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Sports Betting, the 2026 World Cup, and Latino Financial Risk

How the sports economy can grow with Latino communities, not at their expense.

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Executive Summary

The 2026 FIFA World Cup was a defining cultural and economic moment for Latino communities. With 48 teams and 104 matches across the United States, Mexico, and Canada, the tournament generated an extended period of national pride, family viewing, media engagement, and commercial activity.[1] It also unfolded in a sports marketplace where betting had become increasingly mobile, personalized, and embedded into the fan experience.

Latino fans are central to the future of that marketplace. McKinsey & Company estimates that the U.S. sports economy could grow to more than $300 billion by 2035, with Latino fans accounting for approximately one-third of that growth.[2] Their youth, enthusiasm across multiple sports, and influence over media engagement, consumption, and community-building make Latinos a major economic force, not a niche or fair-weather audience. This growing influence creates substantial opportunities for investment, representation, and wealth creation. It also raises an important question: will the sports economy build lasting value with Latino communities, or will some parts of the industry extract financial value without adequately protecting the households helping drive its growth?

This brief examines that question through the lens of financial health. It builds on LatinoProsperity's fintech and wealth pathways research, the LatinoProsperity and Urban Institute Understanding America Study survey analysis, and the Urban Institute's July 2026 national sports betting brief using the same survey.

Survey results indicate that sports betting participation among Latino respondents was relatively low during the prior year. Five percent reported using a sports betting app or website, 6 percent reported betting in person, and 1 percent reported using a prediction market. Most Latino respondents who bet reported doing so infrequently and wagering less than $100 over the year

However, the World Cup demonstrated how a high-attention cultural moment can expand exposure to sports betting. National identity, family watch parties, Spanish-language coverage, social media, and a dense match schedule created repeated opportunities for platforms to reach both established and occasional fans. As Latino audiences become more valuable to the sports industry, betting platforms have stronger incentives to convert cultural engagement into account openings, repeated wagers, and deposits.

The concern is not that all Latino fans are becoming heavy bettors. It is that mobile platforms can use culturally significant moments, promotional offers, live betting, and repeated notifications to turn fandom into financial leakage. Even relatively modest losses can reduce savings, interfere with bill payments, increase debt strain, or intensify financial stress among households already working toward greater stability.

The policy challenge is therefore not whether Latino consumers should participate in legal sports entertainment. It is whether the industry's growth will be accompanied by transparent products, meaningful consumer protections, and responsible investment in the communities helping drive that growth.

Key Findings

Latino fans are a major driver of sports-sector growth.

Their expanding cultural and economic influence gives leagues, media companies, sponsors, and betting platforms a growing commercial interest in reaching Latino audiences.

Sports betting participation among Latinos is relatively low and similar to non-Latinos, with comparable use of online and in-person channels.

An estimated 9% of Latino respondents reported betting through at least one channel compared with 11% among non-Latinos, a difference that was not statistically significant. Among Latinos, 5% used a sports betting app or website and 6% bet in person.

Latino bettors report disproportionately severe financial consequences.

Eleven percent of Latino respondents reported a very negative financial impact from sports betting, compared with just 1% of non-Latino respondents, despite broadly similar participation rates.

Online and mobile betting may heighten financial risk.

Online bettors bet more frequently, spend more, use more complex products, and are more likely than in-person-only bettors to report difficulty paying bills.

These risks intersect with broader Latino financial priorities.

Latino respondents prioritize emergency savings, reducing debt, improving credit, and homeownership while reporting less confidence in meeting long-term financial goals.

Policy should focus on industry design and conduct.

Consumer protections should address misleading promotions, credit-funded deposits, repeated betting prompts, difficult-to-understand products, weak spending controls, and uneven access to Spanish-language disclosures and assistance.

The sports economy should recognize Latino fans not only as participants in its growth, but as partners whose loyalty, cultural influence, and economic power are helping shape the industry's future. The 2026 World Cup demonstrated both the strength of that influence and the risks that emerge when intense cultural engagement is paired with aggressive betting products and marketing. The experience offers an opportunity to build a stronger model going forward, one in which the industry invests in Latino communities, protects consumer financial well-being, and ensures that economic growth, cultural inclusion, and shared prosperity advance together.

