

# **CENTRE for GAMBLING RESEARCH at UBC**

## **Media portrayal of sports betting in Canada before and after Bill C-218**

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New Horizons in Safer Gambling

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**Paul  
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a place of mind

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Department of Psychology**

# Disclosures

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Cambridge Cognition Ltd (royalties relating to neurocognitive testing)

Ontario launched open market with licensing of private operators

Changes in technology:

- Mobile apps
- In-play betting

Concerns for integrity in sports - match-fixing & player betting

Revenue projections, based partly on capturing the grey/offshore market

Legalization of single-event sports betting

Safeguards in place?  
Lessons from other jurisdictions?

How would the industry adapt? Partnerships and mergers

Marketing and communications

- Ads & promotions
- Odds information

Gambling harm  
- Impact on rates of gambling problems  
- Normalization among youth

# Media coverage of gambling

- To what extent does the media reflect *vs influence* public discourse: media reinforces political agendas (McMullan & Mullen 2001), shapes legitimacy (Humphreys & Latour 2013)
- Framing theory (Entman 1993): media provides frames that give coherence and meaning to complex cultural material, both emphasizing and de-emphasizing.
- Portrayal focuses on tension between gambling revenue and gambling harm (Selin & Nyrhinen 2022), which varies by gambling form (Borch 2012)
- Only one study of Canadian media (McMullan & Mullen 2001); only two on sports betting (Lee et al 2016 US, David et al 2017 Australia)



# Research Questions

- How has sports betting been portrayed in Canadian newspapers from 2020 - 2022?
  - Searched 15 highest circulating daily newspapers using Newsstream database
- What were the dominant themes and voices? Which themes and voices were less represented?
  - Quantitative content analysis of themes (presence/absence), primary theme, and voices (quotes or paraphrasing)
- How did these themes and voices change from *before* (T1: Jan 2020 – June 2021) to *after* (T2: July 2021 – Dec 2022) the passing of C-218?

# Coding Schedule

Main theme	Subthemes
1) Legality	Bill C-218; Ontario's licensing model; US legality
2) Industry Change	Company mergers and partnerships; Company finances; Projected revenue
3) Technology	Mobile access to sports betting; In-play betting
4) Marketing and Communications	Normalization; Advertising & promotions; Men; Children; Fines and sanctions; Odds & sports betting terms
5) Integrity	Offshore market; Criminal activity; Player betting & match fixing
6) Reform	Analogies to other jurisdictions' reform changes; Need for regulatory change
7) Gambling Harm	Problem gambling
Voices	Government; Gambling industry; Sports leagues; Broadcasters; Celebrities; Academics; Treatment providers/NGOs; Lived Experience

Modified from David JL et al (2017) *BMC Public Health*, in context of Australian government enquiries into sports betting

