

Competing for Growth

The Exceptional Case of Gaming

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Contrary to what the urban political economy literature would lead us to predict, riverboat casinos have increasingly faced strong, organized opposition in many states across the country despite the large amounts of private investments, jobs, and tax revenues generated by casino developments. Yet at the same time, no such significant opposition has developed to successfully challenge the granting of large public subsidies to other private businesses by state and local governments. The author argues that this anomaly is explained by the mobilization of nationally organized interest groups that are successful in framing gaming as a moral, expressive issue, not only an instrumental strategy of economic development. These groups have been able to exploit the decentralization and fragmentation of the political system by exerting influence in several arenas, including citizen referenda, legal appeals, and legislative action.

Keywords: gaming; gambling; economic development

Despite the large volumes of jobs, private investments, and tax revenues that they bring to local economies, riverboat casinos have repeatedly faced well-organized, highly vocal opposition in many states and cities across the country. The opposition has been remarkably successful, essentially stopping riverboat gambling from spreading across the United States. The success of this opposition seems to contradict the substantial literature on local economic development, which documents the intense competition among jurisdictions for growth and the creative strategies that jurisdictions employ to lure investment. State and local governments continue to give substantial tax breaks, job training funds, free land, and other subsidies to private business, but they have backed away from the one industry that seems to require few if any subsidies—an industry that has invested billions of dollars, created thousand of jobs, and generated millions of dollars in new tax revenue. What explains the exceptional nature of gambling? How does it differ from the industries that states and localities fight to attract and keep?

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In this article, I use the state of Missouri as a case study to explore the contrast in the political economy's response to "normal" economic development projects and casino gaming. Missouri is an excellent candidate for this purpose because it has recently promoted a variety of large subsidized economic development projects; at the same time, the gaming industry has become well established in the state. In 1995, the state of Missouri, amid heated controversy, agreed to pay half of the construction cost of a new football stadium in St. Louis. The stadium controversy showed that all sides understood that the fight was basically about whether the stadium was a wise use of taxpayer dollars.

It is important to note that the controversy over a football stadium was unusual. Most subsidies for economic development are considered and extended without public notice or controversy; they are bureaucratic and routine. In Missouri, three economic development incentive packages totaling \$3.25 million provided by the state to Wal-Mart Corporation were processed routinely through the state's Department of Economic Development. In contrast to both the stadium and Wal-Mart cases, during the same period, the state went through three highly contentious statewide referendums on casino gambling since the first one that legalized gaming in 1992. In this article, I examine these three very different examples as a way of revealing why gaming is an exceptional economic development strategy subject to a unique policy process.

The controversies over the stadium and gaming issues reveal that, unlike the stadium, gaming is a public policy issue that carries an important "expressive" dimension. Opponents to stadium financing tended to approach the issue in instrumental terms; that is, they shared with proponents the assumption that the issue of state financing should be judged on the question of whether the stadium's benefits outweighed its costs. In contrast, opponents to gaming and its expansion defined gambling as a moral issue, and thus, the controversy over gaming became "expressive" rather than instrumental (Rochefort & Cobb, 1994). The issue was not whether gaming might be a good public investment but whether it was right or wrong. Groups that treat issues in expressive terms are able to mobilize citizens and organizations that ordinarily do not usually care about economic development issues. As the Missouri case shows, they also are able to expand the scope of conflict to a national arena (Schnattschneider, 1960). By doing so, they are able to readily mobilize opposition to gaming in many places simultaneously, and thus influence governments all across the country.

THE CASINO INDUSTRY AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Governments at all levels in the United States provide financial incentives, such as tax abatements and credits, underwriting the cost of land, public funding of worker training, and the exercise of governmental powers, especially through the use of eminent domain, for the benefit of particular firms. State and local governments in the United States have a long history of competing for new

investment and capital (Boorstin, 1992; Handlin & Handlin, 1969; Heath, 1954; Norwood, 1974; Wade, 1992; Warner, 1992). A central element of this competition has been public incentives given to private businesses. The funds involved in these initiatives are substantial. It has been estimated that "at least \$30 billion annually is given in location incentive by sub-national governments in the USA" (Thomas, 1997, p. 122).

The volume of public subsidies to private businesses is also growing. One of the fastest growing areas of public subsidies to private business involves the heated competition for professional sports teams. This competition has involved the construction of "30 professional sports palaces" in the 1990s alone at a cost of more than \$4 billion (Laing, 1996, p. 23). The bulk of these outlays have been paid for with public monies. One study has suggested that "more than \$4 of every \$5 in 1990s construction [of sports stadiums] comes from public sources" (Brady & Howlett, 1996, p. 13c). Whereas most sports stadiums built in the 1950s and 1960s had significant private participation, in the 1990s, paying the cost of building new stadiums has become principally a public function (Noll & Zimbalist, 1997; Rosentraub, 1997).

The growth of public subsidies can be observed in the rising cost of relocation packages that states and localities give to private corporations. Schweke and his colleagues have documented the escalation in the costs of relocation incentives to the automobile industry.

For instance, in 1980 the Nissan project in Tennessee cost \$11,000 in public fund per job created. Five years later, the Saturn Corporation recruitment cost \$26,000 per job. South Carolina landed the BMW plant at a cost of \$68,421 per job. And the [1993] Mercedes-Benz deal . . . in Alabama involved an incentive package costing \$150,000 to \$200,000 per job created. (Schweke, Rist, & Dabson, 1994, p. 8)

The use of public subsidies to attract and retain businesses has continued unabated. And although there are examples of successful opposition to the provision of public incentives to private businesses (Milhalopoulos, 1998; Thomas, 1997), these are the exceptions rather than the rule. Research suggests that economic development incentives continue to grow in number, variety, and cost (Eisinger, 1988; Schweke et al., 1994).

