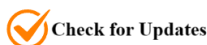


Odds and Betting Diversity of Legal and Illegal Bookmakers in Türkiye: A Comparative Analysis

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Academic Editor: Akan Bayrakdar

Received: 01.05.2025

Accepted: 10.08.2025

Published: 30.09.2025

Citation: Ötkan, C. Ç., & Halıcı, A. (2025). Odds and betting diversity of legal and illegal bookmakers in Türkiye: A comparative analysis. *Journal of Sport for All and Recreation*, 7(3), 394-402.

<https://doi.org/10.56639/jsar.1689145>

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Abstract: This study aims to compare the betting odds and diversity offered by legal bookmakers in Türkiye and a bookmaker based abroad, which is considered illegal. The descriptive survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was used. A total of 464 competitions played in the top and one lower league in the football leagues of six different countries were included in the study. The included competitions were analyzed regarding match result odds and number of bets. The data were collected between August 18 and September 18, 2024. The data set was found to be normally distributed, and ANOVA and Posthoc LSD tests were used for analysis. It was found that the odds and variety of bets offered by illegal bookmaker were significantly higher than the monopoly Main Legal Bookmaker and all six different online bookmakers. This situation is attributed to the monopoly dominance of the betting market in Türkiye. Opening the market to competition through licensing would provide consumers with more attractive prices and services.

Keywords: Betting diversity, bookmakers, monopolisation, illegal sports betting, sports betting.

1. Introduction

Sports betting is as popular and controversial today as it was in the past. Dissenters of sports betting argue that betting games should not be intertwined with sports and could lead to the corruption of sports as a form of gambling that does not require skill (Khazaal et al., 2012). The existence of illegal organizations manipulating the results of competitions for their benefit through on-field actors and athletes betting on their competitions in different disciplines and levels shows that concerns about corruption are realistic (Steinberg, 2021; Doyle, 2023; Rascoe, 2023; Staniforth, 2023; Thomas, 2023). In addition, it is also argued that sports betting is a threat to public health as it can lead to gambling addiction (Gainsbury, 2015; Lopez-Gonzalez et al., 2019; Russell et al., 2019). However, despite all these adverse opinions, sports betting has a market volume of 242 billion dollars (IBISWorld, 2023). Especially online sports betting is considered an indispensable activity by consumers in many countries due to its easy accessibility and privacy (Wood et al., 2007).

The legal regulations and the form of the market for online sports betting, which has become an essential service sector within the sports industry, differ according to the countries' approach. These include banning online betting activities, creating a competitive market through licensing, or creating a state/corporate monopoly (Etuk et al., 2022). In Türkiye, land-based and online sports betting games are outsourced to private legal entities that win the state tenders. This situation creates a monopoly in determining prices and products in the sports betting market.

Research on legal and illegal sports betting in Türkiye is available in the literature. Some studies address the issue from legal (Belci, 2021; Uz, 2008), economic (Altınışık, 2017), sociological (Yaşar, 2010), psychological (Çelik, 2016; Önal, 2023),

and communicative (Özsoy et al., 2014) perspectives. Ötken and Çolakoğlu (2020) researched the views of participants who have illegal betting over the internet. In this study, participants stated that they prefer illegal companies based abroad over legal online betting games in Türkiye due to higher odds and more betting options. This study was conducted to quantitatively compare odds and betting diversity, a research topic that has not been addressed before in Türkiye and which influences consumers' preferences. Accordingly, the study aims to compare the odds and betting diversity by a private law legal entity that provides legal services to consumers of fixed odds sports betting games in Türkiye with the odds and betting diversity offered by a company that is considered illegal in Türkiye but serves as a licensed online bookmaker in many countries. It is thought that revealing the consequences of monopolization in sports betting games shaped in line with the legislation in Türkiye is essential for all subjects related to sports and betting games.

1.1. Legal Regulations on Sports Betting Games in the World and the State of the Market

Across the world, there are different approaches and legal regulations for land-based (at physical locations) and online sports betting. In the U.S.A., the situation varies by state. Following the repeal of The Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act, each state has regulated and legalized its sports betting legislation. Many states, such as New Jersey, New York, Indiana, and Michigan, allow licensed sportsbooks to offer land-based and online betting services to provide a competitive environment. In Alabama, Alaska, California, Georgia, Hawaii, Idaho, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Carolina, Texas, and Utah, sports betting is illegal (Bengel & McCarriston, 2023; Humphreys & Carcedo, 2012; Meer, 2011).

