



COALITION FOR POLITICAL FORECASTING

# **Political Betting Regulation in the United States: Pathways to Liberalization**

July 2023

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**A Report of the Coalition for Political Forecasting**

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## About the Coalition for Political Forecasting

The Coalition for Political Forecasting is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that aims to liberalize regulations on political betting in order to serve the public interest.

The Coalition advocates for a community of researchers, traders, and philanthropists that sees real-money prediction markets and other betting platforms as advanced forecasting tools that can help humanity navigate an uncertain future by aggregating and refining predictions about political events.

The Coalition seeks to advise the policymaking community on how betting on political events can improve democratic institutions, promote economic stability, and facilitate innovative research.

The views expressed here are those of the authors.

### Coalition Leadership

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## Abstract

Regulations on political betting markets today are more uncertain than they have been at any point since 2014. The prediction market community has so far failed to persuade lawmakers and regulators that liberalization of the space serves the public interest. Arguments for doing so have been undermined by the mixed performance of prediction markets in recent elections, the national political environment, and ineffective business decisions by companies in the space. While the U.S. Congress or the courts could intervene to create safe harbors for election contracts, liberalization of the political prediction market space will likely require a long, expensive, and multifaceted advocacy campaign that is unlikely to bear fruit until after the 2024 U.S. presidential elections.

## Background

In August of 2022, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission (CFTC) made two major announcements regarding the regulation of political prediction markets.

First, the CFTC [withdrew](#) PredictIt's no-action letter and ordered the site to shut down in February 2023.<sup>1</sup> The no-action letter, granted in 2014,<sup>2</sup> had allowed PredictIt to emerge as the most significant legal political betting exchange in the United States. A group of plaintiffs associated with PredictIt responded by suing the CFTC in an ongoing lawsuit.

Second, the CFTC announced that it would review the proposal of Kalshi, a Designated Contract Market (DCM) dedicated to event contracts,<sup>3</sup> to offer markets on the U.S. mid-term elections. The agency set a self-imposed goal of completing its review by October

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1. CFTC, "CFTC Staff Withdraws No-Action Letter to Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand Regarding a Not-For-Profit Market for Certain Event Contracts," 4 August 2022. <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/PressReleases/8567-22>
  2. CFTC Letter No. 14-130, Division of Market Oversight, 29 October 2014, <https://www.cftc.gov/node/213146>
  3. Kalshi's DCM application is available at: CFTC, "Kalshi DCM Application," File Number: 21-00068, [https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia\\_freqrequestinfo.html](https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia_freqrequestinfo.html)

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28, 2022, just days before the election. Although the CFTC staff reportedly advised the commissioners to reject Kalshi's application, the midterm elections came and went without a formal decision. Pursuant to section 40.11 of the regulations of the CFTC, Kalshi [asked](#) the agency to review its request to offer election markets on control of the U.S. Congress by May 22, 2023. When the CFTC missed three deadlines and ultimately did not respond, Kalshi withdrew the request.<sup>4</sup>

In June 2023, Kalshi [notified](#) the CFTC that it was self-certifying new control of Congress contracts under section 40.2(a) of the regulations of the CFTC. If approved, the contracts would have modified position limits, expanded trading prohibitions, and other revisions from the July 2022 contracts that Kalshi made based on feedback from the comments period.<sup>5</sup> On June 23, the Commission [announced](#) that it had commenced a 90-day review of the contracts with a 30-day public comment period, pursuant to CFTC Regulation 40.11(c), and that Kalshi must suspend listing of the contracts during the review.<sup>6</sup>

The CFTC's decisions have diminished hopes that regulations on political betting markets will be eased quickly or even that the space will see greater legal clarity in the near future. Restrictions on political betting are more uncertain today than they have been

