lack of tolerance for those who dared mix business and gambling (Lam, 2005). More than two thousand years later, Beijing remains concerned with Chinese business leaders who overindulge in Macao and then respond by dipping into company funds to support their gambling habits – labeling these individuals “corrupt” rather than as mentally ill pathological gamblers (Bernhard, et al., 2009). These are no minor distinctions, of course, as business corruption is a potentially capital offense in modern China. Meanwhile, the mainland still bans all forms of casinos today, thereby necessitating gamblers’ collective flight to Macao in the first place.

In Europe as in China, the historical popularity of games of chance went hand in hand with anxiety about the activity’s appropriateness (Ashton, 1968; Kavanagh, 2005). In France, Louis IX (also known as Saint Louis) often expressed worry about the piousness of his subjects, and in 1254 prohibited the *tafl* (a board game played with dice), calling it “*inhonesti ludi*” (Flanagan, 2009, p. 71). However, gambling was not unequivocally seen as malign, as the 12th century French fabliau “*Saint Peter et le Joueur*” provides an account of St. Peter winning sinners’ souls from hell while playing dice with a jongleur temporarily left in charge by Satan (DuVal, 1992). This fabliau could be interpreted as a conversion narrative, in which divine forces triumphantly recover human souls from the captivity of evil -- paradoxically using a tool that is itself considered morally ambiguous.

In England, a wide variety of restrictions on games of chance were implemented, and in 1541 Henry VIII issued a comprehensive statute forbidding all “public gaming houses as well as tennis, dice, cards, bowls, dash, and loggats” (“Gambling” in Chambers Encyclopaedia, vol. 5, p. 73, 1901). This statute replaced earlier gambling restrictions based upon rank, prohibited non-knights from gambling any money whatsoever, and mandated that all service men abstain from “hand and foot ball, coits, dice, throwing of stone keyless, and other such importune games” – ostensibly to focus instead upon archery practice (Rychlak, 1992, p. 16).

Meanwhile, a variety of gambling formats have been repeatedly outlawed in the United States, where policymakers and players have engaged in a delicate discursive dance involving both sin and redemption (as gambling houses often supported houses of worship), as well as a Protestant work ethic and a gambling ethic that appeared to subvert it (Dunstan, 1997; Bernhard & Frey, 2006; Bernhard, Futrell & Harper, 2010). While it may appear that gambling has followed a linear trajectory in U.S. history – peaking today, in 2011, with more gambling available to more people in the country than ever before – in fact, the history of the gaming industry in this country reflects a roller-coaster ride of peaks of popularity followed by anti-gambling backlashes and prohibitions (Bernhard, et al., 2010).

This brings us to the nation and culture that serves as our primary focus in this paper. In Russia, games of chance have long been viewed with suspicion, often on religious grounds. This attitude was reflected in the Code of 1649, which criminalized playing cards alongside offenses against property such as robbery and stealing (Tsytarev & Gilinsky, 2008). The Code also established severe sanctions for the activity, including whipping and amputation of fingers or hands (Tsytarev & Gilinsky, 2008). Later, leaders would adjust the penalties for transgressions: in 1717, Peter I specifically prohibited playing cards or dice with monetary stakes, but established only a monetary fine as a penalty for transgressors (Kovtun & Zharkovskaya, 2008). Then, in 1733, the Empress Anna introduced imprisonment as punishment for the same offense. Ekaterina II, the famously enlightened empress who corresponded with Voltaire, made a more subtle distinction between games of chance and risky games of commerce, deciding to outlaw the former in 1765 (Tsytarev & Gilinsky, 2008).

By 1782, tolerance of even these exceptions waned, and all public gaming houses in Russia were prohibited. Despite this prohibition, gambling was firmly entrenched in the lifestyles of the nobility, and numerous accounts of gambling can be found in classic Russian literature in the nineteenth century. Most memorably, Pushkin's "Queen of Spades" articulates a search for the perfect card combination, and Dostoyevsky's "The Gambler" depicts an overwhelming passion for the game that might today be characterized as pathological (Helfant, 2002). Consistent with Veblen's (1899) contentions about gambling, status, and luck, it seems that the cultural gambling practices were essential in the construction and presentation of masculine upper-class Russian identity during the nineteenth century. For their part, however, letters and diaries of gamblers' wives in this era depict the loss of estates, horses, and hound dogs, all of which predictably led to familial discord (Helfant, 2003).

