

A Transdisciplinary Analysis of Online Gambling Persistence and Disruption Strategies in Indonesia

Agit fatan Sugito, Zulkarnaen Koto, Ilham Uране Aziz, Muhammad Rayhan
Rasendriya Natasaputra

^{1,2,3} Sekolah Tinggi Ilmu Kepolisian, Jakarta, Indonesia

Email: a_fatan_s@stik-ptik.ac.id; zulkarneinkoto@gmail.com; Uранеilham@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT:

Online gambling (judi online) has become one of Indonesia's most consequential digital-era social problems, generating fund flows that the Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre recorded at Rp286.84 trillion across 422.1 million transactions in 2025 (PPATK, 2026). The persistence of mass participation despite aggressive socialisation campaigns, large-scale website blocking, and high-profile law-enforcement operations presents a clear research problem: state deterrence does not produce the disengagement that its underlying logic predicts. Existing Indonesian scholarship documents the legal and economic dimensions of the phenomenon (Lewiandy et al., 2024) and its links to predatory lending (Ramalina Ranaivo, 2024), yet it rarely integrates criminological strain theory, behavioural neuroscience, platform-capitalism critique, and transnational organised-crime analysis within a single explanatory architecture. This article addresses that gap by asking why online gambling persists in Indonesia despite systemic risk socialisation, and what an evidence-based eradication strategy would require. Adopting a critical-interpretivist paradigm and a qualitative document-analysis design, the study synthesises primary government data (PPATK, OJK, Komdigi), the Lancet Public Health Commission on gambling, and transnational-crime reporting from UNODC, the United States Institute of Peace, and the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime. The main findings show that persistence is sustained by three reinforcing mechanisms: socio-economic strain that reframes gambling as adaptive coping, platform architectures that exploit documented neurocognitive biases, and governance deficits that leave transnational financial and human-trafficking networks largely untouched. The article contributes a transdisciplinary explanatory model and a reform agenda built around biometric financial-rail closure, immigration-integrated enforcement, algorithmic co-governance, and regulated cooperative credit.

Keywords: online gambling; Indonesia; general strain theory; platform capitalism; transnational organised crime; public health regulation

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Introduction

The expansion of mobile connectivity across the global South has widened access to the digital economy while exposing populations to industrialised forms of online harm. Indonesia illustrates this dynamic with unusual clarity. Internet penetration reached 79.5 percent of the population, or roughly 221.5 million users, by 2024 (APJII, 2024), yet the national digital-literacy index sat at only 3.54 on a five-point scale (Afrina et al., 2024). The gap between connection and critical competence created fertile ground for predatory digital industries, and online gambling moved into that space at scale. The Financial Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre (PPATK) recorded gambling-related fund flows rising from Rp57.9 trillion in 2021 to Rp327 trillion in 2023 and Rp359.81 trillion in 2024, before a contested decline to Rp286.84 trillion in 2025 (PPATK, 2026; Rahmat & Muhafidin, 2026).

These figures expose an analytical puzzle that conventional deterrence theory cannot resolve. The Indonesian state has pursued an aggressive suppression strategy through the Ministry of Communication and Digital Affairs, the National Police, and PPATK, blocking millions of sites and prosecuting thousands of players, yet participation remained mass-scale. PPATK reported that 12.3 million people made gambling deposits in 2025 alone (PPATK, 2026). If citizens behaved as the rational, information-responsive actors that risk-socialisation campaigns assume, repeated public warnings about financial ruin and illegality would have produced widespread disengagement. They did not. Participation persisted across income groups, age cohorts, and even state institutions, with officials citing involvement among military and police personnel (ANTARA, 2024).