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4. See Kalshi filings at CFTC. "Trading Organization Products Associated Documents," <https://sirt.cftc.gov/sirt/sirt.aspx?Topic=TradingOrganizationProductsAD&Key=48820>
  5. Mick Bransfield, "CFTC Kalshi Cheat Sheet," 23 June 2023, <https://mickbransfield.com/2023/06/22/cftc-june-26th-kalshi-meeting-cheat-sheet/>; Chougule, host, "Another CFTC Review of Kalshi's Election Markets," Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), <https://starspangledgamblers.libsyn.com/another-cftc-review-of-kalshis-election-markets>; Declan Harty, "Kalshi makes new play for big investors to wager on U.S. elections," *Politico Pro*, 14 June 2023, <https://subscriber.politicopro.com/article/2023/06/kalshi-makes-new-play-for-big-investors-to-wager-on-u-s-elections-00101851>; Letter from Xavier Sottile, Head of Markets, KalshiEX LLC, to Secretary of the Commission, Office of the Secretariat, CFTC, 12 June 2023, <https://kalshi-public-docs.s3.amazonaws.com/regulatory/product-certifications/CONTROL.pdf>; Twitter thread, 27 June 2023, 9:52 AM, [https://twitter.com/mansourtarek\\_/status/1673690840995180546?s=20](https://twitter.com/mansourtarek_/status/1673690840995180546?s=20)
  6. CFTC Release Number 8728-23, "CFTC Announces Review of Kalshi Congressional Control Contracts and Public Comment Period," 23 June 2023, <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/PressReleases/8728-23>; Chougule, host, "Another CFTC Review of Kalshi's Election Markets"; Letter from Christopher Kirkpatrick to Sottile, 23 June 2023, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/ptc/23/06/ptc0623230001.pdf>

since 2014, when PredictIt launched.

Since June 2022, we have been exploring how regulations on political prediction markets might be reformed to better serve the public interest. For reasons elaborated in our [comment](#) to the CFTC, we believe that political betting markets are an advanced forecasting and social consensus building mechanism, which, with time and space to mature, can help humanity navigate an uncertain future.<sup>7</sup>

Our work has been funded by a grant from the Long Term Future Fund.<sup>8</sup> The fund aims to influence the long-term trajectory of civilization by addressing global catastrophic risks, in part by supporting initiatives that promise to improve society’s ability to make and disseminate accurate forecasts.<sup>9</sup>

When we undertook the project, we did not know the extent to which regulations in the space would change in the coming months. In this sense, the timing of this project proved fortuitous. Against the backdrop of the CFTC’s review, we conducted dozens of interviews with a variety of stakeholders in the political prediction market space. Some of our most informative conversations were with CFTC commissioners, lawyers, and staff.

This report summarizes our findings on the regulation of political betting in the United States.

Part I explains the different approaches political betting platforms have taken to navigate an uncertain regulatory regime, and the consequences they have had for the prediction market community.

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7. Sia, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 70745, 23 September 2022. <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=70745&SearchText=sia>

8. “Grants Database,” EA Funds, Centre for Effective Altruism, <https://funds.effectivealtruism.org/grants?fund=Long-Term%2520Future%2520Fund&sort=round>

9. “Long-Term Future Fund,” EA Funds, Centre for Effective Altruism, <https://funds.effectivealtruism.org/funds/far-future>



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Part II analyzes the main reasons why political prediction markets are highly regulated in the United States and why the trend line appears to be moving in the direction of stricter regulation.

Part III outlines pathways that could lead to the liberalization of political betting markets before the 2024 U.S. elections.

The report concludes with recommendations for those who share our interest in liberalizing regulations on political betting to serve the public interest.

## Current Approaches to Navigating Regulations

Current debates over political prediction markets stem from the choices companies in the space have made to navigate a restrictive and uncertain regulatory landscape. To deal with regulatory challenges, they have pursued various approaches. Each has entailed tradeoffs for the companies as well as the prediction market community.