Introduction

Sports betting has become a large and rapidly expanding consumer market. Americans spent $57 billion on sports betting in 2021 and $167 billion in 2025, nearly tripling in four years.[3] As of the brief's release, 39 states and the District of Columbia had legalized sports betting, and 32 states plus D.C. allowed online or mobile sports betting.[4]

11%
U.S. adults who bet on sports in past year

46%
Sports bettors who used only online/ mobile channels

55%
Sports bettors who bet less than $100 in past year

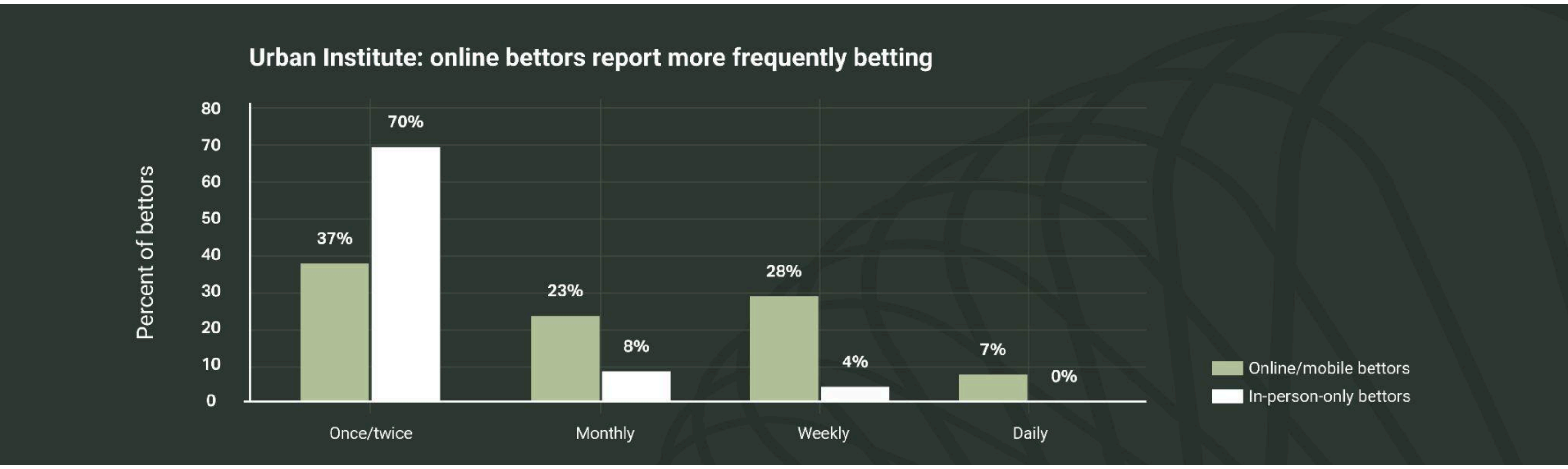
67%
Sports bettors who bet to try to win money

Most sports betting is small, but financial harm is concentrated

Most sports bettors bet relatively infrequently and with small amounts: 48% bet only once or twice in the past year, and 55% bet less than $100. At the same time, a meaningful minority report harm: 12% of all sports bettors said they saved less than they would have without betting; among sports bettors with income below $50,000, the share was 19%, and among bettors ages 18 to 29, it was 15%.[5]