The United Kingdom, one of the leading sports betting countries in Europe, has a competitive approach to sports betting based on cooperation between government and private companies (Schreiber, 2017). The games are conducted under the Gambling Act 2005. Local governments are given significant powers under the Commission, which has a regulatory and supervisory role. Accordingly, companies aiming to provide services for sports betting games are licensed by local authorities.

In Spain, land-based sports betting is regulated by regional authorities. The Directorate General licenses operators wishing to offer online sports betting services for Regulation of Gambling (2024) if they meet the legal, technical, and economic requirements. Accordingly, Spain, like many other E.U. Member States, has a competitive market in online sports betting.

When the European Union legislation is examined, it is seen that it aims to prevent monopolization in the goods and services offered, and sanctions are imposed on practices that restrict economic freedoms. On the other hand, the European Commission expressed its support for Member States to adopt measures to protect public health in gambling activities such as sports betting. However, it is stated that these measures and practices should be consistent and compatible with the public interest objective (European Commission, 2023). The process in Germany is an example of this situation. The European Court of Justice ruled that a private company's sports betting monopoly violated E.U. law (Carmen Media Group - C-46/08, 2010). Subsequently, it was ruled that the licensing process was also not in compliance with E.U. law because the number of licensed companies was limited to 20 (Sebat Ince - Case C-336/14, 2016). Companies that fulfill the license requirements can provide sports betting services without restrictions.

In some countries such as Jordan, Afghanistan, Bahrain, Iran, Pakistan, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Algeria, Libya, Somalia, and Sudan, sports betting is considered as a form of gambling and is illegal due to cultural, religious, social and political factors (Hartmann et al., 2016; Migue, 2023).

1.2. Legal Regulations on Sports Betting in Türkiye and the State of the Market

In Türkiye, the focal point of the research, the person who gambles is subject to administrative fines. The person who provides a place and opportunity for gambling faces imprisonment and a judicial fine. Accordingly, it is possible to say that gambling activities are illegal in the country. However, the National Lottery and other land-based and online games of chance, which were under the monopoly of the State until 2020 and then transferred to the company's monopoly through a tender, are considered legal (Hatipoğlu Aydın, 2021).

Sports betting games were first offered under the state monopoly due to legal regulations in 1959. In 2004, fixed odds and mutual betting games were transferred to private legal entities through tender procedures (Akşar, 2009; Uz, 2008).

Accordingly, sports betting games under state monopoly were transferred to company/consortium monopoly. In 2019, the Şans Girişim Joint Venture, consisting of Demirören Holding and Las Vegas-based Scientific Games, won the current ten-year tender by bidding 0.2% of the revenue (Euronews, 2019). Except for the Contractor Company, the services provided by all betting companies based abroad were deemed illegal under the Law on the Regulation of Betting on Football and Other Sports Competitions and Games of Chance (1959).

The Contractor Company also has a monopoly in online fixed odds betting. Although six bookmakers were granted online bookmaker licenses by the Spor Toto Organization of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the contractor determines the odds offered by these online bookmakers and the main bookmaker (Regulation on the Implementation of Fixed Odds and Mutual Betting Games Based on Sports Competitions, 2009). In light of this information, it is observed that the sports betting market in Türkiye has a limited number of actors and, in essence, a monopolistic structure. That competition is only realized at the tender stage.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Model

This study aims to compare the betting odds and the diversity of betting options provided by legally operating bookmakers in Türkiye and those offered by an internationally based bookmaker deemed illegal. In line with this objective, the descriptive survey model, one of the quantitative research methods, was employed to examine the current situation systematically. The descriptive survey model is all of the processes that describe a situation in the past or present as it exists and are applied to realize learning and develop desired behaviors in individuals. In the descriptive survey model, in a universe consisting of many elements, a survey is conducted on the whole universe or a group of samples or samples to be taken to make a general judgment about the universe (Karasar, 2012).