# The Articles

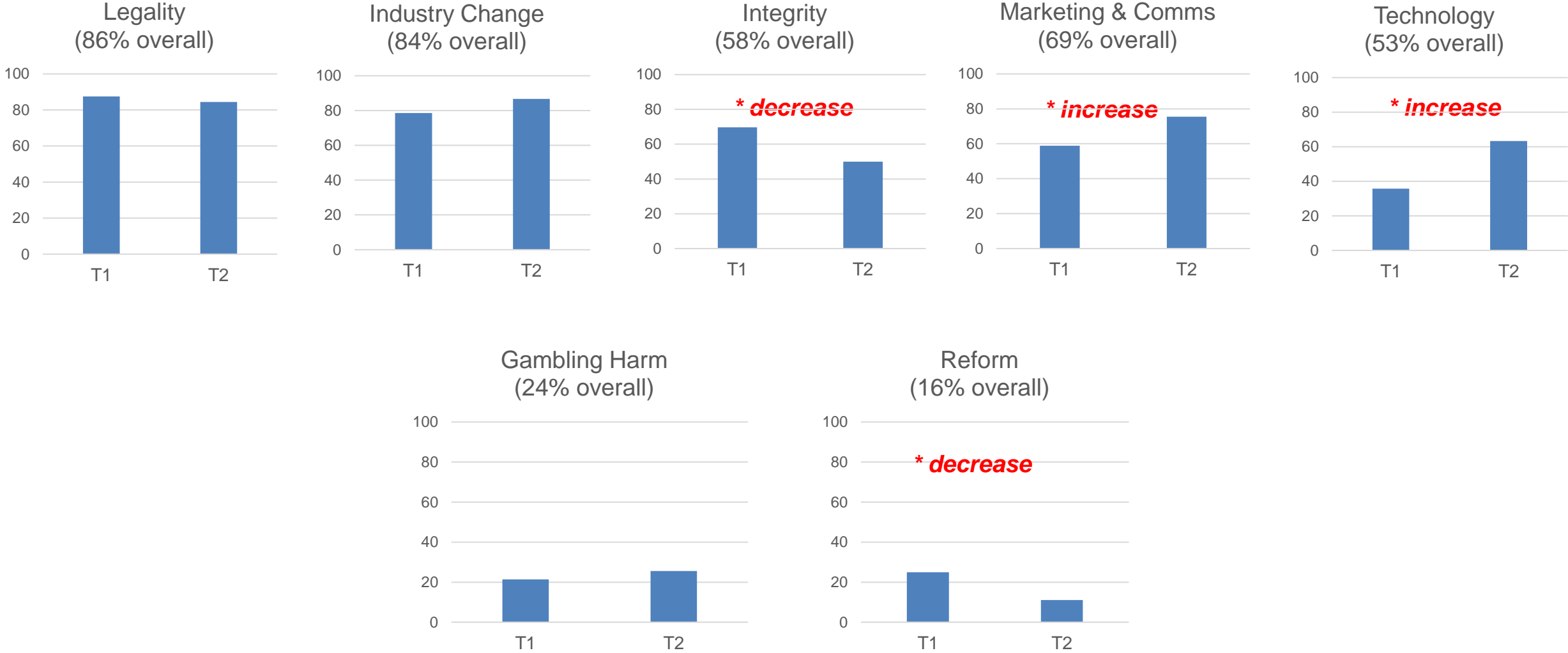
Newspaper	Overall	T1 (n = 56)	T2 (n = 88)
Toronto Star <sup>a</sup>	63	16	47
The Globe and Mail	18	8	10
National Post <sup>b</sup>	17	12	5
The Toronto Sun <sup>b</sup>	11	4	6
The Hamilton Spectator	8	4	4
Winnipeg Free Press	6	1	5
The London Free Press <sup>b</sup>	5	4	1
Edmonton Journal <sup>b</sup>	4	1	3
The Vancouver Sun <sup>b</sup>	4	2	2
Calgary Herald <sup>b</sup>	3	1	2
The Chronicle Herald	3	1	2
The Ottawa Citizen <sup>b</sup>	2	0	2
The Province	2	2	0

341 articles found (search terms 'sports betting', not advertorials)

→ 146 articles after duplicates removed

<sup>a</sup> TorStar, parent company of Toronto Star, linked to NorthStar Bets in Ontario. <sup>b</sup> all published by PostMedia, who partnered with Covers.com (a gambling-affiliated company who specialize in betting odds) in April 2022.

# Theme mentions (presence / absence)





# **Decrease in integrity articles: many pre-C218 articles linked projected revenue with grey market**

*...single game betting is easily found online through offshore companies or through the black market; the result is that up to \$14 billion is wagered annually by Canadians in an unregulated market... that scenario depends on how much a regulated sports betting regime in Canada can take back market share from the offshore grey market (Optimism growing over single-game betting bill, National Post, 14 June 2021)*