The literature on economic development would lead us to predict that casinos would have quickly spread all across the United States. By contrast to most other economic development schemes such as sports stadiums and convention centers, which generally require large public subsidies, casinos are taxed heavily and typically invest in public infrastructure. Yet, the spread of gaming has been slow and uncertain, despite a quick start out of the gate. The expansion of the legalized casino industry from its historical base began in 1989, when South Dakota legalized limited stakes casinos. Two years later, Colorado did the same, and in 1991, Iowa legalized riverboat gaming. By 1995, legalized non-Indian reservation casinos were operating in 10 states, including Illinois, Mississippi,

TABLE 1: Casino Gaming Revenue by State and by Year (\$ million)

State	Year Began	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995
Nevada	1931	5,059	5,464	5,809	6,188	6,940	7,300
New Jersey	1978	2,877	2,992	3,126	3,304	3,423	3,748
South Dakota	1989	24	36	40	43	46	46
Colorado	1991		23	180	239	298	354
Iowa	1991		65	70	45	105	455
Illinois	1991		15	226	606	98	1,179
Mississippi	1992			122	790	1,473	1,725
Louisiana	1993				16	603	1,060
Missouri	1994					110	466
Indiana	1995						9
Total		7,960	8,595	9,573	11,231	13,096	16,342

SOURCE: Information gathered from Andersen (1996).

TABLE 2: Casino Gaming Industry Employees and Wages by State, 1995

State	Employees	Wages (in \$ thousands)
Colorado	6,500	131,000
Illinois	12,000	306,000
Indiana	1,000	25,000
Iowa	3,800	97,000
Louisiana	13,600	312,000
Mississippi	27,100	546,000
Missouri	8,200	215,000
Nevada	170,000	4,280,000
New Jersey	40,800	1,374,000
South Dakota	1,100	27,000
Total	284,100	7,331,000

SOURCE: Information gathered from Andersen (1996).

Louisiana, Missouri, and Indiana, which followed Iowa's lead by legalizing riverboats in consecutive years from 1991 through 1995. It appeared that gaming would spread rapidly across the United States, thoroughly breaking Nevada's monopoly, which had lasted from 1931 until the adoption of gaming in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1978. However, the expansion stopped after Michigan's 1997 authorization of three casinos in the city of Detroit, the first of which opened for business in August 1999.

The geographic spread of non-Indian casino gambling contributed to significant growth of the industry, measured in terms of industry size as well as new investments, jobs, and public revenue generated by casino activities. Between 1990 and 1995, for example, industry revenues grew from \$8.0 billion to \$16.3 billion (see Table 1). In 1995, the industry employed more than 284,000 individuals (see Table 2) and paid \$2.9 billion in taxes (Andersen, 1996).

TABLE 3: State Gambling Revenues

	<i>Admission Fees</i>	<i>State Gaming Tax</i>	<i>Total</i>
1995 fiscal year	12,106,705	62,165,064	74,271,769
1996 fiscal year	22,559,064	107,476,799	130,035,863
1998 fiscal year	39,547,895	144,495,659	184,043,554
1999 fiscal year	40,788,429	161,642,827	208,431,256
2000 fiscal year	48,420,271	175,906,992	224,327,263

SOURCE: Information gathered from Missouri Gaming Commission (1995, 1996, 1998, 1999, 2000).

Missouri's riverboat casino industry has grown faster than the national average. The first riverboat casinos opened in the state in May 1994. In its first year of operation, fiscal year (FY) 1995, Missouri's casino industry generated gaming revenues of \$299 million. By the end of FY 2000, gaming revenues had more than tripled to \$977 million (Missouri Gaming Commission, 1995, 2000). Not surprisingly, state tax revenues from the industry during this period also grew substantially. Missouri assesses a \$2 admissions fee and taxes casino revenues at 20% and receives \$1 from the admissions fee and 18% of the gaming tax. The home dock communities, the cities hosting the casino developments, receive the other dollar from the admissions fee and 2% of the gaming tax. The state's portion of gaming revenues increased from \$74.3 million in FY 1995 to more than \$224 million in FY 2000 (see Table 3). By the end of FY 1999, the industry employed more than 10,000 employees and had invested \$1.3 billion in capital in the state (Missouri Gaming Commission, 1996, 2000, p. 37).

Riverboat casino gaming has had a significant impact on Missouri's economy. An independent study estimated that in 1996 riverboat casinos contributed \$759 million to Missouri's economy in direct, indirect, and induced effects and created 17,932 new jobs (see Tables 4 and 5). Nonetheless, there is strong opposition to the industry, as demonstrated by the failure of more states to legalize it and by the continual challenges to the industry's legitimacy by its opponents, including in Missouri (Hornblower, 1996).¹ To understand why this is the case, we compare two issues: public funding for a new football stadium in St. Louis and state subsidies for three new Wal-Mart distribution centers, with the battles over casino gaming.