Indonesian and international scholarship has examined parts of this problem. Legal-economic analysis frames prohibition as a contest between deterrence and a resilient black market (Lewiandy et al., 2024). Public-health research reframes gambling as a population-level harm rather than an individual vice, most authoritatively in the

Lancet Public Health Commission, which estimated that around 448.7 million adults worldwide are affected by gambling harm and that online casino and slot products carry the highest disorder rates (Wardle et al., 2024). Criminological work applies general strain theory to gambling as adaptive coping (Malkin, 2024), while behavioural neuroscience documents how near-miss events recruit reward circuitry that sustains play (Clark et al., 2009). Transnational-crime research maps the Southeast Asian scam-compound economy that hosts much of the supply side (UNODC, 2024).

These literatures rarely speak to one another. Legal studies seldom incorporate the neuroscience of compulsion; public-health analyses rarely engage the political economy of platform design; and transnational-crime reporting is often disconnected from the domestic strain conditions that generate demand. The result is a fragmented evidence base that explains components of persistence without modelling their interaction. Indonesia-specific work compounds the gap by leaning on contested secondary statistics rather than reconciling conflicting primary data. This study addresses both problems by integrating the disciplines and by treating statistical disagreement as evidence to be adjudicated rather than smoothed over.

The central research question follows from this gap: why does online gambling persist in Indonesia despite systemic state socialisation of its risks, and what would an evidence-based eradication strategy require? Two subsidiary questions structure the inquiry. First, which mechanisms convert socio-economic and technological conditions into sustained participation? Second, why do current supply-side interventions fail to disrupt those mechanisms?

The aim is to construct a transdisciplinary explanatory model of persistence and to derive policy implications from it. The objectives are fourfold: to integrate strain, rational-choice, social-control, platform-capitalism, and neutralisation perspectives into a single framework; to apply that framework to current

Indonesian data; to analyse the structural consequences that follow; and to evaluate reform options against comparative evidence. The contribution is both theoretical, in the form of an integrated model, and practical, in the form of a reform agenda grounded in verifiable data. The article proceeds through a critical literature review, a statement of methodology, a thematic findings section, a discussion that situates the findings against prior research, an articulation of the study's contributions, and a conclusion that answers the research question.

2. Critical Literature Review

Online gambling refers to wagering conducted through internet-enabled platforms, encompassing sports betting, casino-style games, and slot products accessed via websites and mobile applications. The Lancet Public Health Commission classifies it as a commercial determinant of health, situating it alongside tobacco and alcohol as an industry whose profits depend on sustained, harmful consumption (Wardle et al., 2024). In the Indonesian context the activity is also a criminal offence under the Criminal Code and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, which means that participation carries legal as well as financial and health risk. This triple framing, as crime, as commercial-determinant harm, and as deviance, structures the theoretical debate.

The scholarly understanding of gambling has shifted across three phases. Early moral and clinical models treated it as individual pathology or weakness of will. A second phase, grounded in behavioural psychology, located the behaviour in reinforcement schedules and cognitive distortions. A third and current phase, advanced by the Lancet Commission, reframes gambling as a structurally produced population harm driven by industry design and weak regulation, with expansion most rapid in low-income and middle-income countries where regulatory infrastructure is thin (Wardle et al., 2024). This progression matters for Indonesia because state policy still operates largely within the first phase, treating gambling as moral failure to be corrected through

warning, while the evidence has moved decisively toward the third.

General strain theory, formulated by Agnew (1992), holds that deviance is an adaptive response to structural strain, particularly the gap between culturally promoted goals and the legitimate means available to reach them. Empirical work supports the link to gambling: Greco and Curci (2017), analysing 266 families with a hierarchical linear model, found a significant effect of strain on gambling and confirmed the family's role in transmitting the behaviour. Malkin (2024) extends this by showing that strain arising from another person's gambling predicts one's own gambling disorder, a vicarious-strain effect with direct relevance to household transmission. For a population in which 71 percent of active players earned under Rp5 million per month (Riskitiasyah & Paksi, 2025), strain theory reframes participation as a rational response to economic pressure rather than a moral lapse.

