

Sports Betting And Legal Implications In India: The Regulation Of Gambling And Match-Fixing In Sports

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Sports betting in India have grown significantly with the rise of digital platforms, yet it remains largely unregulated under national law. The lack of a unified legal framework has led to illegal betting networks and match-fixing scandals, affecting the integrity of Indian sports. This paper examines the existing legal landscape, key match-fixing cases, and regulatory challenges. It also explores global best practices and proposes reforms, including a centralized legal structure, stricter monitoring mechanisms, and player protection policies to ensure fair and transparent sports betting regulations in India.

Keywords: Sports Betting, Gambling Laws, Match-Fixing, Indian Sports, Legal Reforms

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01. Introduction

Sports betting in India have witnessed exponential growth with the advent of online gambling platforms. However, the absence of comprehensive legal oversight has contributed to illicit betting markets and match-fixing scandals. This paper investigates the legal implications of sports betting, the role of illegal betting syndicates, and the regulatory challenges faced by authorities in curbing match-fixing.

02. Review of Literature

The legal landscape governing gambling and betting in India has been extensively discussed in academic and legal scholarship, given its complex interplay of state and central laws. Scholars have explored the historical, legislative, judicial, and regulatory aspects of gambling laws, highlighting various legal ambiguities and policy challenges.

2.1 Legal Framework of Gambling and Betting in India

The legal framework for gambling in India is primarily governed by the **Public Gambling Act, 1867**, which was enacted during British rule. The Act criminalizes operating or being found in a common gaming house but leaves considerable regulatory discretion to individual states. Some scholars (Singh, 2019) have argued that the 1867 Act is outdated and fails to address modern digital and online gambling platforms, necessitating an urgent legislative overhaul.

The Supreme Court and various High Courts in India have played a crucial role in interpreting gambling laws, particularly in distinguishing between games of chance (prohibited) and games of skill (permissible). The landmark case of *State of Andhara Pradesh v. K Satyanarayana (1968)* upheld rummy as a game of skill, setting a precedent for skill-based gaming.

Scholars like Bhattacharya (2020) have analyzed how judicial pronouncements have shaped the gambling industry, noting inconsistencies in how different courts classify various games. For instance, the Mumbai High Court's 2019 judgment in *Gurdeep Singh Sachar v. Union of India* ruled that fantasy sports like Dream11 involve a predominant element of skill and thus do not fall under gambling.

With the rise of online gaming, fantasy sports and mobile betting platforms, scholars and policymakers

Have debated the regulatory vacuum in India. The Information Technology Act, 2000 does not explicitly cover online gaming, creating a grey area exploited by offshore betting companies. Studies by Kapoor and Mehta (2021) argue that state-wise bans on online gaming (e.g., Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) have led to regulatory fragmentation, thereby necessitating a centralized gambling policy akin to models in the UK and the USA.

Several scholars advocate for a uniform gambling law, arguing that the current patchwork of state and central regulations creates ambiguity and encourages illegal betting operations. Kumar (2023) suggests that India could adopt a regulated licensing model, similar to the United Kingdom Gambling Commission, to balance industry growth with consumer protection.

2.2 Impact of Illegal Betting and Match-Fixing

Illegal betting markets thrive in jurisdictions with weak regulatory frameworks, leading to substantial financial losses for governments due to tax evasion and money laundering. Smith & Anderson (2019) highlighted that unregulated gambling operations generate billions of dollars annually but remained un-taxed and outside legal scrutiny.

Agarwal (2018) explored the socio-economic effects of illegal sports betting, linking it to organized crime networks. Chakraborty (2020) examined the 2013 IPL match-fixing scandal, discussing the involvement of bookies and the failure of sports authorities in enforcing anti-corruption measures.

2.3 Global Regulatory Models and Their Applicability in India

Despite laws prohibiting unauthorized betting, enforcement remains a major challenge. Studies by Kapadia (2021) argue that legal loopholes and jurisdictional differences allow illicit operators to thrive. The Law Commission of India Reports (2018) recommended regulatory measures but noted that political resistance and ethical concerns prevent effective reforms. Further, Roberts (2020) and Wilson (2021) evaluated gambling laws in the UK, Australia and the US, proposing regulatory adaptations for India, such as:

01. Licensing and taxation models to curb illicit betting operations.

01. Strict anti-money laundering measures to prevent financial crimes.
02. Establishing an independent gambling regulator to oversee both offline and online betting activities.
03. Public awareness campaigns to mitigate the social harms of gambling.

04. Research Methodology

This study employs a **qualitative research approach**, using secondary sources such as government reports, judicial rulings, scholarly articles, and case studies. Legal analysis is conducted through doctrinal research, examining statutory laws and judicial precedents in India and comparative jurisdictions.