THE NEW ST. LOUIS DOMED FOOTBALL STADIUM

Over the last three decades, there has been an intense competition for professional sports teams. As cities try to make themselves attractive to sports teams, the public construction of new sports stadiums has become the norm. This phenomenon manifested itself in St. Louis in the late 1980s and early 1990s

TABLE 4: The Economic Impact of Missouri Projected to 1997 Levels (\$ millions)

<i>Component</i>	<i>Direct Effect</i>	<i>Indirect and Induced</i>	<i>Total Effect</i>
Casino operations	463	390	853
Labor service	140	106	246
Other casino expenditures	323	284	607
Revenue to the state	175	193	368
Education	137	146	283
Other	38	47	85
Revenues to home dock cities	63	68	131
Displacement of other spending	(389)	(299)	(688)
"Annualized" construction	51	44	95
Total economic impact	361	396	759

TABLE 5: Summary of Total Net Economic Impact—1997

\$759 million in Missouri output
 \$508 million in personal income
 17,932 jobs

SOURCE: Information gathered from Leven, Phares, and Louishomme (1997, p. 67).

following the move of the St. Louis Cardinals professional football team to the Phoenix, Arizona, suburb of Tempe in the spring of 1988. Having threatened to leave St. Louis if he was not provided a new stadium for his team, Bill Bidwill, the team's owner, accepted the offer by Phoenix-area civic leaders to build a stadium if he would move the franchise. Soon thereafter, St. Louis business and political elites embarked on an odyssey to position St. Louis for one of the anticipated National Football League (NFL) expansion teams. A key element of this endeavor was the public construction of a \$301 million, 65,300-seat, state-of-the-art stadium with 113 luxury/club suites.

Groundbreaking for the new stadium was held on July 13, 1992. This event, along with the subsequent completion of the stadium and recruitment of the Los Angeles Rams football team to St. Louis, were the culmination of the efforts of an extraordinary political coalition. That coalition included Vincent C. Schoemehl, Jr., the Democratic mayor of the city of St. Louis; the Democratic executive of St. Louis County; the predominantly Republican chief executive officers of the major corporations in the St. Louis metropolitan area; the state's conservative Republican governor, John Ashcroft; and a winning coalition in the state General Assembly. The coalition was extraordinary, partly because of its bipartisan membership. That level of cooperation among such a diverse group had seldom coalesced in Missouri politics in support of a major commitment of state funds for an economic development project in the St. Louis region. In fact,

the Missouri legislature has long been dominated by out-of-state members who have rarely supported measures that principally benefit urban areas. Yet, the coalition that promoted the construction of the new stadium succeeded in securing the funding even though no professional team had agreed to use the facility in advance. (The stadium was completed in 1995 and the Rams played their first game there in the fall of 1996.)

The funding scheme provided for 30-year financing construction that included an annual commitment of \$6 million from the city of St. Louis, \$6 million from St. Louis County, and \$12 million from the State of Missouri. Although the state, county, and city agreed to bear the bulk of the cost of building the new stadium, the private group that was attempting to win an expansion team for the facility only agreed to pay a fraction of the construction cost, about \$4.2 million from the proceeds of the sale of personal seat licenses (PSLs). The group also agreed to pay a small rental fee (\$250,000 a year) "if and when a team arrived" in the city (Phares & Rosentraub, 1997, p. 304).

THE POLICY PROCESS

Securing public financing of the proposed football stadium involved navigating a policy process with key decision points at the local, regional, and state levels of government because all three levels of government were involved. The challenge faced by city leaders was securing the approval of the Board of Aldermen and controlling the agenda so that key decisions were not made through the electoral process. The involvement of voters was relatively minor: St. Louis County officials faced the challenge of securing voter approval for a 3.75% to 7.25% tax on hotel and motel rooms to raise \$6 million for the stadium project. The county mounted a well-financed campaign that was strongly supported by the business community. St. Louis County voters approved the measure by a two thirds majority in the April 4, 1990, election. The tax was sold as a "user fee" that would not be paid by residents but by visitors who stayed in hotels and motels in the county.

At the state level, a coalition led by Ashcroft and a Democratic state legislature pushed through the legislation needed to secure the state's share of the cost of constructing the new St. Louis football stadium. Few legislators publicly objected to committing public revenues throughout a 30-year period to fund the facility but some of them did object to pressure from proponents of the new stadium. For example, when a key member of the partnership suggested that if the state did not approve the needed legislation, he might abandon the effort to attract an NFL team to St. Louis, Rep. Garcia Backer, chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee, indicated that her subcommittee felt "no urgency" to speed up the legislative process. Similarly, Rep. Chris Kelly, D-Columbia and vice chairman of the House Budget Committee, stated, "the committee will meet and act as the committee sees fit" (Lindecke, 1991a).

ISSUE DEFINITION

The proposed stadium was defined in classic economic development terms. Emphasis was given to the argument that the considerable amount of public money was justified by the anticipated benefits. As then-Mayor Vince Schoemehl indicated at the groundbreaking for the new domed stadium, the facility would be "an economic engine for the entire region." To bolster this claim and to counter reservations about the economic impact of the proposed stadium, the accounting firm of Coopers & Lybrand (1991a, 1991b) issued two reports estimating that new net public fiscal benefits of \$580 million per year would be generated by The Americas Center. This assumed that, with the larger space, more conventions would be attracted to St. Louis and that the city would attract an NFL franchise.

The new facility would not only serve as a major sports venue but also would be an integral part of the city's effort to tap into the burgeoning tourism industry. Plans for the new stadium called for it to be situated adjacent to the Cervantes Convention Center and for the stadium to be used as exhibition space when not used for sports events. The new stadium would be the third element to the complex. A south addition to the convention center would house an executive conference center. The three pieces of the complex would become the second largest single-level convention center in the United States, behind Chicago's McCormick Place, and seventh in the United States in total overall square footage. The expanded facility was christened The Americas Center.

THE MOBILIZATION OF INTERESTS

Although the public financing of the new stadium was accomplished, it was achieved by overcoming political opposition. Two principal challenges were mounted against the new stadium. One was from the leading advocate for homeless people in the St. Louis area, and the other was from within the ranks of the political elites in the person of Virvus Jones, the comptroller of the city of St. Louis.