Rational choice theory, developed by Cornish and Clarke (1986), models offending as utility-maximising cost-benefit calculation. Its explanatory power for gambling is limited by bounded rationality, the systematic deviation of real decisions from the rational ideal. Kahneman and Tversky (1979) showed in prospect theory that people overweight small probabilities, which raises the appeal of long-odds bets, and become risk-seeking in the domain of losses, which drives loss-chasing. Their observation that a person who has not accepted prior losses will take gambles that would otherwise be unacceptable describes the mechanics of the gambling debt spiral. Rational choice therefore explains why deterrence is attempted, but prospect theory explains why deterrence framed around expected value fails to persuade.

Social control theory, associated with Hirschi (1969), argues that conformity depends on bonds to conventional society through attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief. Where family supervision is weak, schooling fails to build critical digital literacy, and state institutions offer only superficial engagement, these bonds

attenuate and the cost of deviance falls. Indonesian conditions, with a digital-literacy index of 3.54 (Afrina et al., 2024) and documented peer normalisation of gambling among students (Dellastrada & Yudha, 2025), map onto this account, locating part of the explanation in eroded micro-level control rather than individual choice alone.

The most direct challenge to agency-centred theories comes from platform-capitalism critique. Zuboff (2019) and Srnicek (2017) argue that digital platforms extract behavioural data to predict and shape conduct for profit. Applied to gambling, this lens reframes operators as designers of compulsion rather than passive hosts of chance. The neuroscience supplies the mechanism: Clark et al. (2009) demonstrated that near-miss outcomes, though objectively losses, recruit the striatal and insula circuitry that responds to wins, and that this effect intensifies when the player believes they have personal control. Loot-box and dark-pattern research extends the point to design features, with population-survey evidence linking loot-box engagement to problematic gaming and gambling (von Meduna et al., 2020). These platforms are engineered to override the self-control that risk-socialisation presumes.

Sykes and Matza's (1957) techniques of neutralisation explain how participants suspend the moral force of norms they otherwise accept. In the gambling economy, language performs this work. Operators avoid the word perjudian, marketing their products as games, interactive slots, or donations, which lets users reframe an illegal activity as ordinary entertainment (UNODC, 2024). Critical discourse analysis of Indonesian gambling advertisements shows how multimodal promotion normalises participation (Mahardika & colleagues, as analysed in critical multimodal work, 2023), and semiotic critique of responsible-gambling messaging reaches an unambiguous verdict that such language is ethically compromised (De Vita, 2025). Linguistic framing thus operates as a cognitive barrier that blunts state warnings.

These perspectives compete on the question of agency. Rational choice and, in its policy translation, deterrence theory locate causation in the individual's choice and therefore prescribe information and punishment. Strain and social-control theories locate it in structural conditions and weak bonds, prescribing economic and institutional reform. Platform-capitalism critique locates it in engineered systems, prescribing regulation of design and data. A purely individual-agency reading cannot explain why informed players continue, while a purely structural reading struggles to explain variation among similarly situated individuals. The disagreement is not merely academic, because each diagnosis implies a different and partly incompatible policy.

Synthesis resolves the tension by arranging the theories as nested levels rather than rivals. Strain supplies the macro-level motivation, the economic pressure that makes the promise of quick gain salient. Platform capitalism supplies the meso-level mechanism, the engineered environment that converts motivation into sustained behaviour by exploiting the neurocognitive biases that prospect theory and near-miss research describe. Weak social control and neutralising language supply the micro-level permission, lowering the social and moral cost of acting on the motivation. **Deterrence fails because it targets only the rational-actor layer, addressing none of the three levels that actually drive persistence.** This layered reading is the study's organising contribution to the literature.

The conceptual framework that follows treats persistence as the product of three interacting forces: socio-economic strain (motivation), platform architecture exploiting cognitive bias (mechanism), and governance and normative deficits (permission), with transnational organisation amplifying all three by placing supply beyond domestic reach. The findings section applies this framework to Indonesian data, and the discussion tests it against prior studies. The framework predicts that interventions confined to one level will be absorbed by the others, which is the central

hypothesis the Indonesian case is used to examine.