04. Sports Betting in India: Growth and Legal Landscape

Sports betting in India have surged with the rise of online platforms, mobile accessibility and the popularity of sports like cricket and football. Despite its rapid growth, the industry operates in a legal grey area due to outdated laws like the Public Gambling Act, 1867, and inconsistent state regulations. While courts have differentiated games of skill from chance, regulatory gaps persist, fueling illicit betting markets and match-fixing concerns. This paper examines the growth, legal framework, challenges and potential reforms needed for a structured sports betting industry in India.

4.1 The Rise of Online and Offline Sports Betting

Sports betting in India have expended rapidly, driven by both traditional (offline) and digital (online) platforms. Offline betting has long existed through informal networks and underground syndicates, particularly in cricket. Despite legal restrictions, unregulated betting continues to thrive, often linked to match-fixing scandals and illegal gambling rings (Hill, 2010).

The rise of online sports betting has further transformed the industry, with mobile apps, digital wallets and fantasy sports platforms like Dream11 and MPL making betting more accessible (Forrest, 2021). Online platforms leverage real-time data; AI based odd prediction and seamless payment gateways, attracting millions of users (Williams, Brown & Thomas, 2022). However, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework has led

To concerns over fraud, addiction and money laundering (Kapadia, 2021).

As both online and offline betting markets grow, the need for regulatory clarity and consumer protection becomes increasingly urgent. This paper explores the trends, challenges and potential policy reforms required to balance industry growth with legal oversight.

4.2 Existing Legal Framework

The legal framework governing sports betting in India is fragmented with outdated central laws and varying state regulations. The Public Gambling act, 1867, a colonial era law, serves as the primary legislation, prohibiting most forms of gambling but failing to address modern online betting platforms (Kapadia, 2021). Since gambling is a state subject, individual states have the power to regulate or ban betting activities, leading to inconsistencies in enforcement (Law Commission of India, 2018).

Judicial interpretations have played a key role in defining betting laws. The Supreme Court has distinguished games of skill from games of chance, allowing platforms like Dream11 to operate legally, while traditional betting remains largely restricted (Forrest, 2021). However, the Information Technology Act, 2000, which governs online activities, does not explicitly regulate online gambling, creating a legal grey area for digital betting operators (Williams et al., 2022).

Some states, such as Sikkim, Nagaland and Meghalaya, have introduced licensing models for online gaming and betting, while others like Tamil Nadu and Andhra Pradesh have imposed bans (Kapadia, 2021). Despite Growing demand, India lacks a uniform national policy on sports betting, leaving regulatory gaps that fuel illegal syndicates and tax evasion.

- **The Public Gambling Act, 1867:** Prohibits gambling but lacks provisions addressing online betting.
- **Information Technology Act, 2000:** Regulates online transactions but does not explicitly cover betting.
- **State-Level Variations:** Goa, Sikkim, and Nagaland permit regulated gambling, while other states maintain a strict ban.

In Punjab, the legal framework

Governing gambling and betting is primarily based on the Public Gambling Act, 1867, a central legislation that prohibits most forms of gambling and the operation of common gaming houses. This Act has been adopted by Punjab and its provisions continue to be enforced within the state.

In summary, while traditional forms of gambling, including sports betting, remain largely prohibited under the Public Gambling Act, 1867, exceptions like physical lotteries exist. The rise of online gambling presents new challenges, highlighting the need for updated regulations to address the evolving gambling environment in Punjab.

05. Match-Fixing in Indian Sports

Match-fixing is one of the most vital threats to the integrity of Indian sports. It involves manipulating the outcome of a game, often for financial gain through illegal betting syndicates. The lack of a robust regulatory framework, coupled with weak enforcement mechanisms, has allowed corrupt elements to exploit players and officials. Cricket, being the most popular sport in India, has witnessed some of the most high-profile match-fixing scandals, but other sports, such as football and kabaddi, have also been affected. This section explores the major match-fixing incidents, the role of organized crime and the consequences of such corrupt practices on Indian sports.