One of the most vocal opponents of the proposed stadium was the Reverend Larry Rice. Rice headed the New Life Evangelical Center, which worked as an advocate for the poor and the homeless in St. Louis. Rice argued that the proposed expansion of the convention center and construction of the domed stadium would take money away from service needed by the poor. Rather than use general revenues, he contended that "funding should be from a new, dedicated tax source" (Lindecke, 1991b). Rice's opposition to the funding scheme for the project involved a number of protests. In January 1991, he went on a hunger strike vowing to continue his water-only fast until the city's March 5th primary or until the Missouri legislature voted to not use state general revenue to fund its portion of the project. After the legislature approved the funding package, Rice filed a lawsuit to block the proposed sale of tax-exempt bonds to fund the

construction. After the Missouri Court of Appeals in Kansas City rejected the suit, Rice appealed to the Missouri Supreme Court, which declined to hear his appeal (Lindecke, 1991c).

Rice and a group called Stop Wasting Our Taxes also initiated a petition drive to put the issue to the voters of the city of St. Louis. They succeeded in getting 12,000 to 13,000 city residents to sign a petition calling for a public vote on the sale of \$247 million in tax-exempt bonds to fund the construction of the new stadium. However, the Board of Election Commissioners rejected the petitions because they had not been filed, as required, within 30 days after the Board of Aldermen had passed an ordinance authorizing the use of general revenue ("Missouri St. Louis Rice Loses," 1991).

The other major source of opposition was that of Comptroller Virvus Jones. Jones used his elected office to effectively use the media to voice his opposition to the proposed stadium and convention center expansion. But more than that, he used the power of his office to block progress on the project. Jones opposed the stadium project mainly because, he said, commitments to hire minority and female contractors for building stadium were inadequate. Once the issue of female and minority participation was addressed to his satisfaction, a key roadblock was removed and stadium construction proceeded quickly. The attention of civic elites now turned to attempting to attract an NFL team to the city.

MISSOURI ASSISTS WAL-MART

Although public funding for the new football stadium stirred some controversy, state subsidies of \$3.25 million of economic development assistance to Wal-Mart, Inc., the world's largest retailer, is more typical of most economic development projects in that no opposition was mounted. Between January 2000 and June 2001, the state of Missouri's Department of Economic Development (DED) approved three assistance packages for Wal-Mart. In July 1999, Wal-Mart Stores East, Inc., announced plans to develop a distribution center in St. James, Missouri, about 100 miles southwest of St. Louis. The distribution facility would be developed on a 200-acre site and would serve Eastern Missouri and Western Illinois. The company estimated that the multimillion-dollar distribution center would create between 300 and 600 new jobs.

Six months later, in January 2000, the DED announced that it had "determined that the company is eligible for assistance through the Business Facility Tax Credit program and the state treasurer's Missouri First Linked Deposit Program, and that the company may also qualify for state job training funds." More significantly, as part of the economic development package, the DED "approved an application on behalf of the City of St. James for a \$1 million industrial infrastructure grant through the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program" (Missouri Department of Economic Development [DED], 2000a). The

CDBG funds would finance the construction of a new connector road that would link the new distribution center to a state highway.

The second state-assisted Wal-Mart development involved the construction of an 860,000-square-foot food distribution center in Harrisonville, Missouri, in the Kansas City metropolitan area. It was estimated that the \$35 million project would create between 400 and 600 new full-time jobs. The economic development package provided to the company by DED was very similar to the St. James package. The major exception is that the \$1 million in CDBG funds provided for this project would be used "for improvements to the sewer and water system, as well as a public access road" (DED, 2000b). In addition to the very similar incentive package, such as the St. James project, the Harrisonville development was announced by Wal-Mart officials before the state of Missouri even formally committed to providing economic development assistance.

The third economic development package provided by DED to Wal-Mart was for yet another distribution center. This facility would be located in the middle of the state in Moberly, Missouri. The 450,000-square-foot facility would create between 300 and 400 new full-time jobs and would be facilitated by a \$1.25 million CDBG industrial infrastructure grant to "make water and sewer improvements" (DED, 2001).

POLICY PROCESS, MOBILIZATION OF INTEREST, AND ISSUE DEFINITION

The approval of each of these substantial public incentive packages for Wal-Mart was processed through the institutional arrangements within the Missouri Department of Economic Development. The applications for CDBG funding and eligibility for other state assistance was processed through the regulatory procedures that the DED has established. Through that process the needed approvals and authorizations were secured.

Although the three incentive packages provided more than \$3.25 million of public assistance to one of the most profitable companies in the world, none of the three projects stimulated any political opposition. Opponents did not attend the public meeting where the issue was discussed and approved. There were no attempts to use the state courts to block the incentives and no appeals were made to the media, the legislature, or the governor.

These projects were typical of most economic development projects undertaken by cities and state economic development agencies. They are defined by economic development officials as important incentives needed to support new investment and the creation of new jobs within a jurisdiction. The granting of subsidies is treated as a routine bureaucratic matter. The subsidies provide opportunities for officials to issue press releases, attend ribbon-cutting ceremonies, and claim credit for delivering tangible benefits to their constituents.

Whereas public financing of the new football stadium by the state of Missouri, St. Louis County, and the city of St. Louis had stimulated a limited amount of localized opposition, the approval of public assistance for Wal-Mart did not

TABLE 6: Votes Cast in Statewide Gambling Measures in Missouri 1992-1998

<i>Date</i>	<i>Total Votes</i>	<i>% Yes</i>	<i>% No</i>	<i>Margin of victory/defeat</i>
November 1992	2,237,318	63	37	558,182
April 1994	1,054,883	50	50	-1,261
November 1994	1,749,965	54	46	135,709
November 1998	1,463,661	56	44	178,987

SOURCE: Information gathered from State of Missouri (1993-1994), Holleman and Ganey (1994), Linsalata and Schlinkmann (1994), and Board of State Canvassers (1998).

trigger a murmur from potential opponents. By contrast, riverboat casino gambling has stimulated intense and extended political debate and conflict.