Online/mobile betting is the higher-risk channel

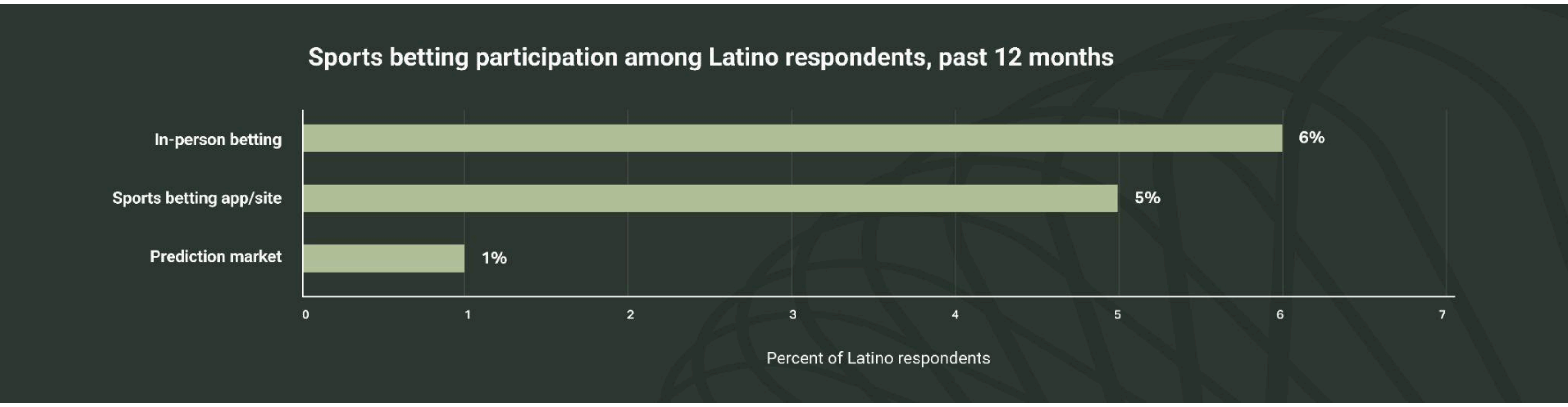
Online bettors were less likely to bet just once or twice and more likely to bet monthly, weekly, or daily. They also spent more, used more complex bet types, and were about 15 times more likely than in-person-only bettors to report delaying or skipping a bill payment because of sports betting.[6]



Source: Urban Institute Fintech Survey (January 2026). Online/mobile bettors include sports betting app and prediction market users; in-person bettors only bet at physical locations. Sample sizes differ by survey question because of nonresponses.

Among Latinos, betting participation is similar to non-Latinos, but reported financial harm is greater

Sports betting participation remains relatively low among Latino respondents, but those who bet are nearly as likely to do so online as in person. Among respondents who answered the sports betting items, 6% reported betting at a casino, racetrack, kiosk, or other in-person location, compared with 5% who used a sports betting app or website. Another 1% reported using a prediction market. The narrow gap between in-person and app-based betting suggests that sports betting among Latinos is not concentrated in a single channel; digital platforms are already reaching Latino bettors at roughly the same rate as traditional, in-person venues.



Source: Urban Institute Fintech Survey (January 2026). Latino sports betting participation, past 12 months. Percentages are weighted and calculated among respondents with nonmissing responses.Total Latino survey sample: n = 423; unweighted number of Latino respondents reporting sports betting through at least one channel: n = 46. Weighted Latino sports betting participation rate: 9%. Respondents could report participation through more than one channel.

What Latino sports bettors reported

Frequency	A majority reported betting only once or twice in the past year, while non-Latino bettors were more likely to report weekly betting.
Amount	Nearly two-thirds of Latino sports bettors reported betting less than $100 in the past year.
Format	Single-game bets were by far the most common format; more complex products were used by a much smaller share.
Motivations	Winning money and entertainment were the top reasons for betting; social reasons, promotions, boredom, competition, and risk-taking were secondary.
Financial harm	Harms were not widespread, but about 1 in 10 Latino sports bettors reported reduced savings, difficulty paying bills, or greater financial stress tied to sports betting. Latino respondents were also more likely than non-Latino respondents to report a very negative financial impact from sports betting, 11% versus 1%.

From fandom to financial leakage

The 2026 World Cup created a different consumer environment than ordinary sports betting. It combined national identity, soccer fandom, family viewing, watch parties, Spanish-language media, social media conversation, and a match schedule that repeatedly put betting prompts in front of fans. Because the tournament was co-hosted by the United States, Mexico, and Canada, betting felt more local and culturally connected.

The risk pathway	
1. Attention National teams, flags, family watch parties, Spanish-language coverage, and social media pull more casual fans into a high-attention environment.	**2. Activation** Deposit bonuses, odds boosts, and matchday promotions invite first-time or occasional bettors to open accounts.
3. Acceleration Live betting, parlays, and push notifications make it easy to bet repeatedly during a single match.	**4. Household impact** Losses can crowd out savings, bill payments, remittances, debt reduction, or other stability goals.