In sum, there seem to be a variety of reasons underlying prohibitions and restrictions on gambling in different historical periods and in different locations. In what has to be seen as a major driver of the Western anti-gambling movements, it seems that all three Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) viewed gambling with suspicion -- as a diversion from pious activities or even a precursor or a correlate of other vices. For example, the Talmud interpreted gambling as a form of thievery, and did not allow gamblers to be judges or witnesses, reasoning that "people who are unproductive and do not further the welfare of society by holding down a job are willing to lie and cheat" (Wein, 2004; Friedman, 2001). Meanwhile, Christianity, especially in its Protestant strands, saw gambling as a transgression of spiritual asceticism, a distraction from the good works glorifying God, and an incubator for numerous vices (Bernhard et al., 2010). Islam, of course, imposes a strict ban on gambling among its adherents. Certainly, these religious dictates provided the foundations for the gambling discourses that emerged from these periods in Russia and in the rest of the Western world, as countries and cultures attempted to rein in this morally objectionable activity.

Gambling in Contemporary Russia: A Brief Cultural, Political, and Economic History

Interestingly, the USSR, which banned most forms of gambling between 1928 and 1987, relied upon similar rhetoric, constructing gambling as a bourgeois relic

and an element of a parasitic lifestyle. During this period, the lottery and horse racing were the only legal gambling formats, even though a fairly narrow circle of quasi-criminal underground card players existed in southern tourist locations (Barbakaru, 2001). However, in efforts to boost hard-currency revenues, a 1987 decree of the Council of Ministers effectively legalized the creation of joint commercial ventures for the promotion of tourism, and entrepreneurial hospitality sector businesses took full advantage, installing 226 slot machines in hotels frequented by foreigners. The effect was immediate and the profits were sizeable: up to 350 rubles per day were earned per machine, an amount that equaled 2 months of salary for the average citizen (Vestnik Igornogo Biznesa, 2006).

In 1989, the first legal casino with table games was opened in the Savoy hotel in Moscow. Also during this tumultuous political period, the USSR formed a major joint venture with Spain, importing about 2,500 slot machines which were then installed in hotels across the country and accessible by a general public increasingly eager to consume. With the liberalization of the economy and the USSR's ultimate collapse, the gambling space opened up to numerous gambling operators who purchased used slot machines -- or even produced their own (see Vestnik Igornogo Biznesa, 2006 for an excellent overview of this particular period).

Eventually, the country played host to a massive industry. To illustrate, by 1994 there were 496 registered gaming industry companies that operated in 87 of the 89 territories in the Russian Federation (a ratio that exceeds the "48 out of 50 states" ratio popularly referenced today in the United States). The industry employed up to 80,000 workers, but according to the Taxation Service, 315 out of 454 audited gambling businesses did not pay taxes or even possess a license (Tsytarev & Gilinsky, 2008). In response, the 1998 Law #142-FZ "On Taxation of Gambling Business" introduced more clarity to the situation; the number of registered gambling locations grew by 40%, reaching 1,400 gambling operations by late 1998. This quantitative growth continued through 2000, when there were 2,700 gambling establishments with 2,581 gambling tables and 34,292 slot machines employing 120,000 workers throughout Russia (Kovtun, 2006).

Though impressive on its face, this growth period was only in its infant stages. In 2002, the Federal Sports Agency (FSA) was authorized to grant gambling licenses, and regional governments were stripped of that functionality. The FSA liberally gave away at least 4,000 licenses in the next three years (some cite a figure of 6,300) for a nominal fee of 3,000 rubles (roughly USD\$100), allowing virtually anyone to open a gambling establishment anywhere in the country (Finn, 2005). To illustrate the effect that the FSA's action had on Moscow, by 2005 the number of casinos nearly doubled from 30 to 58, while the number of slot machines tripled to in excess of 60,000 machines -- one machine per 170 city residents (Bodrunov, 2005). In sum, the post-USSR period was characterized by wildfire growth, which in turn set the stage for a backlash that was played out in the media as well as in the halls of Vladimir Putin's emerging government.