RIVERBOAT CASINO GAMBLING IN MISSOURI

The Missouri legislature first considered two gaming bills in 1990, but these measures were defeated in both the state House and Senate. The following May, however, the two chambers enacted by narrow margins a riverboat casino law authorizing a November 1992 statewide referendum. In the first statewide vote on riverboat casino gambling, the constitutional amendment passed, with nearly 63% of those voting approving the measure. Despite being supported by a large majority of the state's citizens, however, the riverboat casino gambling industry in Missouri faced repeated challenges to its legitimacy and continued presence in the state.

POLICY PROCESS: EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF CONFLICT

Adoption of the constitutional amendment legalizing riverboat casinos was only the first hurdle faced by the state's newest industry. The industry also would face two major court challenges and be subjected to three additional statewide votes. The first court challenge centered on the constitutionality of slot machines, the leading source of industry revenues. In *Harris et al. v. Missouri Gaming Commission et al.* (1996) the Missouri Supreme Court sided with gaming opponents and ruled that slot machines and other "games of chance" were unconstitutional. This decision necessitated two statewide elections. In the April 1994 election, gaming opponents won a major victory by defeating the constitutional amendment legalizing slot machines by less than 1% of votes cast. In the second election on slot machines in November 1994, the measure passed by a comfortable majority (see Table 6).

The second court challenge centered on the Missouri Gaming Commission's practice of allowing casino developers to build in manmade basins. In *Akin et al. v. Missouri Gaming Commission et al.* (1997) the state's highest court ruled that

the six casinos that had been built in manmade moats near the Missouri River were unconstitutional. The *Akin* decision necessitated a fourth statewide election in November 1998 on riverboat gambling to resolve the issue of boats-in-the-moats. The excitement and euphoria about the possible benefits to the state and the communities that were attempting to attract casino developments following the passage of the initial gaming measure in November 1992 faded in the wake of the *Harris* and *Akin* decisions.

THE NOVEMBER 1992 ELECTION

The first major victory by proponents of riverboat gaming was the passage of House Bill 149 by the Missouri legislature in July 1991. This law approved riverboat casinos and authorized the placing of a constitutional referendum on the November 1992 ballot. This action had been motivated, in part, by the fact that two bordering states, Iowa and Illinois, had previously legalized riverboat casinos and many Missourians were patronizing these facilities.

In the months leading up to the November 1992 referendum, opponents of the gaming measure mobilized their troops. One of the key organizations in the opposition to riverboat gambling was the Missouri Christian Leadership Forum. The Leadership Forum was a statewide interfaith group that included the four Roman Catholic dioceses in Missouri, the Missouri Baptist Convention, the two Episcopal dioceses in the state, and the Missouri Conference of the United Church of Christ. The Leadership Forum urged "voters to defeat [the] constitutional amendment that would legalize riverboat gambling" and argued that trying to solve the state's economic problems with riverboat gambling was "short-sighted, ill-founded and without any sound and reliable fiscal basis." Moreover, in a statement released to the press, the Leadership Forum maintained that studies demonstrate that gambling does not create wealth "but only transfers wealth not based upon any need of the recipient, but solely upon chance" (Rogers, 1992).

Bob Terry, editor of the Missouri Baptist Convention's publication *Word and Way*, stated that the Missouri Baptist Convention was opposed to legalization of riverboat gambling because of the "social ills" that it would create and questioned the "claims being made for riverboat gambling, that it would create a lot of jobs" (Rogers, 1992). Reverend Larry Rice was as opposed to gambling as he was to public financing for a new football stadium, but his arguments against gambling added a new moral dimension. A representative of the "Don't Gamble With Missouri Rivers Committee," Rice argued that gaming proponents "neglect to mention that the regulation of riverboat gambling can be costly . . . [that] cities investing in facilities for riverboat gambling can end up losing in a big way because the boats can easily go somewhere else" and that introduction of the industry will cause people to "fall victim to the addiction of gambling" (Rice, 1992).

In addition to getting their message out through press releases and editorials, the preachers used their pulpits to urge their congregations to oppose the measure and mobilize volunteers to pass out fliers. According to Kevin Layton, president of Citizens Against Riverboat Gambling of St. Charles, he and his supporters would "begin a door-to-door campaign . . . handing out fliers designed to counter a well-financed effort promoting passage of the gambling proposal" (Roberson, 1992). The grassroots nature of the effort made it unnecessary for opponents to raise large amounts of money for a media campaign. The Committee to Stop Proposition A reported spending only \$24,534 on the campaign (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1992).

FRAMING THE ISSUE: PROPONENTS

The main message conveyed by the proponents of Proposition A was that economic benefits would flow to Missouri and its citizens. "In each town where they stop, on the radio call-in shows, standing before the television cameras, the 'Vote Yes' team offer[ed] a single message: casinos bring jobs and tax money" (Linsalata, 1992). This message was not only communicated by the spokesmen and -women of the campaign but it was reinforced in the last weeks of the campaign by the release of an economic impact study that estimated that 12,681 new jobs and \$286 million in new income in the St. Louis area alone would be created by the industry, according to John Qualls, professor of economics at Maryville University in St. Louis and author of the study "Riverboat Casino Gambling Would Have a Significant Impact on St. Louis' Economy" (Faust, 1992). A significant portion of this new economic activity was expected to result from additional tourists that would be attracted to the state. In St. Louis, for example, Qualls estimated that 20% of casino patrons would be new tourists visiting the area that would create "about . . . 1.3 million additional room nights each year at St. Louis hotels."