### Operate Under a No-Action Letter

The Iowa Electronic Markets and PredictIt have been operating under no-action letters by the CFTC. Under the terms of the no-action letters they have agreed to operate as academic entities with limits on the types of markets they can offer, the total number and diversity of users they can accommodate, and the size of bets they can take.<sup>10</sup> PredictIt's

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10. CFTC Letter No. 93-66, Division of Trading and Markets, 18 June 1993 <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/idc/groups/public/%40lrlettergeneral/documents/letter/93-66.pdf>; CFTC Letter No. 14-130; Andrew Corcoran, CFTC Letter to Professor George Neumann, CFTC Letter No. 91-04a, Division of Trading and Markets, CFTC, 5 February 1992, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/files/foia/repfoia/foirf0503b002.pdf>; Corcoran letter to Neumann, CFTC Letter No. rf05-003, Division of Trading and Markets, CFTC, 18 June 1993, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/files/foia/repfoia/foirf0503b004.pdf>; CFTC, No-Action Letters Concerning the University of Iowa's Iowa Electronic Markets, File Number RF05-003, 18 May 2005, [https://www.cftc.gov/foia/repfoia/foirf05-003\\_1.htm](https://www.cftc.gov/foia/repfoia/foirf05-003_1.htm)

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decision to [test the limits](#)<sup>11</sup> of the 2014 agreement has been a factor in the CFTC’s [determination](#) that the site “has not operated its market in compliance with the terms of the letter.”<sup>12</sup>

The CFTC’s March 2023 [filing](#) indicates that the Iowa Electronic Markets are on a more stable regulatory footing than PredictIt by virtue of its organization, compensation structure, and relations with the CFTC.<sup>13</sup> The Iowa Electronic Markets, a [money-losing](#) venture, is limited to 2,000 participants who can place bets of between \$5 and above \$500.<sup>14</sup> [Unlike PredictIt](#),<sup>15</sup> the operators of the Iowa Electronic Markets are academics from the University of Iowa’s Tippie College of Business and associated volunteers. These individuals have shown little inclination to offer political markets to a broad user-base, raise its maximum bet limit, or directly monetize the project.

Notwithstanding these limitations, the Iowa Electronic Markets and PredictIt, in a regulatory sense, are the most successful, modern political prediction markets in the United States. They have legally and continuously offered diverse political markets with meaningful liquidity, reasonably accurate price signals, and useful data for research purposes.<sup>16</sup> The relatively benign positions the CFTC and other regulators have adopted toward these projects suggests that academia will remain a promising arena to build political prediction markets with public interest orientations that are on a stable legal foundation.

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11. Letter from Vincent McGonagle, Division of Market Oversight, CFTC, to Margaret Hyland, Victoria University of Wellington, 2 March 2023, <https://twitter.com/CasinoOrgSteveB/status/1631838950300975105?s=20>

12. CFTC, “CFTC Staff Withdraws No-Action Letter to Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand Regarding a Not-For-Profit Market for Certain Event Contracts,” 4 August 2022, <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/PressReleases/8567-22>

13. *Ibid.*

14. Jeff Sommer, “Forecasting the Future of Election Prediction Markets,” *The New York Times*, 4 November 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/11/04/business/election-prediction-markets-mid-terms.html>

15. Letter from McGonagle to Hyland, 2 March 2023

16. “Research Opportunities,” PredictIt, <https://www.predictit.org/research>; “Iowa Electronic Markets,” University of Iowa Henry B. Tippie College of Business, <https://iemweb.biz.uiowa.edu/about-iem/>

### Skirt Regulations

Polymarket tried to offer political contracts without registering with the CFTC as a DCM. Polymarket claimed that it is a decentralized platform that does not take custody of traders' funds. This approach allowed Polymarket to offer a wide array of markets and generate considerable volume on the site, reaching [more than 4 billion shares](#) within a year after its launch.<sup>17</sup> However, the CFTC subsequently took action against the company. In a settlement announced in January of 2022 Polymarket paid a civil [penalty](#) of \$1.4 million and was forced to move offshore. The CFTC determined that Polymarket's event-based binary options contracts constituted swaps that were not fully decentralized.<sup>18</sup> This has set a limiting precedent for new competitors in the space like Insight Prediction, which now effectively face the choice of remaining offshore, pursuing the onerous and seemingly stalled process of registering and operating as a DCM, or risking CFTC enforcement actions.