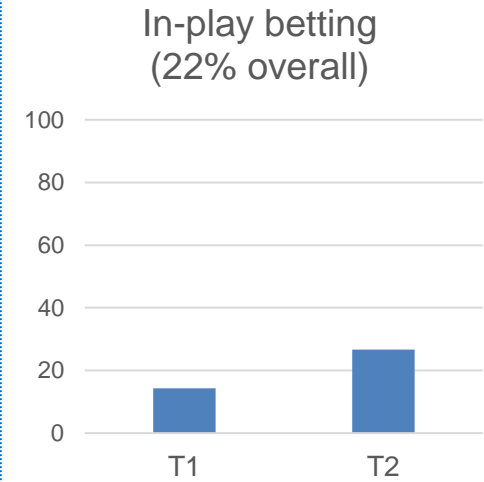
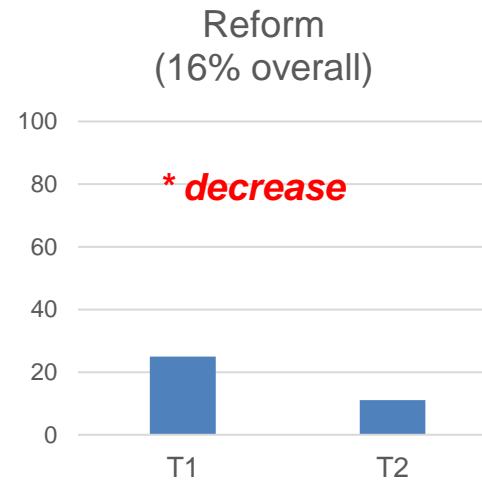
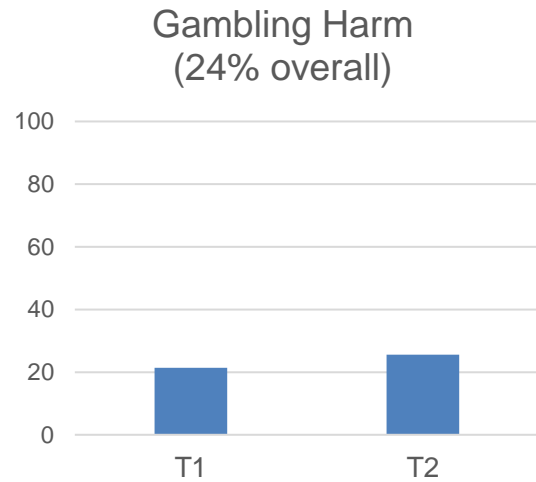
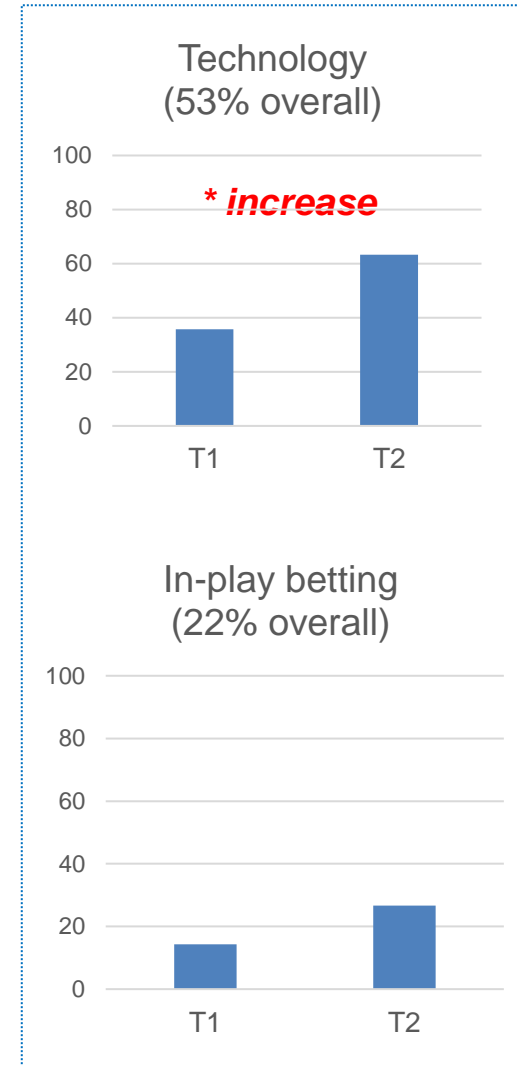
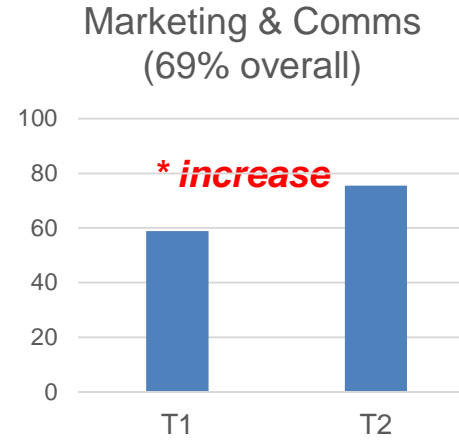
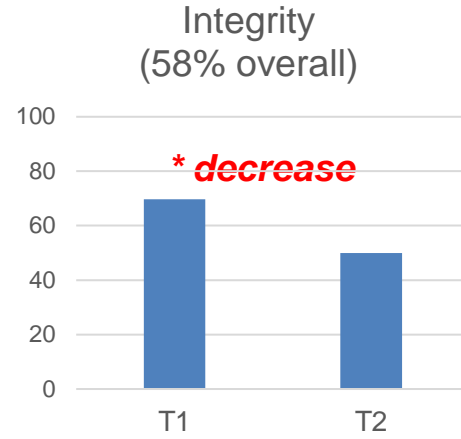
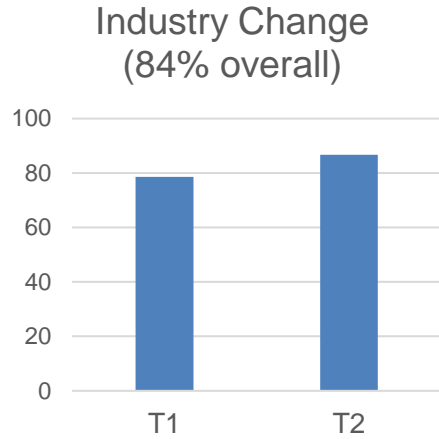
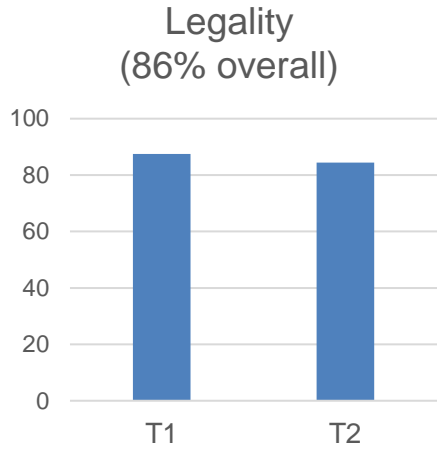
*Last month, Ontario said single-event sports betting is a \$14 billion industry in Canada... The province said that "Ontarians spend close to \$1 billion on online gambling with an estimated 70 per cent taking place on unregulated grey market websites, with limited, if any, consumer protection and responsible gaming measures. (Toronto Star, 13 Aug 2021)*