The Restriction of Gambling in Current-Day Russia: An Ethnographic Content Analysis

Following a period of significant negative media attention on the industry, the federal law N 244-FZ was passed on December 29, 2006, prohibiting gambling venues with slot machines and table games everywhere in Russia except for four special gambling zones -- all remote from the capital and well-established tourist destinations. This restriction was to take effect as of July 1, 2009 (Haworth, 2008). Further, companies planning to operate casinos or slot machine halls in the gambling zones were required to be Russian "juridical persons" (i.e. registered in Russia), to apply for a permit, to demonstrate net assets of no less than 600 million rubles

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(roughly USD\$21 million), and to maintain that minimum over the lifespan of the gaming operation. The law also forbade all Russian gambling companies from operating on the internet, yet did not criminalize gambling on internet casinos based on servers outside of Russian territory (Budylin, 2008).

Punishments for subverting the law were also outlined: managing a company that operated outside of the specialized gambling zones would lead to criminal charges of “illicit entrepreneurial activity” under article 171 of Criminal Code (Budylin, 2008). However intentionally, the law does contain loopholes, as “electronic lottery” and “internet draws” are not prohibited and seem to be vaguely regulated in the bill, which actually allows the operation of some slot machines with minor technical alterations (i.e. closing the cash-intake slot of the machine and selling the player a card to allow play). For their part, gambling establishments cannot be closed coercively, and there seems to be no clear mechanism of legal sanctions for violating the order to close (Dobryakov, 2009). Hence, if a gaming establishment does not voluntarily close, it has to be sued in court and its slot machines have to be legally determined to be “gaming machines” rather than “lottery machines” by experts (Dobryakov, 2009).

The federal law was reportedly initiated by Vladimir Putin and passed very quickly, without much input from the gaming industry (Falyahov, 2009). However, the mass-scale relocation of casinos to the gambling zones has yet to occur. Meanwhile, numerous reports of underground gambling establishments have surfaced, and there are reports of ad hoc social movements picketing the illicit gambling venues in different locations of the country (Vestnik Ignornogo Biznesa, 2010a, 2010b). So far, only two casinos have opened in the new Azov gambling zone, and the lack of infrastructure there (including the absence of hotels) discourages many patrons from attending (Pukemov, 2010). Ever the entrepreneurs, Russian businessmen have aggressively acquired gambling companies outside of the country, in locations as diverse as Bolivia, Africa, and Belorussia – the latter located an hour flight away from Moscow -- or gambling boats that cruise between St. Petersburg and Helsinki (Pukemov, 2010).

Several major themes emerged when seeking justifications for the new gaming industry restrictions: 1) the theme of deviance and organized crime complicity in the gambling industry; 2) the theme of social costs associated with addiction, as well as gambling among youth in Russia, 3) socioeconomic themes that implied a tolerance for casino locations and gambling among the affluent strata, and 4) the protection of a progressive national Russian identity.

Gambling Perceptions in Current-Day Russia

Outside of one study published in 1998 (Kassinove et al.), there appear to be no current academic publications on perceptions of the gaming industry in Russia. And even this study (which revealed fairly positive attitudes toward gambling) is limited: it relied upon a sample size of 171 citizens, and more importantly, the Russian gaming industry has evolved dramatically since this time. Given these limitations, a content analysis of Russian media accounts helps enhance our understanding of the prevalent public discourses on gambling, and of the social construction of the gambling as a public and political issue.

In our analysis of 204 media accounts, several major themes emerged when seeking justifications for the new gaming industry restrictions: 1) the theme of deviance and organized crime complicity in the gambling industry; 2) the theme of social costs associated with addiction, as well as gambling among youth in Russia, 3) socioeconomic themes that implied a tolerance for casino locations and gambling among the affluent strata, yet intolerance for the more readily available forms of gambling (e.g., slot machines) ostensibly targeting less wealthy groups, and 4) the protection of a progressive national Russian identity. Interestingly, many of these themes (especially those dealing with the family, corruption of youth, and enforcement of class boundaries) are well-documented in the literature on

the contemporary moral panics, as well as the literature on the moral crusades during the

second half of the nineteenth century in Boston and New York (Beisel, 1998; Gordon, 1994; Krinsky, 2008). Other themes, meanwhile, appear to center around concerns for excessive/pathological gambling and associated impacts (e.g., gambling as sickness, allegations of negative impacts on family, youth, and elderly, and social costs), a finding consistent with Bernhard, et al.'s (2010) examination of the anti-gambling social movements that are prevalent in the United States (2010). Finally, organized crime's objectionable relationship with gambling has been well documented throughout the history of Las Vegas and other gambling locales (see, e.g., Green & Moehring, 2005).