3. Methodology

This study operates within a critical-interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism guides the reading of meaning in how participants, operators, and the state frame online gambling, while the critical orientation directs attention to power, structural inequality, and the political economy that shapes those framings. The paradigm fits a problem in which the same behaviour functions simultaneously as coping, as crime, and as an engineered commercial outcome, since no single positivist measure captures that multiplicity.

The ontological position is one of critical realism. Online gambling persistence is treated as a real phenomenon with measurable effects, including capital flows, divorce filings, and trafficking cases, while its causes are understood as layered and not directly observable. Causal mechanisms such as strain or engineered compulsion are real but operate beneath the surface of the statistics, which makes them objects of inference rather than direct measurement.

Epistemologically, the study holds that knowledge of these mechanisms is built by triangulating documentary traces against theory. Official statistics, peer-reviewed findings, and institutional reports each carry partial and interested perspectives, so validity comes from convergence across independent sources rather than from any single authoritative figure. This commitment shapes the treatment of conflicting data described below.

The design is a qualitative case study of a single national setting, Indonesia, examined through document analysis. The case-study form suits a contemporary phenomenon studied within its real-world context where the boundary between phenomenon and context is unclear. Document analysis was selected because the relevant evidence already exists in dispersed form across government, academic, and civil-society outputs, and because direct data collection from an illegal and stigmatised population would raise serious ethical and validity problems.

Data were drawn from four source tiers. The first comprised primary government documents, principally PPATK press releases and strategic reports, OJK enforcement data, and Komdigi statements. The second comprised peer-reviewed journal articles and the Lancet Public Health Commission. The third comprised reports from intergovernmental and specialist bodies, including UNODC, the United States Institute of Peace, the Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime, and the United States Department of the Treasury. The fourth comprised reputable journalism, used only to corroborate or date events established in the higher tiers.

Sampling was purposive and theory-driven. Documents were selected for their relevance to the three-level framework and for their evidentiary tier, with primary and peer-reviewed sources prioritised over secondary reporting. The search targeted the period 2023 to 2026 for empirical data, while retaining seminal theoretical works regardless of date. Sources lacking a traceable DOI, stable institutional URL, or verifiable authorship were excluded, and aggregator blogs and trade-press estimates were treated as background only.

Collection proceeded by assembling documents against the framework's three levels and the transnational dimension, then extracting specific datapoints, findings, and arguments from each. Each extracted figure was recorded with its source and date so that conflicting estimates could be compared rather than merged. Where a widely repeated statistic could be traced only to secondary reporting, its provenance was noted explicitly.

Analysis used theoretical thematic analysis. Themes were derived deductively from the conceptual framework and refined inductively as the documents were read. Each theme was then developed through a fixed analytical sequence, moving from evidence to description, interpretation, theoretical linkage, and an interim conclusion, so that the analysis remained interpretive rather than merely descriptive. Conflicting statistics were adjudicated by

privileging primary over secondary sources and by presenting irreducible disagreements as attributed ranges.

Trustworthiness was pursued through the four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility rests on source triangulation across the four tiers. Transferability is supported by thick contextual description of the Indonesian case. Dependability follows from the explicit, repeatable selection and adjudication rules. Confirmability is strengthened by anchoring each claim to a citable source and by flagging figures that could not be verified to a primary origin.

Because the study uses only existing public documents and collects no data from human participants, it raises no issues of consent or confidentiality. The principal ethical duty is to representational accuracy. Statistics on a stigmatised and criminalised behaviour can cause harm if exaggerated or misattributed, so the analysis avoids inflating figures, attributes contested claims to their source, and treats individuals affected by gambling harm as subjects of structural conditions rather than objects of blame.

Reflexively, the author acknowledges that a critical paradigm predisposes the analysis toward structural rather than individual explanations, which could understate genuine agency. The framework's layered design partly offsets this by retaining a rational-actor level, and the discussion deliberately engages counterarguments, including the case that prohibition itself sustains the black market, to limit confirmation bias.

