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[Gamblers in Native American casino.](#)
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Summary Article: **gambling**

From *The Macmillan Encyclopedia*

Playing a game of chance, or betting on the outcome of an uncertain event, in the hope of winning money. Games of chance, betting, financial speculation, lotteries, and similar activities, have been a part of human activity for all of recorded history. Attempts to suppress these activities, or to control them, have an equally long history. Christian Churches, especially the more Protestant denominations, have often opposed gambling on moral and theological grounds. Kings and governments have in the past regarded it as a distraction from “honest” hard work and imposed laws against gambling, often aimed at the working classes. Thus, gaming houses and betting shops have frequently been banned. In England, for example, Henry VIII banned gaming houses, because they distracted young men from their “proper” military pursuits. This ban remained in force until the 1960s, when the Betting, Gaming and Lotteries Act (1963) and the Gaming Act (1968) permitted gaming under licence. However, the wealthy have always been able to engage freely in gambling on stocks, shares, currencies, and commodities: the desire to gain money without having to work for it knows no class barriers. Official attitudes have sometimes been guided by an assumption that the rich will gamble responsibly, while the poor, in desperation, will not.

In the UK, gaming is now a major industry, with football pools, betting on horseraces and greyhound races, casinos, gaming clubs, and amusement arcades licensed by the Gaming Board of Great Britain. Horseraces and greyhound races have an immense following: the annual amount of off-course betting on horseraces in the 1990s exceeded £6 billion. The **National Lottery**, introduced in 1994, regulated (from 1999) by the National Lottery Commission, and run by Camelot plc, is estimated to attract some two-thirds of the adult population, who spend on average about £2.60 each per week on the lottery tickets. Of the billions of pounds staked each year, 50% goes in prize money, 12% goes to the government as tax, and 28% is divided between certain approved good causes (the remainder is divided between Camelot and the retailers). However, the National Lottery was not the first organized attempt by the British government to cash in on the gambling instinct. Premium bonds, introduced in 1956, enable savers to gamble with the interest on their savings (retaining the right to recover the value of the bond at any time).

The urge to gamble exists everywhere in the world and is usually now catered for by governments, who seek ways of taking a share of the stake money (the major exception is in Islamic states, where gambling is forbidden). However, gambling, like drinking and taking illegal drugs, can become addictive with dire consequences to the gambler's life and family (See Gamblers' Anonymous).

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