2.2. Data Collection

For the study, Legal Main Bookmaker (LMB), 6 Legal Online Bookmakers (LOB1, LOB2, LOB3, LOB4, LOB5, LOB6), and one online Illegal Bookmaker (IB), which is considered illegal, were examined within the scope of the study. A total of 464 matches played in the top and one lower league in the football leagues of England, Italy, Germany, Spain, France, and Türkiye were included in the study. The included competitions were analyzed regarding match result odds and number of bets. Data were collected between August 18 and September 18, 2024. Data could not be collected between September 8 and 10 due to national team matches. Since the betting odds on the identified sites were constantly updated, the data were entered into the system simultaneously to prevent data loss.

2.3. Statistical Analysis Methods

The data were transferred to the SPSS Package program without any intervention. The conformity of the 464 transferred data to the normal distribution was interpreted by examining the skewness and kurtosis values. In this context, the results were examined with the numbers specified as criterion values in the literature (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), and it was understood that the data set was suitable for normal distribution. After examining the data distribution, ANOVA and Post hoc LSD tests were used to analyze the data.

2.4. Ethical Approval

This study did not involve human or animal subjects; therefore, ethical approval was not required. The research was conducted in accordance with the "Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions" and the ethical guidelines of the Declaration of Helsinki.

3. Results

When Table 1 is analyzed, it is seen that the means of home win odds significantly according to the bookmakers ($F(7)=5.384$; $p\leq 0.05$). As a result, the Post hoc LSD test found that the mean of the IB's home win odds (2.54 ± 1.05) was significantly higher than the mean of the seven legal bookmakers. There is no significant difference between the mean home win odds of the other seven legal companies. The calculated eta-square effect size shows that the difference is low.

Table 1. ANOVA results for the averages of bookmakers' home win odds

	Bookmaker	N	X	Sx	F	sd	p	n2
Home win odds	IB	464	2,54	1,05	5,384	7	,000	,010
	LMB	464	2,32	1,12				
	LOB1	464	2,21	1,06				
	LOB2	464	2,21	1,06				
	LOB3	464	2,22	1,06				
	LOB4	464	2,23	1,07				
	LOB5	464	2,21	1,06				
	LOB6	464	2,21	1,06				

Table 2. ANOVA results for the averages of the bookmakers' draw odds

	Bookmaker	N	X	Sx	F	sd	p	n2
Draw odds	IB	464	3,8132	,89	38,357	7	,000	,068
	LMB	464	3,4553	,70				
	LOB1	464	3,2589	,63				
	LOB2	464	3,2591	,63				
	LOB3	464	3,2644	,63				
	LOB4	464	3,2876	,64				
	LOB5	464	3,2560	,63				
	LOB6	464	3,2598	,63				

When Table 2 is analyzed, it is seen that the means of the draw odds differ significantly according to the bookmakers ($F(7)= 38.357$; $p \leq 0.05$). As a result of the Post hoc LSD test, it was found that the mean of the IB ($3.81 \pm .89$) was significantly higher than the mean of the 7 legal bookmakers. It was also found that the draw odds of LMB ($3.45 \pm .70$) was significantly higher than the average of all LOBs. There is no significant difference between the means of the draw odds of the other 6 LOBs. The calculated eta-square effect size shows that the difference is moderate.

Table 3. ANOVA results for the averages of bookmakers' away win odds

	Bookmaker	N	X	Sx	F	sd	p	n2
Away win odds	IB	464	3,64	1,89	4,109	7	,000	,008
	LMB	464	3,41	1,84				
	LOB1	464	3,19	1,67				
	LOB2	464	3,19	1,67				
	LOB3	464	3,20	1,67				
	LOB4	464	3,21	1,69				
	LOB5	464	3,21	1,71				
	LOB6	464	3,19	1,68				

When Table 3 is analyzed, it is seen that the averages of the away win odds differ significantly according to the bookmakers ($F(7)= 4.109$, $p \leq 0.05$). As a result of the Post hoc LSD test, the average away win odds of the IB (3.64 ± 1.89) is significantly higher than the average of the seven legal bookmakers. There is no significant difference between the mean away win odds of the seven legal bookmakers. The calculated eta-square effect size shows that the difference is low.