# When gambling harm is mentioned, it is often fleetingly

*"Beyond a few general rules pertaining to disclosing a problem gambling hotline, the (commission) has done very little to regulate advertising and promotion in this space"* (quoting law prof Marc Edelman) (Advertising blitz brings questions, Toronto Star, 19 Feb 2022)

*But C-218... proved to be a winner, gaining the support of the four major parties in the House, as well as industry associations and groups that help gambling addicts.* (Legal single-game betting to be a winner: MLL, Winnipeg Free Press, 28 Aug 2021)

# Theme mentions (presence / absence)

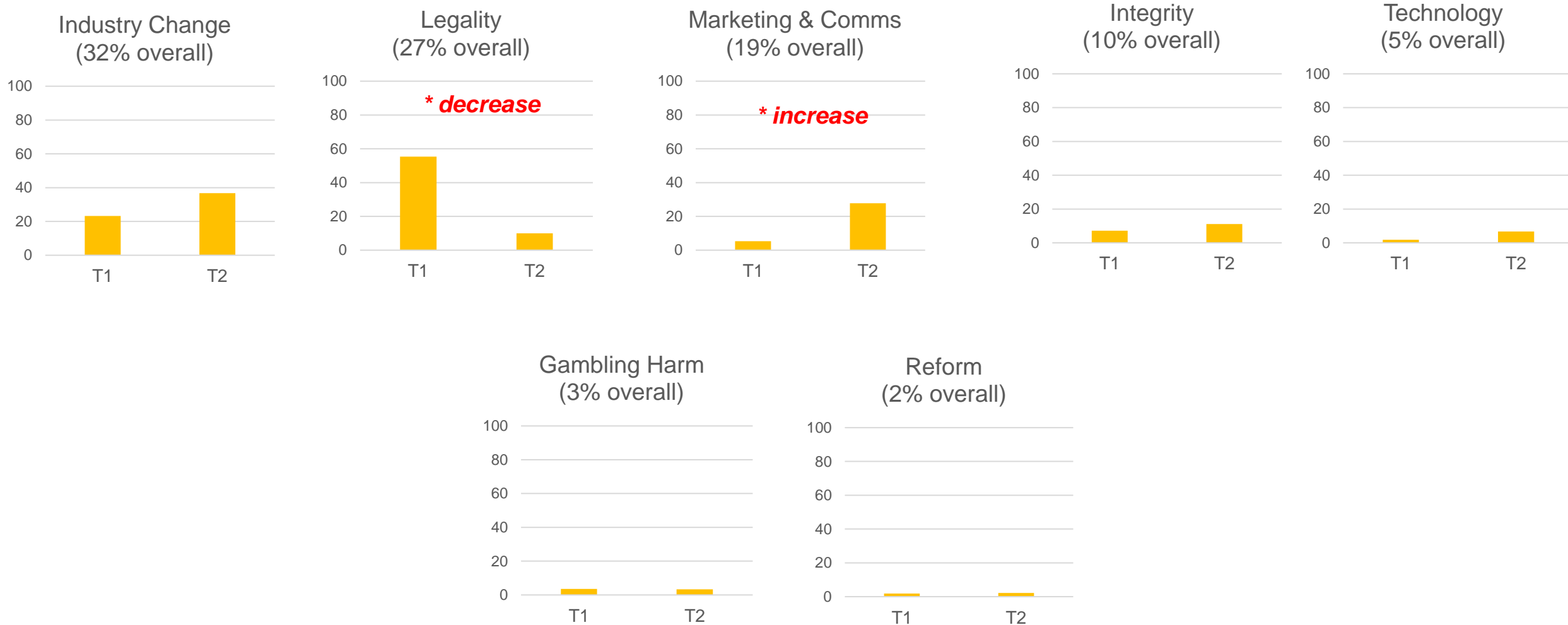


# Media did not anticipate C-218 as a change to the gambling product

*...single event sports betting has upped the ante around the desire for data by everyone with skin in the game. That's especially true when it comes to anticipating the expected growth of in-game or micro bets... "It turns watching sports into a gamified, lean-in experience, [and] provides the opportunity for media organizations to build and deliver an increasingly engaged audience," said Harris (for Deloitte Canada) (Giving data to sportsbooks, leagues want share of the pie, Toronto Star, 27 Nov 2021)*

*"[OLG] customers will have access to thousands more betting options than are offered today. We will also provide new betting choices for online and mobile customers that will also include dynamic odds, novelty bets, and new features like the ability to place live bets during games" (Launch set for start of NFL season, Toronto Star, 10 July 2021)*

# Primary Themes



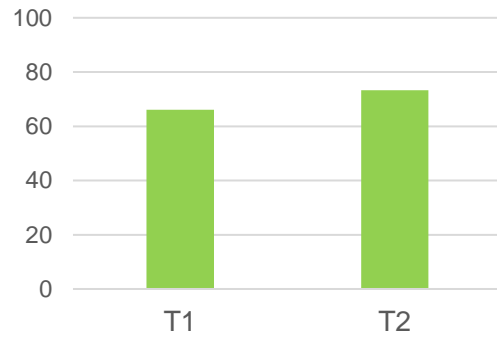
# Increase in negative articles on Marketing (ads) after C-218

*The Beaverton, a popular Canadian parody website, published a cheeky story the other day that carried the headline "Sportsnet apologizes for interrupting gambling commercial with hockey" (The Pandora's Box of sports betting has been opened, Winnipeg Free Press, 21 May 2022)*

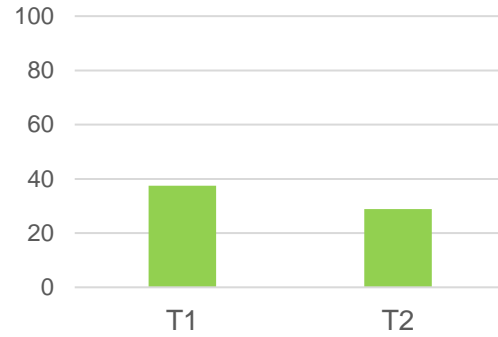
*This spring there is a new annoyance never before seen. Hockey Night in Canada appears to have morphed into Hockey Night at the Casino. Jim Matheson of Edmonton tweeted out "I long for the same Tim Horton's commercial over and over" (NHL playoffs, or Hockey Night at the Casino? Globe and Mail, 14 May 2022)*

# Voices

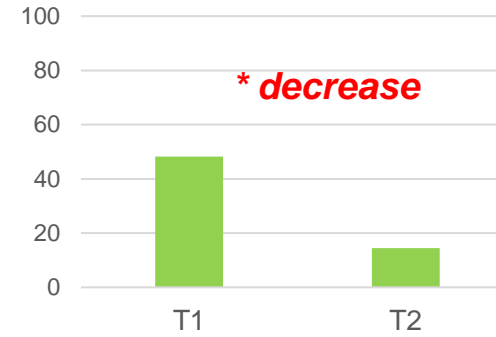
Industry  
(71% overall)