Why this is a financial health issue

LatinoProsperity's prior fintech research found that digital financial access does not automatically become wealth-building. For many Latino households, digital tools are used to manage instability, smooth cash flow, avoid overdrafts, and navigate short-term pressure. Sports betting should be understood within the same framework: it is a digital money-moving platform whose effects depend on household financial buffers, product design, and market conduct.[7]

Urban's national findings show that many consumers use sports betting as entertainment, but also that the online channel is linked to more frequent play, more complex bets, and greater bill-payment risk. The World Cup is precisely the type of moment that can move consumers from occasional entertainment toward repeated mobile engagement.

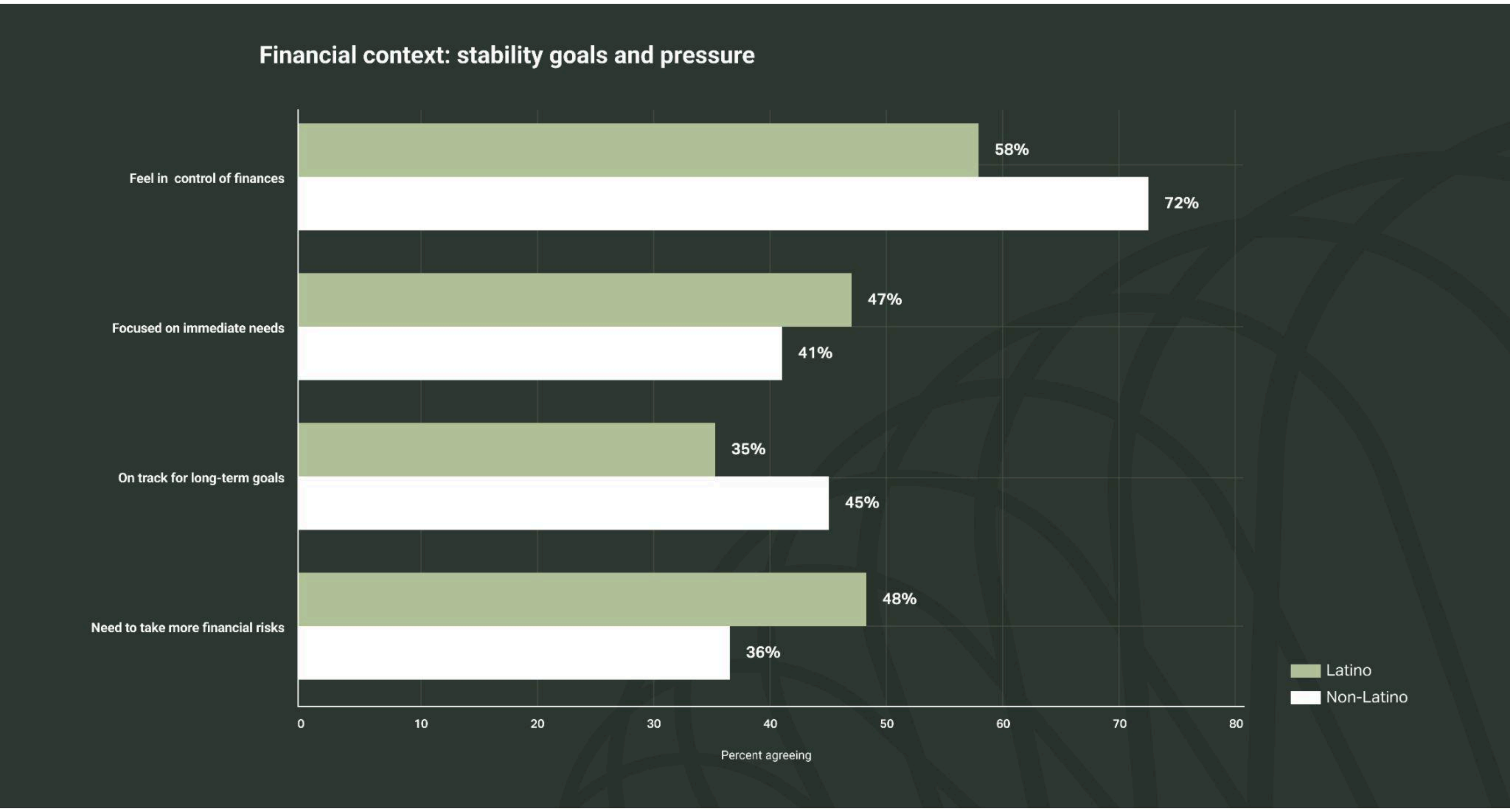
How online sports betting can affect Latino financial health?