Table 4. ANOVA results for the mean betting diversity of bookmakers

	Bookmaker	N	X	Sx	F	sd	p	n2
Betting diversity	IB	464	208,56	83,83	14,33	7	,000	,026
	LMB	464	191,31	15,59				
	LOB1	464	198,15	15,46				
	LOB2	464	192,45	14,37				
	LOB3	464	197,20	14,69				
	LOB4	464	197,89	14,71				

LOB5	464	190,51	15,13
LOB6	464	198,35	14,97

When Table 4 is analyzed, it is seen that the mean betting diversity varies significantly according to the bookmakers ($F(7)= 14.33$, $p \leq 0.05$). As a result of the Post hoc LSD test, the mean betting diversity of the IB (208.56 ± 1.89) was significantly higher than the mean of the seven legal bookmakers. In addition, the mean betting diversity of LOB1, LOB3, LOB4 and LOB6 was significantly higher than that of the LMB.

4. Discussion

This research compares the betting odds and diversity offered by Legal Bookmakers and Illegal Bookmakers in Türkiye. Accordingly, there is a significant difference between the odds and betting diversity offered by LMB and six different LOBs and the odds and betting diversity offered by IB. This difference was found to be in favor of IB. This situation is seen as an inevitable consequence of monopolization. The fact that a single bookmaker, legally recognized in the country, sets sports betting odds in a non-competitive environment leads to unattractive prices for customers (Edelman & Holden, 2021; Paton & Williams, 2001; Sheran, 2021).

In monopolized markets, it is tough to meet the demands of consumers regardless of the sector, as the services offered are limited in variety and quality, and prices are high. Due to the lack of competition, it is not possible for the company producing goods or services to have the motivation to prioritize the expectations of its consumers (Goyal, 2019). When the monopoly cannot offer a reasonable price, demand and customer satisfaction decline, and this situation adversely affects the company's income level, making it more challenging to offer a price and service quality that will satisfy the consumer mass (Bhattacharya et al., 2021). If there is competition in the market, favorable consumer rents will be realized through lower prices and higher service quality (Acemoğlu & Özdağlar, 2007; Acemoğlu et al., 2016; Feenstra, 2016).

While sports betting in Türkiye was under public monopoly, private monopoly has taken over. The Constitutional Court of the Republic of Türkiye predicted that the prices of goods and services would be unattractive for consumers and that the quality would be adversely affected if the monopoly changed hands through privatization (Constitutional Court Decision No. 1994/42-2, 1995). The findings of the research justify the Constitutional Court. In addition, Article 167 of the Constitution states that "The State shall take measures to ensure and improve the healthy and orderly functioning of money, credit, capital, goods and services markets, and shall prevent monopolization and cartelization in the markets, whether de facto or by agreement." Despite this, it is observed that the State de facto monopolizes sports betting games.

Instead of using its authority in sports betting to ensure an open competitive environment as the free market requires, the State prefers a tender procedure. Companies participating in the tender indicate the percentage of revenue they will receive from sports betting. The State transfers its monopoly authority to the company offering the lowest percentage. In the first tender in 2004, the winning company offered a 1.4% revenue share. The last auction in 2011 was won by the company that offered a 0.2% share of revenue. The remaining 99.8% goes to the national treasury. It is also understood from the research findings that a bookmaker serving under these conditions cannot compete with international bookmakers established in offshore countries (Akşar, 2009; Talimciler, 2019).

Establishing a monopoly in the sports betting sector is seen as a factor that adversely affects the freedom to provide services. The monopoly in question can only be justified if a systematic structure is established where the aim is to combat the threat of gambling to public health (Renita, 2018; Towfigh & Glöckner, 2011). It is stated that the factors that encourage addiction to sports betting games are live betting, betting promotions, and advertisements (Hing et al., 2016; Russell et al., 2019). However, it is observed that Legal Main Bookmaker and six other Legal Online Bookmakers in Türkiye do not apply these addictive elements. Therefore, it is not possible to say that the State protects the monopolistic structure in sports betting games due to the threatening aspects of gambling to public health and that it systematically fights against addiction. According to Rehm (2008), although politicians claim that the monopolization of the gambling market is aimed at combating addiction, this is a pretext. The fundamental aim of politicians is to preserve a regular and valuable source of income from sports betting and games of chance.