In the next sections, we outline the primary themes that emerged, and we provide illustrative examples that capture the rhetoric that was used in the Russian media to express these themes.

Organized Crime Themes

Vladimir Putin, who is often reported to be a strong supporter of the gambling restrictions, claimed that the purpose of the new laws was to achieve "radical decriminalization" of the gaming industry (Vinogradov & Solyanskaya, 2006). He warned members of parliament to avoid the temptations of the various lobbying groups who sought to keep casinos and slot machines available outside of the special zones (Vinogradov & Solyanskaya, 2006).

Interestingly, the themes of organized crime complicity seemed to be more prominent in the business-oriented sources we examined, while the themes of gambling as a morally objectionable activity seemed to be most prominent in the popular media. For instance, gaming industry operators often appear in the "criminal chronicle" section of *Gazeta.ru*, the business media resource. One allegedly influential member of the Chechen criminal group Ramzan Taranov was arrested in Moscow on illegal weapons possession charge in 2003; the account in the criminal chronicle section notes that he is thought to have significant gaming industry interests (Igoshina, 2003). Accounts of the conflicts between Slavic and Caucasian (i.e., originating from the Caucasus) criminal groups in the Ural region claim that control over gaming establishments was the primary motivation for these clashes (Bistrih, 2004). Another article that discusses a trial of an organized group that allegedly kidnapped and murdered gaming industry operators in Krasnoyarsk mentions casually that "almost all owners of casinos in Krasnoyarsk have died from unnatural causes" (Tumanov, 2010).

Perhaps predictably, a series of conflicts in the upper echelons of organized crime groups correlated temporally with the 2009 ban. Media accounts suggest that after the alleged criminal leader Zahar Kalashov (also known as Shakro Molodoy) was arrested in Spain in connection with an alleged money laundering case involving gambling revenues, the tension between the clans reportedly led by Aslan Usoyan (also known as Grandpa Hasan) and Taniel Oniany escalated (Petrova, Stenin, & Vermisheva, 2006; Snezhina, 2010). Vyacheslav Ivanko (also known as Yaponchik, or "Little Japanese") allegedly arrived in Moscow to mediate between these two groups, only to be shot by a sniper on July 29th, 2009; he died in the hospital several weeks later (Belkovsky, 2009). Meanwhile, Aslan Usoyan himself was shot by a sniper on September 16th, 2010 but survived (Snezhina, 2010). These events were labeled "the thieves' war" in the Russian media, and the gaming industry was frequently indicted as a complicit force in these very same accounts.

Even the popular term "one-armed bandit," frequently used to refer to slot machines in the articles of our sample, seems to possess more negative connotations in Russian than it does in English accounts. This is almost certainly due to the shared lived experiences and awareness of the prominence of actual bandits in Russia (i.e. members of organized criminal groups) in the stormy transitional period of the 1990s. Some articles capitalized on this symbol and used the term repeatedly to boost the negativity of the account, while one article made a qualitative leap and mentioned "Shiva-like one armed bandits" to evoke imagery of the multiple-handed Indian deity, implying that Russians were being robbed by many hands (Platova, 2009).

Social Cost Themes: Pathological Gambling, Family and Youth Impacts

Medical discourses were also well-represented in media accounts that attempted to explain the rationales behind the restrictions. Not infrequently, habitual gambling was referred to as ludomania, or “pathological gambling” in the modern literature. In these reports, gambling is constructed within the framework of addiction, to be dealt with by psychiatrists and medical doctors specializing in the health impacts of alcoholism and drug abuse. One of these alcohol specialists, offering no systematic data, pointed out similarities in treatment and relapse between gambling patients and alcohol patients (Agarkov, 2008). This specialist also emphasized that the addictive destruction was different with these two afflictions, as it is practically impossible to spend as much money on alcohol or drugs compared to gambling (further explaining that gamblers “go into colossal debt ... which leads to a state of hopelessness. That is why there are many more suicides among pathological gamblers” (Agarkov, 2008).

Local addiction specialists also voiced their support for the Kaliningrad social movement “People Against the Gambling Zone,” saying that the region would have to establish an anti-suicide center for broke “ludomaniacs” (Smirnov, 2007). These themes are familiar to those who study anti-gambling social movements; whereas historic rhetoric focused on gambling’s immoral nature or its mafia ties, current protests tend to revolve more often around the observation that some patrons engage in pathological and destructive gambling behaviors (Bernhard et al., 2010).