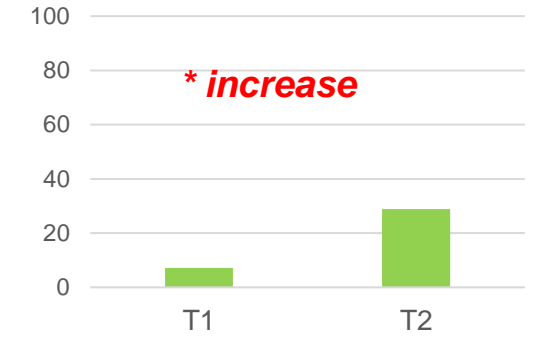
Sports leagues  
(32% overall)



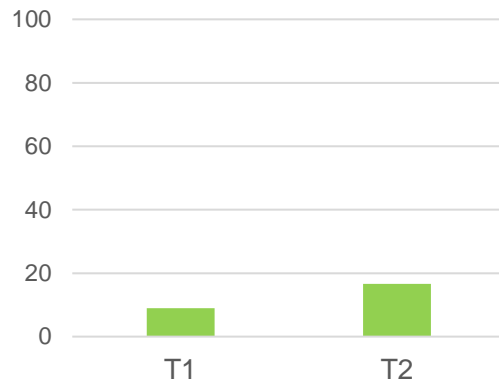
Government  
(27% overall)



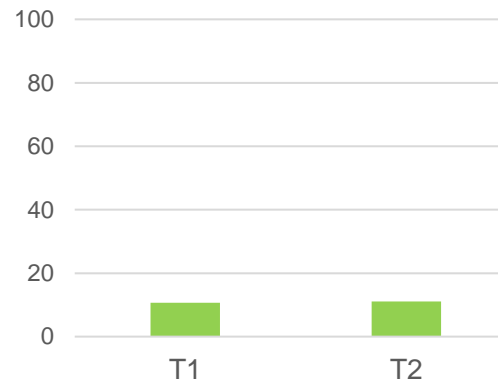
Celebrities  
(21% overall)



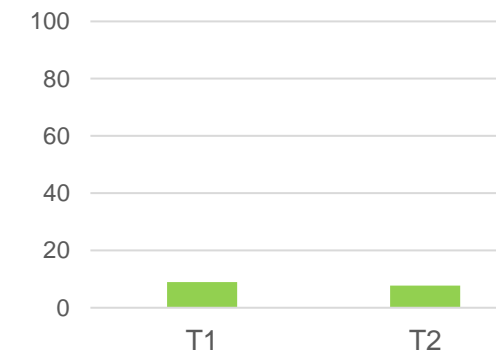
Broadcasters  
(14% overall)



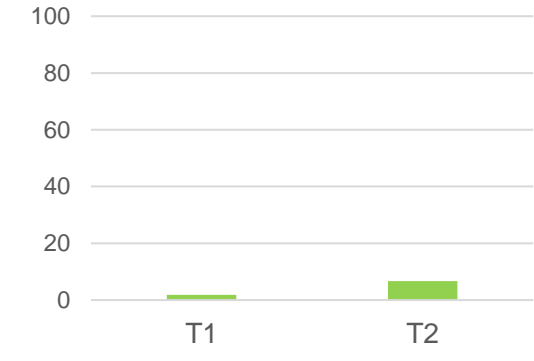
Academics  
(11% overall)



Treatment  
Providers/NGOs  
(8% overall)



Lived experience  
(5% overall)



# Conclusions: media coverage of sports betting

- In covering the legalization of sports betting, Canadian media has focused on corporate and economic considerations. Industry Change was the modal primary theme, and the gambling industry was the most frequent voice.
- By contrast, the coverage has neglected the risks of harm: Gambling Harm and Reform as themes, and academics, treatment providers/NGOs, and people with lived experience of gambling harms as voices.
- Although Technology was mentioned in over half of articles, in-play betting (as a subtheme) was rarely discussed (21%), suggesting the reporting has largely ignored the shift towards a higher-risk gambling product.
- We encourage researchers, treatment providers, and people with lived experience to be more accessible to media in order to portray a more balanced perspective.



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