Pittsburgh businessman and owner of the abandoned Admiral on the St. Louis riverfront was the driving force behind the "Vote Yes" campaign. He established and funded the campaign organization. He developed the campaign strategy emphasizing the economic benefits that the new industry would bring to the state and the additional revenues that would be generated for public education. Connelly and his companies provided more than 80% of the \$1.9 million expended by the "Vote Yes" statewide campaign. Proponents of riverboat gambling garnered support from approximately 1.4 million Missourians or 63% of those who voted on the referendum in November 1992 (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1992; see Table 6).

THE FIRST LEGAL CHALLENGE

Missouri voters legalized riverboat gambling in November 1992. The following month, operators of the Casino Queen, a casino located in East Louis,

Illinois, and situated across the Mississippi River from downtown St. Louis, filed suit charging that the Missouri riverboat casino gaming law was unconstitutional. While the lawsuit made its way through the Missouri court system, state officials moved to implement the new gaming law. Facing concerns about the allocation of administrative responsibility for casino gambling to the Tourism Board, the Missouri General Assembly amended House Bill 149 to create the Missouri Gaming Commission. The general assembly passed the amended bill in April 1993 and Governor Mel Carnahan, who had succeeded the term-limited Ashcroft that January, signed the amended bill into law later that month.

In November 1993, the Missouri Gaming Commission announced that it would process the first four gaming licenses. In August 1994, the first four casinos made their Missouri debut. Two of them were located in the St. Louis area—the President Casino in the City of St. Louis and the St. Charles Riverfront Casino in St. Charles—and two in the Kansas City area—the Argosy Casino in the City of Riverside and the St. Jo Frontier Casino in St. Joseph.

These casinos opened despite the fact that in January 1994 the Missouri Supreme Court had ruled in *Harris v. Missouri Gaming Commission* that only the portions of the gaming statute were constitutional. The court declared that games such as poker and blackjack were constitutional because they required some measure of skill to win but that slot machines, craps, and roulette constituted games of chance and were unconstitutional. The court's ruling set the stage for the second statewide riverboat casino campaign in April 1994.

THE APRIL 1994 ELECTION—CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT 3

The *Harris* decision was a major setback for gaming proponents because slot machines are the most reliable revenue generators for casinos. The decision put the industry's future in Missouri in doubt because slot machines were estimated to provide as much as 70% of casino revenues. Although groups opposed to riverboat casino gambling on religious and moral grounds did not initiate the suit, the *Harris* decision provided these groups with a second opportunity to defeat the industry.

As in the November 1992 election, gambling opponents mounted a low-budget campaign stressing arguments based on the moral objections to gambling and the social costs that the industry was feared to create. But as part of the April 1994 campaign, these groups also brought in experts that supported their policy position to speak on the issue. For example, in March 1994, the Leadership Forum brought in two professors from the University of Illinois who argued that the casino industry "does not create new jobs, it shifts jobs" (Mannies, 1994). Another invited expert was Jeffery Bloomberg, the prosecuting attorney of the mining town-turned-vacation destination of Deadwood, South Dakota, which had limited stakes casinos. Bloomberg maintained that legalized gambling increases crime in communities (Mannies, 1994).

In the April 1995 election, gaming opponents not only succeeded in attracting greater media coverage than in 1992 but they quadrupled their campaign expenditures from less than \$25,000 to \$97,997 (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1994). By applying greater resources and redoubling their mobilizing effort, groups such as the Missouri Christian Leadership Forum, Citizens for Life and Liberty, and the Good Government Committee were able to galvanize a minimum winning electoral coalition. Out of the 1,054,883 votes cast on Amendment 3, opponents were able to defeat the measure by a margin of just more than 1,200 votes (see Table 6). Low voter turnout in the Kansas City area and strong voter turnout in rural counties provided the narrow margin of victory to gaming opponents (Mannies & Rogers 1994).

The April 1994 election handed the nascent Missouri casino industry a major defeat despite the fact the gambling proponents had "blanket[ed] the state with billboards and television ads touting gambling as the best bet for more jobs, better schools, improved public safety and a stronger economy" (Mannies, 1994) at a cost of \$4.4 million (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1994). The defeat of Amendment 3 raised doubts about the industry's future. An industry observer concluded that the vote on Amendment 3 would "be looked upon by many in the industry as an indicator of riverboat gaming's acceptance. . . . [The casino industry] can't seem to shake its image as a bunch of crime-time people, of criminals and hoodlums" (Mannies & Holleman, 1994, p. 1A). But the industry and its supporters decided to go to the well again. This time they mounted a petition drive to put another measure on the November 1994 ballot.

THE NOVEMBER 1994 ELECTION ON CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT 6

Gaming proponents succeeded in collecting more than 130,000 signatures between the April 5, 1994, defeat at the ballot box and the July 8, 1994, deadline for putting a measure on the November 8, 1994, general election ballot. This was a major accomplishment in a very short period of time. The proposed measure was referred to as Amendment 6 and asked voters to vote "yes" or "no" on the following question:

Shall the General Assembly be authorized to permit only upon the Mississippi River and the Missouri River and the Missouri River lotteries, gift enterprises, and games of chance to be conducted on excursion boat and floating facilities? This proposal would increase state revenues from existing gaming boats approximately \$30,000,000 per year. Impact on local governments is unknown. (1994 *Mo Laws* 1249)

The petition drive that placed Constitutional Amendment 6 on the ballot set the stage for another heated election campaign between the by-now familiar political combatants.