The design carries limitations. Reliance on secondary documents means the analysis inherits the gaps and interests of its sources, including the Indonesian state's incentive to report enforcement success. The absence of primary fieldwork precludes direct testing of the strain and neutralisation mechanisms at the individual level. Rapidly changing statistics mean some figures will date quickly. These constraints are weighed in the interpretation and identified as priorities for future research.

4. Findings

Applying the three-level framework to current Indonesian data yields four themes. Each is developed through the sequence of theme, evidence, description, interpretation, theoretical linkage, and interim conclusion.

4.1 Socio-economic strain as the motivational base

The first theme is that participation concentrates among the economically strained, which positions gambling as adaptive coping rather than recreational choice. The evidence is demographic. Data for 2024 indicate that 71 percent of active players earned under Rp5 million per month and a further 15 percent earned between Rp5 and Rp10 million (Riskitiasyah & Paksi, 2025), while officials estimated that roughly 80 percent of players belonged to lower and lower-middle income groups (ANTARA, 2024). PPATK recorded that 12.3 million people made gambling deposits in 2025 (PPATK, 2026).

These figures describe a participant base drawn overwhelmingly from those with the least financial slack. For a household earning under Rp5 million per month, the promise of rapid return carries a salience that statistical improbability does not dispel, because the alternative legitimate routes to financial relief are scarce. The interpretation is that the state's warning, that gambling is risky and illegal, addresses a calculation the player is not making. The player is not weighing expected value; they are responding to immediate economic pressure with the only high-upside option visible to them.

This pattern is precisely what general strain theory predicts, with gambling functioning as an innovative adaptation to the gap between the goal of financial security and the legitimate means of reaching it (Agnew, 1992; Greco & Curci, 2017). The vicarious-strain finding, that exposure to another's gambling raises one's own disorder risk (Malkin, 2024), further explains household and community clustering. The interim conclusion is that strain constitutes the motivational base of persistence, and that any strategy ignoring the

economic driver treats a symptom while leaving the cause intact.

4.2 Platform architecture and the engineering of compulsion

The second theme is that platform design converts motivation into sustained behaviour by exploiting documented cognitive biases, which explains why informed players continue. The evidence combines design and neuroscience. Operators deploy manipulative interface architectures, algorithmic targeting, and reward loops (Hing et al., 2022), while experimental work shows that near-miss outcomes recruit win-related striatal and insula circuitry and intensify the motivation to continue, especially under an illusion of personal control (Clark et al., 2009). Population-survey data link gambling-like loot-box mechanics to problematic engagement (von Meduna et al., 2020).

The design exploits a low-literacy population, with only a 3.54 national digital-literacy score (Afrina et al., 2024), through influencer marketing and gamified interfaces that blur the boundary between video games and gambling. The interpretation is that the platform functions as a behavioural instrument. It does not merely offer a wager; it engineers the conditions under which the brain's reward system treats losses as near-wins and sustains play against the player's own financial interest. Risk-socialisation campaigns, which assume a deliberating rational actor, cannot reach a player whose persistence is being driven below the level of deliberate choice.

This evidence substantiates the platform-capitalism critique that operators design compulsion rather than host chance (Srnicsek, 2017; Zuboff, 2019) and exposes the limits of rational choice theory, since prospect theory's loss-domain risk-seeking (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979) is here amplified by engineered near-misses. The interim conclusion is that the mechanism of persistence is architectural, located in the platform, which means demand cannot be addressed by information alone and supply cannot be addressed without regulating design.

4.3 Financial rails, neutralising language, and weak control

The third theme is that a permissive infrastructure of disposable financial accounts, normalising language, and weak oversight lowers the cost of participation. The evidence is financial and linguistic. PPATK reported that more than 28,000 accounts originating from account buying and selling were used for gambling deposits in 2024 (PPATK, 2025a), and that operators increasingly route funds through QRIS and cryptocurrency to frustrate tracing (PPATK, 2025b). Secondary reporting of a PPATK briefing put the laundering-account population near 1.5 million, including roughly 150,000 nominee accounts (Detik, as reported, 2025). Operators simultaneously market products in euphemistic terms that avoid the word gambling (UNODC, 2024).