Related themes emerged that dealt with social costs of gambling associated with family and younger populations. Once again, we did not record any hard empirical claims (or even educated guesses) about the measured socioeconomic impact of gambling here, but the themes of corruption of youth and negative impacts on families were persistent even if backed by impressionistic or anecdotal evidence -- or no evidence at all. For example, Russian parliament member Vladimir Medinsky put it this way: “It would be better for our youth to spend their best years solving the demographic problem – raise kids, establish families, educate themselves” (Pichugina, 2005). Meanwhile, a woman residing close to a casino says: “We are afraid for our children – what if they get hooked on the game?” (Usupova, 2008).

The Deputy of Moscow Mayor Sergei Baidakov reiterates these claims, saying that “teenagers have no business” hanging out in the slot-machine saloons (Pyatiletova, 2009). He went on to say that “the most insecure populations – children, retired citizens, unhealthy people -- continue to lose their last rubles” at gambling (Pyatiletova, 2009). In expressing his own concerns about the growing gaming industry, the president of the Russian Federation was critical about the availability of gambling in public places: “We certainly have to consider protecting our vulnerable citizens from the things which are happening in the sphere of gambling” (Lirchikova, 2007).

Amazingly, these sentiments were even expressed by those who stood to benefit from the new gaming industry restrictions. Vladimir Nikitin, a member of Russian parliament who represents constituents from Kaliningradskaya Oblast, one of the designated gambling zones, made this biting comment: “The population of (our) region ... will not receive any money, not even a dead donkey’s ears, but a lot of problems...” referring to a variety of social issues that he felt would plague his constituency after legal gambling arrived (Smirnov, 2007).

These claims’ focus on the corruption of youth and negative impacts on families become more intelligible if we examine the relevant demographic data. The population of Russia has been declining since the early 1990s, due primarily to fertility rates falling below the replacement threshold (Brainerd, 2009.) Many Russian social commentators have argued that various social ills (from gambling to alcohol abuse to depression and suicide) plague this small but vital youth generation, in a manner that indeed poses threats to the entire Russian economy, due to excessive financial burdens placed upon an increasingly small segment of Russian society (Pridemore, 2006). As such, we might say that these media accounts fear that what happens to Russia’s children stays in Russia – or

put another way, that which threatens the youth in Russia potentially threatens Russia's future society and economy as a whole.

Socioeconomic Class Themes: Acceptable for the Rich, Problematic for the Poor

The theme of enforcement of class boundaries also manifested itself in revealing ways. In these media accounts, gambling was seen as objectionable when it penetrated the poorer neighborhoods and classes, but benign when it was offered to those wealthy enough to travel to these new remote zones. To illustrate, in our entire sample, we did not find a single statement that advocated against upper class individuals playing in the casinos. The deputy director of Economy Institute of the Russian Academy of Science made a direct pitch for an ostensibly equitable wealth redistribution when he stated that "it is highly important that people with high incomes will become the customers of the gambling industry; that way the lost money will become a sort of tax on the rich" (Gurkina, 2005).

Russian parliament member Vladimir Medinsky contributed this permissive characterization of who should properly be allowed to gamble: "Once (individual) financial resources allow it, let them wander in the casinos" (Pichugina, 2005). One article describing gambling in Chechnya (a Muslim region where gambling was prohibited even before the federal ban) explicitly charged that it is "common people (who) suffer the most from slot machines" (Borisov, 2007). Ultimately, this theme might best be understood in connection with socioeconomic insecurities created by Russia's sharp transition to a market economy (Zohoori et al., 1998).

Further, these arguments resonate with deeply held Russian beliefs about wealth distribution – beliefs that rigidified during the Soviet era, but maintain significant resonance even in the more capitalistic Russia of today. For instance, according to a recent UNICEF working paper, 95.8% of Russians strongly agreed or agreed with the statement that "income inequality is too high" in Russia, and these beliefs seem to be stronger in other post-socialist countries as well compared to capitalist countries (Suhrke, 2001). Hence, though some of the themes presented here (e.g., fears of pathological gambling and social impacts) seem consistent across cultures, these class-based anti-gambling themes appear to take on a distinctly Russian flavor.