The financial risk from sports betting is not only the size of a single bet. The risk is the combination of low-friction deposits, repeat prompts, bonus terms, live betting, and household financial pressure. External research using transaction and credit data links expanded mobile sports betting access to reduced savings, credit strain, higher delinquencies, and other indicators of financial distress.[8]

Six pathways of harm	
Reduced savings Betting losses can crowd out emergency savings, high-yield savings, retirement contributions, or debt repayment.	**Debt strain** Credit cards, cash advances, overdrafts, and borrowed money can convert entertainment losses into revolving debt.
Credit and delinquency risk Research using credit data links mobile sports betting access to higher delinquency and other credit stress.	**Loss-chasing and speed** Apps reduce friction: a consumer can deposit, wager, lose, and deposit again within seconds.
Hidden complexity Parlays, live bets, boosted odds, and bonus credits can make the true risk difficult to evaluate.	**Family tradeoffs** Losses may affect rent, food, remittances, child expenses, car payments, and shared household obligations.

Why the Latino financial context matters

A $25 or $50 betting loss does not mean the same thing for every household. Latino respondents were more likely to prioritize emergency savings, paying down debt, improving credit, and purchasing a home, while also reporting lower control over finances and lower confidence that they were on track for long-term goals



Source: Urban Institute Fintech Survey (January 2026) Percentages are weighted and calculated among respondents with nonmissing responses.

Responsible entertainment vs. predatory inclusion

Legal access alone should not be treated as financial inclusion. The policy question is whether sports betting markets give consumers informed, budgeted, transparent participation or whether product design and marketing convert cultural attention into repeated loss.[9]

Urban’s national findings reinforce this distinction: most sports bettors report little financial impact, but online/mobile bettors are more likely to bet frequently, use complex bet types, and report financial challenges. That means guardrails should focus on product design and consumer protections rather than moralizing entertainment.[10]

Responsible entertainment	Predatory inclusion
• Consumer sets a budget before betting • Odds, losses, and promotion terms are plain and visible • Deposit, loss, and time limits are easy to set and hard to raise impulsively • No credit-funded deposits or misleading bonus language • Easy self-exclusion and non-stigmatizing help	• Cultural pride, flags, influencers, or team identity are used to drive repeat deposits • Promotions imply free money while obscuring restrictions • Live betting prompts and push notifications encourage rapid losses • Financially stressed users are retargeted with more offers • Consumer protections are fragmented by state or buried in app menus

Conclusion

Latino fans are helping shape the future of the U.S. sports economy. Their loyalty, cultural influence, and economic power should support an industry that builds value with Latino communities, not one that exposes them to avoidable financial harm.

The 2026 World Cup showed how national pride, family viewing, Spanish-language media, and mobile technology can create a powerful environment for sports betting promotion. Although reported participation among Latino respondents was relatively low, digital platforms can quickly turn occasional betting into repeated spending through promotions, live wagers, and constant prompts.

Consumer protections have not kept pace. The National Council on Problem Gambling found that state online sports betting regulations provide uneven protections when measured against its Internet Responsible Gambling Standards.[11] For Latino consumers, fragmented rules can mean uneven access to Spanish-language disclosures, spending limits, help resources, and safeguards against misleading promotions.

The policy challenge is not whether adults should be able to bet legally. It is whether participation is transparent, budgeted, and protected by meaningful safeguards. A stronger model would treat Latino fans as partners in the industry's growth, protect household stability, and ensure that the value they help create contributes to shared prosperity.

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