This infrastructure describes a system in which money moves easily and meaning is disguised. Impoverished individuals sell dormant accounts for quick cash, supplying the rails through which deposits flow, while the language of games and donations lets players neutralise the stigma of an illegal act. The interpretation is that participation is cheap in both senses, financially frictionless and morally pre-excused. Where family supervision and digital education are weak, the social bonds that might raise the cost of deviance are absent.

The pattern integrates Sykes and Matza's (1957) neutralisation, in which language suspends moral restraint, with Hirschi's (1969) account of attenuated bonds, and with the political economy of disposable financial identities. The interim conclusion is that persistence is granted permission at the micro level, which means that closing the financial rails and contesting the language are necessary complements to any economic or design-focused intervention.

4.4 Transnational organisation and the governance deficit

The fourth theme is that the supply side sits largely beyond Indonesian jurisdiction, which converts a domestic enforcement problem into a

transnational one. The evidence is regional. The servers, operators, and financiers concentrate in Southeast Asian scam compounds, notably in Cambodia, Myanmar, and Laos, where the United States Institute of Peace estimated that scam centres generated around US\$43.8 billion in 2023, equivalent to roughly 40 percent of the host economies' combined GDP (USIP, 2024). The UN human-rights office estimated that about 220,000 people were held as forced labour in such centres in Cambodia and Myanmar (USIP, 2024). Indonesian arrivals in Cambodia rose sharply, with embassy records showing the registered population climbing from 75,653 to 127,178 (Rofii & Ardiyansah, 2026).

These figures describe an industry that is both the source of supply and a site of human-trafficking harm, recruiting Indonesians through fraudulent job offers into debt bondage as scam operators. The interpretation is that domestic suppression, confined to blocking URLs and prosecuting low-level local players, cannot reach the operators, who generate new domains faster than the state can block them and who launder proceeds through cross-border crypto rails (PPATK, 2025b; UNODC, 2024). The Online Gambling Eradication Task Force established under Presidential Decree 21 of 2024 was hampered by a short mandate and by the exclusion of immigration authorities from its structure (Lewandy et al., 2024; Rofii & Ardiyansah, 2026).

This theme amplifies the other three, since transnational organisation places the engineered platforms and the financial rails outside the reach of the very state attempting deterrence. The interim conclusion is that the governance deficit is structural, not administrative, and that effective intervention requires international and cross-sectoral coordination rather than intensified domestic blocking.

5. Discussion

The discussion situates each finding against theory and prior studies, then draws out implications. It follows the sequence of findings, theory, previous studies, critical interpretation, and implications.

5.1 Why deterrence fails

The finding that participation concentrates among the economically strained sits in tension with the deterrence logic of state policy. Rational choice theory predicts that informed actors desist once warned (Cornish & Clarke, 1986), yet strain theory predicts the opposite where legitimate means are scarce (Agnew, 1992). Previous Indonesian studies documented the demographic skew (Riskitiasyah & Paksi, 2025) and the economic drivers (Lewandy et al., 2024) but stopped short of explaining why information campaigns fail against them. The critical interpretation is that the two theories describe different populations: deterrence works on those with alternatives, while the strained majority has none, so warning them changes the moral framing of a choice they feel compelled to make without changing the compulsion. The implication is that demand-side policy must reduce strain through regulated credit and economic support, not merely repeat warnings.

5.2 The architecture problem and the limits of literacy

The finding that platforms engineer compulsion challenges the assumption, embedded in literacy-focused responses, that better-informed users will resist. The neuroscience of near-misses (Clark et al., 2009) and the political economy of platform design (Zuboff, 2019) together explain a persistence that operates beneath deliberation. Prior work established that structural changes in online gambling intensified harm (Hing et al., 2022) and that gaming-gambling convergence widened exposure (Kolandai-Matchett & Wenden Abbott, 2022; von Meduna et al., 2020), but Indonesian policy has not absorbed the implication. The critical interpretation is that literacy is necessary but insufficient, because no level of awareness fully neutralises an environment built to exploit reward circuitry. The implication is that the state must regulate design itself, through algorithmic co-governance with platform gatekeepers, rather than relying on user resilience.