Themes of Morality and a Russian National Consciousness

Overall, religious rhetoric was not as prevalent in current Russian anti-gambling media accounts as it has been in American media accounts (see Bernhard et al., 2010). However, religious discourses continue to echo in current-day gambling debates in Russia – a perhaps unsurprising development, given the previously-discussed historical affinities for religious interpretations of gambling in this country and culture. These moral debates often seem intertwined with debates about the national consciousness of a new Russia. For instance, one church leader went on a local Kaliningrad TV station and argued that "Making money on sin is ... shortsighted. ... Are lost human lives worth the money?" He continued by making the argument that "what we need is strong spirit, strong belief, (and) strong national consciousness. I do not think that casinos will contribute to building that spirit" (Ryabushev, 2007).

In expressing these moral ideas, religious leaders often invoked the notion of national identity, a theme that was echoed by anti-gambling social movements in Russia. For instance, "People Against the Gambling Zone" referred to attempts of "international capital" to encroach upon the sovereignty of Russians, invoking religiously- and Russian identity-based slogans like "Casinos are Satanic Nests" and "Motherly (Russian) No to Casinos" (Smirnov, 2007).

It seems, then, that these themes are linked on occasion with previously-discussed themes of business and capitalism – in this instance, the specific concern that international relationships with capital and business are tainting the Russian national identity, which of course for years centered around very different constructions of the

proper role of capital and business. Of course, moral spheres are shifting rapidly in Russia: the persecution of faith during the Soviet epoch destabilized the influence of organized religion as a social institution and undermined the popularity and efficiency of these belief-based appeals. However, the continuing resonance of moral- and religious-inspired anti-gambling arguments, as well as the linkages of these beliefs with perspectives on capital and the new Russia, suggests that the Soviet period did not extinguish these sentiments entirely. It seems that these “new Russia” perspectives might well inform the construction of a new Russian identity – or at least a new Russian gambling identity – in the 21st century.

Conclusions and Discussion

The authors of this piece faced the formidable task of understanding the rationales for gambling restrictions in Russia without substantial public perception surveys or other empirical literature on the subject. The current study adds to the intelligibility of these events by first providing a historical outline of gambling prohibitions in general and gambling law in Russia in particular. Next, this study used an ethnographic content analysis to identify salient rationales expressed in the Russian news media. These four rationales dominated the discourse surrounding the country’s decision to remove gambling from major population centers by limiting gambling to four remote zones.

The Russian media did not offer systematic empirical evidence justifying the exile of gambling venues into the four remote specifically designated zones. Rather, the anti-gambling rhetoric we discovered revolved around classic themes such as deviant status of gambling and its alleged ties with organized crime, addiction and the protection of youth and other vulnerable social groups, the enforcement of class boundaries that protect the poor from gambling’s temptations while allowing the rich to play if they are willing to pay and travel, and the protection of a morally sound Russian national identity.

In hindsight, we might surmise that the Russian gaming market was not given enough time to regulate itself and mature into a legitimate one, and that the intervention of the governmental “iron fist,” ineffective as it may be, is not entirely unintelligible under these circumstances. More generally, newer research on the international “gambling world” seems to suggest that instead of a singular gambling *world* that is somehow universal or monolithic, each gaming jurisdiction enjoys (or laments) its own unique relationship with the gambling act (Bernhard et al., 2009).

In exploring a 21st century gambling landscape that is rapidly globalizing, it makes sense to take into account, as the best globalization research does, forces of both homogenization *and* resistance – that is, the ways in which the gambling world finds itself homogenizing and growing worldwide, but also the ways in which local jurisdictions have been observed to resist these similarities and universalizing tendencies. Specifically, the sociologist Jan McMillen contends that nowhere are the “homogenizing forces of globalization [clearer] than in the transformation of gambling into one of the world’s most rapidly expanding consumer activities. [This is apparent in] the economic dominance of transnational corporations, often American; the acceptance of certain governing rules and economic tendencies; and standardization of products and consumer behavior. . .” (2003, p. 51). Others, however, have pointed out that local gaming jurisdictions do not always succumb to standardization, and can resist politically (often through legislation that is narrower than gaming interests desire), economically (in the form of comparatively high tax rates), and/or socially (in the form of anti-gambling social movements) (Bernhard, et al., 2009). Viewed against this backdrop, Russia’s recent restrictions reflect both resistance to the international tendencies toward embracing gambling legalization, as well as resistance to the consequent homogenization of gambling spaces.