When we evaluate the research findings among legal bookmakers, it is seen that Legal Main Bookmaker is higher than the other 6 Legal Online Bookmakers in the variables home win odds, draw odds, and away win odds. A significant difference is found in the draw odds variable. In the bet diversity variable, 4 Legal Online Bookmakers significantly differ from Legal Main Bookmaker. The difference here is against Legal Main Bookmaker. At this point, Legal Main Bookmaker offers more attractive opportunities to consumers who bet with the motivation of making money.

On the other hand, seven different online bookmakers in the market do not eliminate the monopoly in betting. This is because the contractor Company that wins the tender determines the odds offered to consumers by all these bookmakers. This situation is also supported by the data obtained within the scope of the study. In 2021, a natural or legal person who requested anonymity applied to the Turkish Competition Authority. The applicant stated that betting odds are the main factor in consumers' preference for a betting product. However, it was alleged that the Contractor Company had set the betting odds higher than the other 6 Legal Online Bookmakers because the Contractor Company received a higher commission from the Legal Main Bookmaker following the contract and that competition protection legislation was infringed. The Competition Board, on the other hand, stated that the Contractor Company took the financial risk and suffered the loss in the event of low revenues. Therefore, the Competition Board stated that it was "valid grounds" for the Contractor Company to set higher betting odds for Legal Main Bookmaker, which operates under its management, and reinforced its monopoly power in the market ([Competition Board Decision No. 21-55/781-387, 2021](#)).

5. Conclusions

We started this research by asking why betting consumers in Türkiye prefer illegal betting companies despite the risk of criminal sanctions. A finding from another study struck us. A consumer who preferred illegal betting companies stated that the odds and betting types were much more attractive and that legal betting companies in Türkiye "took them for fools" ([Ötken & Çolakoğlu, 2020](#)). Our results show that the odds and betting range offered by the Contractor Company, which has a monopoly position in Türkiye, are indeed lower than those offered by the Illegal Bookmaker, based abroad and considered illegal.

The current situation appears to be unattractive for consumers who prefer legal bookmakers. As a result of the higher demand for illegal bookmakers, a significant amount of informal economy and money laundering activities occur ([Financial Crimes Investigation Board Presidency, 2022](#)). In order to struggle against illegal betting, the state has come up with palliative solutions such as reducing tax rates, increasing the distributable jackpot, and blocking online access to illegal bookmakers ([Law No. 7491 on Amendments to Certain Laws and Decree Laws, 2023](#); [Presidential Decree No. 8003, 2023](#)). However, marketization of betting games to competition and including international betting companies in the system through licensing, as in the U.K., is a more permanent solution. A betting market in which the political authority plays a regulatory and supervisory role and is free from monopolization would be preferable for consumers.

The research has some limitations. Only one company was included in the study as an illegal bookmaker. As the dependent variable, 3-probability outcome betting odds and the number of betting diversity offered for each competition were considered for football. The data was collected over one month from competitions in the top two leagues of Türkiye and the top 5 countries according to UEFA country coefficients. In future research, more international bookmakers could be included in the study. Data can be collected and evaluated from bet types, branches, and leagues over a broader period.

Author Contributions: Conceptualization, C.Ç.Ö. and A.H.; methodology, C.Ç.Ö.; software, C.Ç.Ö.; validation, C.Ç.Ö., A.H. and C.Ç.Ö.; formal analysis, C.Ç.Ö.; investigation, A.H.; resources, A.H.; data curation, C.Ç.Ö.; writing—original draft preparation, A.H.; writing—review and editing, C.Ç.Ö.; visualization, A.H.; supervision, C.Ç.Ö.

Financial Support: No financial support was received from institutions and/or institutions during the preparation and writing of this study.

Informed Consent: Informed consent forms were obtained from all participants who participated in the study.

Declaration of Data Availability: The data is publicly available.

Acknowledgments: We would like to thank all participants who took part in the study.

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