5.1 Major Scandals and Their Implications

- **2000 Cricket Match-Fixing Scandal:** One of the most infamous match-fixing scandals in Indian sports history occurred in 2000 when several cricketers were implicated in fixing matches for bookmakers. The scandal exposed deep rooted corruption within international cricket, leading to lifetime ban on some players (Gupta, 2001). This case prompted the Board of Control for Cricket in India to establish an Anti-corruption Unit to prevent further instances of fixing.
- **2013 Indian Premier League Spot fixing scandal:** The 2013 IPL season was blemished by allegations of spot fixing, where some players were arrested for their involvement in fixing matches (Chakraborty, 2020). Investigations revealed links between players, bookies and underworld syndicates. The scandal led to significant reforms in India's cricket governance, including the Lodha Committee
- recommendations, which resulted in stricter oversight of the IPL and a temporary suspension of the Rajasthan Royals and Chennai Super Kings franchises (Verma, 2015).
- **Other Sports Affected by Match Fixing:**
 01. **Football:** The Indian Super League is India's top-tier professional football league that was established in 2007 by All India Football Federation. This league has also faced allegations of match-fixing, with reports of betting syndicates attempting to influence match outcome (Rao, 2021).
 02. **Badminton:** Indian badminton players have been approached by illegal betting networks, raising concerns over integrity in the sport (Sharma, 2022).
- **Kabaddi:** Pro Kabaddi League matches have also been flagged for suspicious betting activity, highlighting the growing reach of match-fixing beyond cricket (Deshmukh, 2020).
- 01. **Tennis:** Indian tennis players have been investigated for alleged match-fixing with international governing bodies warning against the rising trend (Patel, 2021).
- 02. **Athletics:** Allegations of race fixing and doping related corruption have surfaced in Indian athletics, particularly in national level competitions (Mukherjee, 2022).
- **Implications of Match-Fixing on Indian Sports**
 01. **Loss of Fan Trust:** Repeated match fixing cases have damaged the credibility of Indian sports, particularly cricket (Chakraborty, 2020).
 02. **Financial Losses:** Fixing scandals lead to a decline in sponsorship deals and broadcasting revenue (Verma, 2015).
- **Legal Challenges:** Existing laws do not explicitly criminalize match fixing, making enforcement difficult (Nair, 2020).

06. Efforts to Combat Match-Fixing and Sports Corruption

Match fixing and sports corruption undermine the integrity of sports, often involving illegal gambling and organized crime (Maennig,

2018). To combat these issues, legal frameworks, sports governance policies and international collaborations have been implemented.

01. Legal Frameworks: Many countries have criminalized match fixing, with the Macolin Convention providing a global framework for cooperation (Council of Europe, 2014). Strict penalties are imposed on offenders to deter corruption (Interpol, 2021).

02. Role of Sports Governing Bodies: Organizations like FIFA, UEFA and the IOC have integrity units to detect and prevent match fixing (FIFA, 2020). FIFA collaborates with Interpol to monitor suspicious activities.

- **Technology & Education:** AI driven monitoring by Sportradar and IBIA helps detect irregular betting activities (Sportradar, 2022). Educational programs increase awareness among athletes and officials about match fixing risks (European Commission, 2021).

6.1 Role of Government and Regulatory Bodies

The role of government and the regulatory bodies in addressing issues related to betting and corruption in sports, particularly in India, is crucial for maintaining the integrity of sports. Various institutions, including the Law Commission of India, the Board of Control for Cricket in India's Anti Corruption Unit and law enforcement agencies such as the Enforcement Directorate and local police, play key roles in this regard.

- **Law Commission of India (2018):** Recommended legalization of betting with stringent regulations. The law Commission of India, in its 276th Report titled "Legal Framework: Gambling and Sports Betting Including in Cricket in India" (2018), acknowledged the widespread prevalence of illegal betting in India. The Commission recommended the legalization of regulated betting with strict guidelines to curb the risks associated with match fixing and money laundering. The report further suggested that betting should be treated as a taxable activity and regulated through stringent licensing norms, ensuring transparency and accountability within the industry.
- **BCCI's Anti-Corruption Unit (ACU):** Works to monitor and prevent corruption in

- cricket. The Anti-Corruption Unit of the BCCI is responsible for monitoring and preventing corruption, including betting and match fixing, in Indian Cricket. Established in 2000 after the Hansie Cronje match fixing scandal, the ACU enforces strict vigilance over players, team officials and other stakeholders. It works closely with law enforcement agencies to detect betting related offences. Despite its efforts, the ACU faces Jurisdictional challenges as betting networks often operate from offshore locations, making prosecution difficult.

- **Enforcement Directorate and Police Interventions:** Conduct raids on illegal betting networks but face jurisdictional challenges. Indian law enforcement agencies, including the enforcement the Enforcement Directorate and state police forces, actively conduct raids on illegal betting networks. These crackdowns aim to dismantle organized crime syndicates involved in illegal betting, money laundering and financial fraud. For example, the 2023 Indian Premier League betting scandal saw the ED conducting raids on multiple betting syndicates operating through online platforms. The agency invoked provisions under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act, 2002, to seize assets linked to these operations (Economic Times, 2023). However, enforcement agencies face jurisdictional and technological hurdles, as many betting platforms are registered in foreign countries. The lack of extradition treaties and cooperation from overseas regulators makes it difficult to prosecute offenders.

While government bodies like the Law Commission of India advocate for regulated betting, enforcement agencies and regulatory bodies such as the BCCI's ACU and law enforcement agencies struggle with jurisdictional challenges and the evolving nature of online betting. A cohesive regulatory framework, including stringent licensing, tax policies and cross border cooperation is essential to address these challenges effectively.