In the campaign leading up to the November 1994 election, proponents of riverboat gambling found a new way to frame the issue of gaming. They argued

that the issue was not whether to have legalized gaming—it had been legalized in 1992—but whether gaming could be used to benefit public education. Because a portion of revenues from gaming were set aside for education, they argued, restricting those revenues made no sense. Several TV ads featured teachers and other state residents talking about how education would improve if the referendum passed.

Opponents invited the most prominent anti-gambling activist in the United States to make repeated visits to Missouri. Tom Grey, a United Methodist minister and the head of the National Coalition Against Legalized Gambling, brought his message about the moral threat and social consequences of allowing the casino industry to have slot machines. Grey had embarked on a nationwide campaign to block the spread of legalized gambling and to repeal it where it had been adopted. In criss-crossing the country he was successful in mobilizing and helping to organize religious communities to oppose gaming wherever it was proposed. He had succeeded in attracting a significant amount of media attention nationally and helping to build what several journalists characterized as a “backlash” against casino gaming (Hornblower, 1996). Grey made several visits to Missouri as part of the campaign by Churches Versus Casinos, one of the more active religious groups in the St. Louis area. Grey, Rev. Lycurgus Starkey, the head of Churches Versus Casinos, and other opponents of Amendment 6 argued that legalizing slot machines and other games of chance would allow gaming companies to corrupt Missouri’s political process.

Even though gaming opponents succeeded at raising more than \$297,000—nearly triple the amount they raised in the April 1994 election (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1994, pp. 226-227)—high voter turnout in the state’s two urban centers provided supporters of Amendment 6 with a margin of victory of 54% (see Table 6). Approval of Amendment 6 provided gaming proponents with a major victory that finally succeeded in settling the issue of the constitutionality of slot machines and other games of chance on Missouri riverboat casinos. Success, however, had not come cheaply (the industry had spent \$10.6 million) (Missouri Ethics Commission, 1994, pp. 226-27), and the industry would have to continue protecting its gains. Rev. Lycurgus Starkey, the head of Churches Versus Casinos, lost and vowed to fight on because, he said, “when the cost of broken lives, economic loss, criminal escalation and government corruption surfaces so that it can no longer be ignored by our citizens, the state will eventually repudiate government-sponsored and promoted casino gambling” (Linsalata & Schlinkmann, 1994).

Despite the November 1994 victory by pro-gaming forces, the industry was to shortly face another major challenge and another statewide campaign. Rep. Todd Akin, R-Town and Country, filed suit, arguing that the Missouri Gaming Commission’s practice of allowing casino developers to build in basins instead of on the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers violated the Missouri constitution. In September 1997, the Missouri Supreme Court agreed and declared boats-in-

moats unconstitutional. This decision threatened the future of six of the casinos located in the state.

In response, the industry mobilized yet another major campaign. Constitutional Amendment 9 was placed on the November 1998 election ballot. This represented yet another major test for Missouri's riverboat casino gambling industry. Failure at the ballot box would threaten the future of five major casino developments and 10,000 employees of those facilities. Although the major organizations engaged in this round were unchanged from earlier campaigns, by 1998 anti-gambling forces had established a permanent presence in the state's capital with the creation of the lobbying group Casino Watch. The organization played a central role in lobbying the state legislature to block any changes to laws dealing with the casino industry. Casino Watch and its chief lobbyist, Steve Taylor, played a very visible role in the campaign leading up to the November 1998 election, as did Akin, who had become a regular commentator on casino gambling following the success of his court case.

ISSUE DEFINITION

Mark Andrews, the St. Louis-area businessman who served as the chairman of the "Show Me the River" anti-moat group, argued that the central issue in the campaign was not jobs and tax revenues generated by the industry but "the broken promises" of the casino industry (quoted in Mannies, 1998). Andrews and other opponents of Amendment 9 repeated the claim that riverboat gambling proponents had promised citizens of the state one thing but had delivered something altogether different. Their ads stressed that "Missourians had been promised family-oriented, cruising riverboat casinos but got glitzy, land-based casinos" (Young, 1998b). The Show Me the River group worked in conjunction with Citizens for Liberty & Life to mobilize opposition to boats in the moats. This effort was in addition to the efforts of the Leadership Forum at galvanizing the religious community across the state to vote against the ballot measure. As before, this group argued that "gambling entices people to wager more than they can afford and results in bankruptcies and other social ills" (Young, 1998b).

Missourians for Fairness & Jobs, an industry group, backed Amendment 9. This group framed the issue in entirely instrumental terms—a matter of fairness to current casino workers who would be made unemployed if the amendment was not adopted. "Their ads urged voters to protect 10,000 casino jobs and \$92 million in gambling taxes that go to public schools" (Young, 1998b). The casino industry initiated a multifaceted campaign that involved an aggressive voter registration drive on riverboat casinos and a media campaign that included statewide television ads and billboards that prominently featured Missourians currently working at the Missouri casinos. The central theme of this campaign was "Save Our Jobs, Vote Yes" (Mannies, 1998). In addition, the Fairness & Jobs campaign featured a very effective radio spot. The spokesperson in both the television and radio ads was retired state Supreme Court Judge Jack Bardgett, Sr. In

the TV ad, Judge Bardgett was pictured in a law library and encouraged voters to clarify the "technical dispute" that posed a threat to Missouri casinos (Young, 1998a).