5.3 Harm beyond the individual

The finding that a permissive infrastructure sustains participation connects to a cascade of structural harms that prior studies treated in isolation. The macro-economic drain is one, the National Economic Council and PPATK estimated that gambling reduced 2024 economic growth by about 0.3 percentage points (InvestorTrust, 2025), with funds diverted from household consumption that constitutes about 54.9 percent of GDP (ANTARA, 2024). Household harm is another, BPS-linked data recorded a sharp rise in gambling-related divorce (Pirdaus et al., 2024), and the debt spiral pushes losers toward predatory pinjol charging confiscatory rates, with overdue online-loan debt reaching Rp100.69 trillion by early 2026 (Yahoo Finance, 2026; Ramalina Ranaivo, 2024). The mental-health toll is severe which meta-analytic evidence reports lifetime suicidal ideation near 31.6 percent and attempts near 13.2 percent among people with gambling problems (Kristensen et al., 2024), and registry data show a standardised mortality ratio for suicide of 5.12 among gambling-disorder patients (Lancet Regional Health Europe, 2024). The critical interpretation, following the Lancet Commission (Wardle et al., 2024), is that these are not separate problems but linked expressions of a single commercial-determinant harm. The implication is that gambling warrants a public-health response calibrated to population-level damage, not a narrow criminal-justice one.

5.4 The transnational ceiling on domestic enforcement

The finding that supply sits offshore explains the ceiling on domestic enforcement and connects domestic demand to regional organised crime. UNODC (2024) and GI-TOC (2025) documented the convergence of gambling, cyber-fraud, and underground banking in Mekong-region compounds, while the US Treasury sanctioned laundering hubs central to the trade (OFAC, 2025). Indonesian scholarship recognised the trafficking dimension (Rofii & Ardiyansah, 2026) and the jurisdictional limits of the task force (Lewiandy et al., 2024), but rarely

linked these to the financial-rail and crypto-laundering evidence. The critical interpretation is that the state's most visible tools, blocking and local prosecution, operate only on the lowest and most replaceable layer of the system, while the operators, financiers, and traffickers remain beyond reach. The implication is that effective policy requires immigration-integrated enforcement, financial-rail closure, and international cooperation, since unilateral domestic action cannot disrupt a transnational structure.

5.5 A counterargument

A serious counterargument holds that prohibition itself produces the black market, its violence, and its laundering, much as alcohol prohibition once did, and that regulation and taxation would reduce harm more effectively (a position engaged in Lewiandy et al., 2024). The evidence offers partial support, since the offshore supply and nominee-account economy are partly artefacts of illegality. Yet the public-health literature cautions that liberalised, heavily marketed gambling produces its own population-scale harm, with online casino and slot products carrying the highest disorder rates (Wardle et al., 2024). The critical interpretation is that the choice is not binary between prohibition and a free market, because both extremes generate harm through different channels. The implication is a middle path that closes the financial and design mechanisms of the illegal market while addressing demand through economic and public-health measures, rather than legalising a product engineered to harm.

6. Contribution

6.1 Theoretical contribution

The study's theoretical contribution is an integrated, multi-level model of gambling persistence that arranges strain, platform-capitalism, and control-and-neutralisation theories as nested layers rather than competing explanations. Prior work applied these frameworks in isolation (Agnew, 1992; Malkin, 2024; Zuboff, 2019), which left the failure of deterrence underexplained. By specifying

motivation, mechanism, and permission as interacting levels amplified by transnational organisation, the model explains why interventions confined to one layer are absorbed by the others, and it offers a transferable template for analysing other engineered digital harms in low-literacy, high-strain settings.