07. The Need for Legal Reforms in Sports Betting Regulation

The regulation of sports betting in India remains a contentious issue with existing laws failing to curb illegal betting networks and match fixing scandals. The Law Commission of India (2018) recommended legalizing and regulating

Betting to ensure transparency and generate revenue. However, the absence of a comprehensive legal framework leads to jurisdictional challenges and enforcement difficulties. Legal reforms are essential to establish a structured, accountable and technology driven approach to sports betting regulation.

7.1 Arguments for Legalization

- **Economic Benefits:** legalizing sports betting can provide significant economic advantages by generating tax revenue, creating employment opportunities and fostering industry growth. Countries like the United Kingdom and Australia have successfully regulated sports betting from billions in annual tax revenues. The Law Commission of India (2018) estimated that a well regulated betting market could contribute substantial revenue to the economy through taxation and licensing fees. The commission stated: *Regulated gambling and betting would help generate revenue for the State exchequer, create employment opportunities and curb the influence of underworld networks engaged in match fixing* (Law Commission of India, 2018, P. 132). Additionally, the betting industry could stimulate job creation in sectors such as technology, customer support, compliance and data analytics.
- **Transparency and Regulation:** Monitoring betting activities reduces corruption risks. A legalized and regulated betting market ensures greater transparency, allowing authorities to monitor betting activities and prevent match fixing. Currently, illegal betting markets operate without oversight, making it easier for corrupt elements to manipulate sports events. Regulated frameworks in countries like the United States (Post-2018 Supreme Court ruling on sports betting) show that legalization enhances consumer protection, prevents money laundering and strengthens sports integrity. The International Cricket Council and FIFA have also advocated for regulated betting markets to mitigate corruption risks.

The BCCI's Anti-Corruption Unit supports stringent regulation, as its former chief Ajit Singh stated: *"If betting is legalized and properly regulated, it will be easier to track suspicious activities and ensure the integrity of sports."* (Singh, 2020, as cited in Indian Express).

Thus, legalizing and regulating sports betting would bring it into the formal economy allowing for better oversight, consumer protection and reduced financial crimes.

▪ Challenges in Implementing Regulations

- **Social Concerns: Gambling Addiction and Potential Exploitation of Athletes:** One of the primary challenges in regulating sports betting is addressing social concerns, including gambling addiction and the risk of athletes being exploited. Critics argue that legalization may lead to an increase in gambling problem, particularly among young people and vulnerable populations. The Law Commission of India (2018) acknowledged these risks, stating: *"Betting and gambling, though a source of revenue, can lead to addiction, financial distress and social instability if not regulated with stringent safeguards."*

Studies from jurisdictions where betting is legal, such as the United Kingdom, shows that gambling problem affects nearly 0.5% of the adult population and can lead to financial ruin, mental health issues and social distress. The availability of online betting platforms further complicates the problem, as it increases accessibility and the risk of addiction.

Another major concern is the exploitation of athletes, especially younger or lower paid players, who may be pressured or incentivized to engage in match fixing. The ICC and FIFA have emphasized that athletes must be educated about the risks of betting related corruption.

- **Jurisdictional Conflicts: Variations in State Laws Complicating Enforcement:** India's federal structure creates significant jurisdictional challenges in regulating sports betting as gambling laws fall under state control. The Public Gambling Act, 1867, which governs gambling laws in India, does not provide uniformity, leading to inconsistencies in implementation across states.

08. Conclusion and Recommendations

The legalization and regulation of sports betting in India require a balanced approach that maximizes economic benefits while mitigating social and legal risks. The current fragmented legal framework and enforcement challenges highlight the urgent need for comprehensive reforms.

8.1 Recommendations

- Unified National Legislation: establishing a central regulatory authority to oversee sports betting would ensure uniformity, betting enforcement and accountability across all states. A well defined framework can prevent jurisdictional conflicts and streamline regulation.
- Strict Licensing Mechanism: A robust licensing system should be implemented to ensure that only authorized and compliant operators can function legally. Licensing criteria should include transparency, financial accountability and responsible gaming measures.
- Player protection and Ethical Awareness: Athletes, particularly young and lower tier players should undergo educational programs on the risks of match fixing, betting related corruption and gambling addiction. Awareness campaigns can help maintain the integrity of sports.
- International Cooperation: India can learn from successful global models such as the UK Gambling Commission and US sports betting regulations. Collaborating with international bodies like FIFA and the ICC can help develop best practices for a secure and transparent sports betting industry.

A well regulated legal framework will not only generate revenue but also protect sports integrity and ensure consumer safety, making legalization a viable and necessary step forward.

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