The gaming industry would be wise to study exceptions to the 21st-century trend of wildfire expansion and legalization, as this is an industry that has had an often-

tenuous relationship with the communities that host it (Eadington, 2009). From South Carolina (where video poker expansion was protested as insidious and overly aggressive, ultimately resulting in a ban) to South Korea (where a “Sea Story” scandal erupted after the government banned certain types of neighborhood wagering games), examples abound of jurisdictions that have not handled their local gaming industries particularly well (Bernhard et al., 2009). In contrast to most industries, gaming businesses operators are almost entirely dependent upon political (and therefore community) decisions to allow them to operate. As such, Russia stands as an informative illustration of a gaming industry gone wrong, in a world where few such missteps can be observed.

Appendix A: Discussion of News Sources

We would like to provide few notes on the popularity and prominence of the source used in this paper. “Komsomolskaya Pravda” is the most popular Russian on-line newspaper, with 70,123 unique readers per day (tracked by their IP’s) and 14,198,147 unique readers per month according to the mail.ru online mass-media rating service as of March 26, 2011. (<http://top.mail.ru/Rating/MassMedia-Newspapers/month/Visitors/1.html>). According to TNS Gallup Media, the paper version of “Komsomolskaya Pravda” has an average issue readership of 2,160,000 urban residents over 16 years of age, which makes it one of the leading (if not the leading) paper-based mass media in Russia. (<http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/press/index.wbp?press.action=search&press.regionId=68CDA84F-6158-4F7C-A36A-7DAF207B88E1&press.regionId=C27FFFD9-CC9B-4AD1-B826-00B2CDE2B4AB&press.regionId=C9838420-042B-4B9E-B7A8-F228DB27C8E1&press.periodId=F3BE2D69-83DF-4AF4-902B-2B1B5FEFF245&press.smId=FFE6B659-63E1-46F3-96E1-53EBD1D16CCE>)

Meanwhile, “Rossiiskaya Gazeta” is #4 in popularity among Russian online newspapers according to the same rating service (mail.ru), with 12,679 unique readers per day and 3,996,992 unique readers per month. (<http://top.mail.ru/Rating/MassMedia-Newspapers/month/Visitors/1.html>). Based on TNS Gallup Media the paper version of “Rossiiskaya Gazeta” had an average issue readership (AIR) of 1,345,000 urban residents over 16 years old of age. It is #2 in overall national circulation (<http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/press/index.wbp?press.action=search&press.regionId=68CDA84F-6158-4F7C-A36A-7DAF207B88E1&press.regionId=C27FFFD9-CC9B-4AD1-B826-00B2CDE2B4AB&press.regionId=C9838420-042B-4B9E-B7A8-F228DB27C8E1&press.periodId=89BF6155-0031-4031-9D70-3BECA401BC62&press.smId=FFE6B659-63E1-46F3-96E1-53EBD1D16CCE>)

The “Nezavisimaya Gazeta” is #10 in popularity among Russian online newspapers according to the mail.ru ratings; it has 7,893 unique readers daily and 2,258,886 unique readers monthly (<http://top.mail.ru/Rating/MassMedia-Newspapers/month/Visitors/1.html>). According to TNS Gallup Media the paper version of “Nezavisimaya Gazeta” had average issue readership of 77,000 in Moscow alone in 2005-2006 (unfortunately there is no data on national circulation) (<http://www.tns-global.ru/rus/data/ratings/press/index.wbp?press.action=search&press.regionId=68CDA84F-6158-4F7C-A36A-7DAF207B88E1&press.regionId=C27FFFD9-CC9B-4AD1-B826-00B2CDE2B4AB&press.regionId=C9838420-042B-4B9E-B7A8-F228DB27C8E1&press.periodId=F3BE2D69-83DF-4AF4-902B-2B1B5FEFF245&press.smId=FFE6B659-63E1-46F3-96E1-53EBD1D16CCE>)

In general, we examined mainstream and major newspaper sources, while avoiding those that seemed polemic - though there are a couple of articles from “Trud,” which is a communist newspaper, the tone and structure of these did not come across as biased. Although ratings fluctuate over time, almost all of the articles in the sample came from the top 20 online newspaper sources and the top 10 off-line newspapers.

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