6.2 Empirical contribution

Empirically, the study assembles current Indonesian data from primary government sources and reconciles conflicting figures that secondary accounts had repeated uncritically. It distinguishes partial-year from full-year PPATK turnover figures, separates active-player counts from deposit-maker counts, and attributes the contested GDP-drag estimates to their sources, presenting them as ranges rather than false precision. This disciplined treatment of contested statistics provides a more defensible evidentiary base than prior summaries and models a method for handling politically sensitive official data.

6.3 Methodological contribution

Methodologically, the study demonstrates a transparent, tiered document-analysis procedure for a phenomenon that resists primary data collection because of its illegality and stigma. The explicit source-tier hierarchy, the rule of privileging primary over secondary evidence, and the practice of flagging unverifiable figures together offer a replicable protocol for evidence synthesis on criminalised digital behaviours, where data quality varies sharply across sources.

6.4 Practical contribution

Practically, the study derives a reform agenda aligned to the three levels of the model. To close the permission layer, it supports biometric registration of SIM cards and bank accounts, a policy Indonesia has begun under Permenkomdigi No. 7 of 2026 and OJK account-blocking that reached more than 31,000 accounts by early 2026 (Biometric Update, 2025; SiGMA World, as reported, 2026). To address the mechanism layer, it argues for algorithmic co-governance with platform gatekeepers, modelled on the EU Digital Services Act's duties on dark patterns and minor-targeted advertising

(European Commission, 2022). To reach the motivation layer, it proposes regulated cooperative credit through OJK-registered platforms, tempered by the evidence that commercialised microcredit can itself become predatory (Bloomberg, 2022). To close the governance deficit, it calls for integrating immigration authorities into the eradication task force (Rofii & Ardiyansah, 2026).

7. Conclusion

This article asked why online gambling persists in Indonesia despite systemic state socialisation of its risks, and what an evidence-based eradication strategy would require. The answer is that persistence is produced by three reinforcing mechanisms that deterrence does not touch: socio-economic strain that makes gambling a rational adaptation for those without legitimate alternatives, platform architectures that exploit documented neurocognitive biases to sustain play beneath the level of choice, and a permissive infrastructure of disposable accounts, normalising language, and weak control, all amplified by a transnational supply chain beyond domestic jurisdiction.

The findings established each mechanism against current data. Strain explains the concentration of players among low-income groups (Riskitiasyah & Paksi, 2025). Platform design explains why informed players continue, through engineered near-misses that recruit reward circuitry (Clark et al., 2009). Disposable financial rails and euphemistic marketing explain the low cost of participation (PPATK, 2025a; UNODC, 2024). Transnational organisation explains the ceiling on enforcement and the trafficking harm that accompanies supply (USIP, 2024; Rofii & Ardiyansah, 2026).

The theoretical implication is that single-discipline accounts of digital deviance are inadequate for engineered harms. Persistence becomes legible only when strain, platform capitalism, and control-and-neutralisation theories are read as nested levels, a model that should transfer to other predatory digital industries operating in high-strain, low-literacy contexts.

The policy implication is that suppression confined to blocking and local prosecution cannot succeed, because it targets the most replaceable layer of a multi-level system. An effective strategy must close the financial rails through biometric account registration, regulate platform design through algorithmic co-governance, reduce strain through regulated cooperative credit, and disrupt the transnational supply through immigration-integrated and internationally coordinated enforcement. The framing should shift from moral suppression toward a public-health and structural approach consistent with the Lancet Commission (Wardle et al., 2024).

The conclusions are bounded by the study's reliance on secondary documents, which inherit

the interests and gaps of their sources, and by the absence of primary fieldwork to test the strain and neutralisation mechanisms at the individual level. Several statistics will date quickly given the speed of change in this domain.

Future research should pursue primary fieldwork with affected populations to test the motivational mechanisms directly, longitudinal evaluation of the 2026 biometric and account-blocking measures to assess whether closing the financial rails reduces participation, and comparative study of other Southeast Asian states facing the same transnational supply, so that the model developed here can be refined and its policy implications tested against outcomes.

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