On Tuesday, November 3, 1998, a majority of Missouri voters approved Constitutional Amendment 9 by a vote of 857,829 to 688,184 (State of Missouri, 1999-2000). The measure retroactively legalized games of chance at casino developments constructed in manmade basins. The November 1998 election on 'Boats in Moats' in Missouri revolved around competing definitions of the issue facing the state's citizens. Steve Taylor, the spokesman for Show Me The River, Inc., explained the industry's victory in these terms: "They turned this into a referendum on jobs. . . . They could not win on the gambling issue. Missourians decided to bail out these employees" (Young, 1998b). Defining the issue as a matter of jobs and state taxes for public education was communicated through a \$10 million campaign and the strategic use of casino employees and a prominent retired state supreme court judge.

RIVERBOAT CASINOS: ISSUE DEFINITION AND INTEREST MOBILIZATION

The definition of casino gaming as a policy issue was an essential feature of the debates over gaming in Missouri throughout the 1990s. Proponents of the industry consistently defined casino gambling as an economic issue and emphasized the creation of jobs; tax revenues to be generated for the state, the localities, and for the state's public schools; and new investment that the industry brings to Missouri communities. In contrast, opponents emphasized moral deterioration, fears of crime, political corruption, and the social costs of gambling.

Over time, both sides became increasingly well organized. By the November 1998 vote on Amendment 9, which legalized boats-in-moats, both opponents of gaming and the industry had developed greater institutional capabilities and sophistication. Steve Taylor, a public relations professional, was hired as the spokesperson for Show Me the River, Inc., the leading anti-gaming committee. Appearing on radio talk shows across the state and regularly on evening newscasts in the state's major television markets, Taylor presented a clear and measured argument why voters should defeat the ballot measure. He argued that his organization was not trying to overturn the wishes of Missouri voters who had passed a constitutional amendment approving casino gaming. Rather, he said he was trying to keep the industry honest and within the scope of the Missouri constitution. In addition to more professional representation in their dealings with the media, gaming opponents also gained a measure of legitimacy because State Representative Todd Akin became one of the leading public figures arguing their cause. Akin's position as a member of the state legislature and the success of his lawsuit established him as a key player in the policy area. As such, Akin consistently attracted media coverage whenever the issue of casino gambling

was debated in the state. The media strategy of gaming opponents had some impact. Even though they were outspent by more than \$9 million in the November 1998 election, they made an impressive showing at the polls.

Missouri's gaming industry also had become more sophisticated. In the campaign to win voter support of Amendment 9, it emphasized the jobs that would be lost if the measure were defeated. To make this argument, the industry mobilized its employees and involved them in its television, radio, and newspaper advertisement campaign. The industry also undertook a voter registration drive before the election. In addition, the industry also used retired Missouri Supreme Court Judge Jack Bardgett as one of its spokesmen. Judge Bardgett did the radio and television advertisements for the Amendment 9 campaign (see McClellan, 1998, p. C1; Young, 1998a). Having a well-regarded former state supreme court justice lent credibility to an industry that historically had a very negative image.

Missouri's riverboat casino industry has successfully defended itself from a number of challenges to its continuation and legitimacy. But despite receiving more than 62% of the votes in the initial 1992 election that legalized riverboat casino gambling, the industry has been challenged in the state's courts and at the elections box. Success at the election box has been made possible as a result of nearly \$16 million in election expenditures alone. The gaming industry succeeded in Missouri only by running a gauntlet of hurdles. At many points it barely cleared them, and failure was always a possibility.

CONCLUSION

The different responses to public funding for a new football stadium, three new Wal-Mart distribution outlets, and to riverboat casino gaming reveals that there is something unique about the politics of gaming. Although the football stadium involved nearly \$300 million in public subsidy, it provoked limited opposition. The more than \$3.25 million in economic development incentives provided to Wal-Mart by the Missouri Department of Economic Development stimulated no opposition at all. Riverboat casino gaming received no public subsidy and generated substantial investment, jobs, and new tax revenue but faced strong and well-organized opposition. The politics of gaming was different from development politics-as-usual because the instrumental issue definition became contested and the scope of conflict quickly expanded. Throughout this 8-year odyssey, proponents and opponents of riverboat gambling offered votes contrasting definitions of riverboat casino gambling. Industry supporters focused on the economic benefits that the industry would provide and the tax revenues for education that would be generated. Opponents were able to mobilize sustained and well-organized opposition by offering a radically different issue-frame that emphasized moral deterioration and social costs.

Issue definition is an essential resource, in part, because it can be used to restrict or expand the scope of conflict (Schnattschneider, 1960). If a policy can

be framed in strictly instrumental terms, the policy process will tend to involve fewer participants, and often only technical experts and bureaucrats. Conversely, when issues are framed along expressive dimensions, opposition can mushroom quickly and opponents become fired with a sense of moral fervor.

Gaming is different from most other economic development strategies in that it tends to attract opposition from a constellation of groups that understand the symbolic issue—the moral dimension of gaming—in similar ways. Although the gaming industry has managed to expand in Missouri, the resources and level of mobilization required to accomplish this have been considerable. Its expansion to other states and metropolitan areas is likely to be slow. Put simply, gaming is not regarded solely as an economic development strategy; it is also defined as a moral dilemma. Controversies over gaming tend to take on this character wherever they erupt, which explains why gaming is likely to spread more slowly than economic development specialists might have predicted.

NOTE

1. It is important to note that I do not discuss Native American Indian tribal gambling in this article. Native American Indian tribal gambling has grown dramatically in the past two decades. "In 1988, approximately 70 Indian casinos and bingo halls were operating in a total of 16 states; in 1998, approximately 260 facilities were operating in a total of 31 states" (National Gambling Impact Study Commission [NGISC], 1999, p. 6-2). However, I do not discuss this sector of the gaming industry because it is not operational in Missouri. For an overview of Native American Indian tribal gaming, see National Gambling Impact Commission (NGISC) (1999).

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