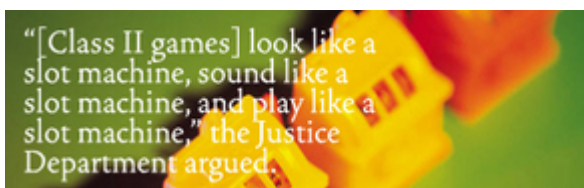


The WAGER Vol. 9(12) - Class II Gaming: Coming to a Reservation Near You!

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Imagine you are a farmer tending to your corn and cattle in 1940s Iowa. After a long week of toiling in the fields, you decide that some weekend entertainment is in order and consider casino gambling. But such a trip would take a week or more because Nevada has the only legal gambling venue of the day. Because you could never leave your farm for that long, you forget gambling and instead spend the weekend with friends. Fast-forward to 2004. Again, you are a farmer in Iowa, except now you have as many as 16 Indian and commercial casinos within driving distance. The expansion of legalized gambling over the past decade has made this scenario a reality in many communities across the U.S. A new U.S. Supreme Court decision regarding Class II gaming (i.e., the operation of electronic bingo machines) across the nation could now bring legalized gambling even closer to home.

On March 1, the U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear an appeal by the Justice Department questioning the legality of the operation of fast-paced electronic bingo games (i.e., Class II games) on Native American reservations. Reservations that operate Class II machines are not bound by state compacts that establish revenue-sharing between reservations and states and can place restrictions on the number of traditional slot machines (i.e., Class III machines) operating on reservations. Class II machines, however, look and operate much like traditional slot machines, thus prompting the federal government's complaint. The Supreme Court's reaction effectively legitimizes the legal and potentially unrestricted use of such devices on Indian reservations across the nation¹ (e.g., Batt & Smith, 2004; Benston, 2004; "Head of the class: U.S. Supreme Court passes on Class II gaming; boom begins," 2004).



"[Class II games] look like a slot machine, sound like a slot machine, and play like a slot machine," the Justice Department argued.

Increasingly rapid expansion of exposure to gambling has drawn the attention of scientists, activists, treatment providers and others. Theoretically, increased gambling opportunities (i.e., exposure) lead to an increased incidence of problem gamblers over time; this model suggests that the object of exposure (i.e., gambling) can contribute to addictive behavior. To empirically test this theory, Shaffer, LaBrie and LaPlante (2004) developed a quantitative gradient to evaluate regional exposure to gambling: the Regional Index of Gambling Exposure (RIGE). The RIGE considers dose (i.e., total number and size of gaming establishments), potency (i.e., types of legal gambling) and duration (i.e., time elapsed since gambling was legalized) of gambling in a specific area and generates an “exposure” score based on this information. This score can be used as a comparative measure of gambling exposure across different regions. The authors used the RIGE to test gambling exposure across Nevada counties, and found that counties with higher numbers of establishments and employees were the most “exposed” to gambling; these counties also evidenced higher levels of pathological gambling, lending some credence to the exposure model. Shaffer et al. also note, however, that adaptive mechanisms are also apparent in Nevada, with longer term residents and casino employees evidencing fewer overall gambling problems than newcomers.

The legal status and expansion of Class II gaming on U.S. Native American reservations will significantly alter dose and potency. Dose will increase dramatically in many communities as reservations create new venues for electronic bingo. Potency will also increase in many communities, as reservations that did not previously offer Class II gaming begin to introduce electronic bingo. The third contributing factor to the RIGE index, duration (i.e., time elapsed), will likely be the key to determining whether and how an increase in gambling exposure relates to pathological gambling behaviors within communities that will be affected by the Supreme Court’s ruling. Populations can react differently over time to more gambling opportunities (i.e., increased exposure can lead to increases in problem gambling behaviors, or can trigger adaptation among those who are exposed), making it difficult to predetermine the effect of installing or expanding gaming operations. It is important that as Class II gaming establishments increase, scientists can use quantitative systems, such as the RIGE, to monitor communities’ gambling exposure and compare this information with problem gambling behaviors. Likewise, effects of gambling on communities should be studied globally, as nations continue to experiment with and rule on the

legality of different gambling types. By using the most recent exposure and pathological gambling data, future research will be able to track, within individual communities across the globe, whether increased exposure related to expanded gaming is associated with increased gambling problems or, conversely, whether recently exposed individuals are resilient enough to adapt to their new environment.

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Notes

1 Following the Supreme Court's decision, several gaming analysts commented that the court's inaction equates to tacit nationwide legal acceptance of Class II gaming expansion on Native American reservations; however, other analysts believe that it is impossible to determine the status of Class II gaming without a definitive ruling. The gaming industry appears to stand with the former, as many leading slot manufacturers are preparing to enter the Class II market. Stock prices of slot manufacturing companies soared following the court's decision.

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