While Polymarket's most committed U.S.-based users still access the site by using VPNs or leaving U.S. territory, the CFTC's enforcement action has deterred liquidity on the site, curtailed its growth as a company, and undermined its ability to invest in the political prediction market community.<sup>19</sup> The latter has been particularly problematic for the political betting community given that Polymarket, before the CFTC enforcement action, was a leader in building the space.<sup>20</sup> In April 2021, as an example, Polymarket launched a mi-

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17. Benjamin Bain, Sridhar Natarajan, and Liam Vaughan, "Crypto Venue for Bets on Trump, JLo and Covid Faces U.S. Probe," *Bloomberg*, 23 October 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-10-23/crypto-venue-for-bets-on-trump-jlo-and-covid-faces-u-s-probe>

18. CFTC, "CFTC Orders Event-Based Binary Options Markets Operate to Pay \$1.4 Million Penalty," 3 January 2022. <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/PressReleases/8478-22>

19. Pat Crawley, host, "How to Trade Prediction Markets and Fade Political Hype," *Stock Market Stories* (podcast), 7 November 2022, <https://youtu.be/xJao6rHgiFE>; Alex Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "Meet Insight Prediction's Founder & CEO, Doug Campbell," *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 15 September 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/09/15/meet-insight-predictions/>; Ben Terris, *The Big Break: The Gamblers, Party Animals and True Believers Trying to Win in Washington While America Loses Its Mind*, New York: Twelve, 2023, 283.

20. Andrew Eaddy and Clay Graubard, hosts, "Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO," *Crowd Money Cast* (podcast), 14 October 2021, <https://youtu.be/vySli47rBJw?t=105>

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crogrants program to help support content, community, and research projects within the prediction market community. The program offered grants of up to \$75,000 but has been curtailed significantly as the company's revenues have dried up.<sup>21</sup> Polymarket has also been forced to lay off staff and suspend hires focused on political contracts.

### Register as a DCM and Apply for Permission with the CFTC

Branding itself as the “first federally regulated exchange,” Kalshi has tried to hew as closely as possible to the CFTC's guidelines.<sup>22</sup> As Kalshi CEO Tarek Mansour has explained, the company's regulatory posture as a DCM allows it to be “uniquely-positioned” to “build a full-scale exchange—one that can attract...institutions, and brokers, and market-makers.”<sup>23</sup>

An important consequence of this regulatory strategy is that Kalshi is limited in the political markets it can provide. Kalshi sees election contracts, which it characterizes as the “[holy grail of events trading](#),” as being “[core](#)” to its mission and identity.<sup>24</sup> Yet while

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21. Polymarket, “Introducing Polymarket Microgrants,” 19 April 2021, <https://blog.polymarket.com/introducing-polymarket-microgrants/>. An example of a project funded by the microgrants program and then discontinued is Pidot's YouTube show “Polymarket Insiders,” which featured commentary and analysis on Polymarket's prediction markets. The show's archive is available at [https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnkuV6troaf1X5sbeQ0Wtg\\_Pgry82NQu](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnkuV6troaf1X5sbeQ0Wtg_Pgry82NQu)
  22. Chougule, host, “How to Bet the Trump Indictments + Julie Su's Confirmation Problems,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 7 April 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/04/07/how-to-bet-the-trump-indictment-julie-sus-confirmation-problems/>; Jeff Joseph, host, “Kalshi: Bet on Everything (#42),” The Prediction Trade (podcast), 5 August 2021, <https://youtu.be/fITN1XQUhJU>; Connie Loizos, “This Sequoia- and Henry Kravis-backed prediction market wants to turn opinions into money,” *TechCrunch*, 31 August 2021, <https://techcrunch.com/2021/08/30/this-sequoia-and-henry-kravis-backed-prediction-market-wants-to-turn-opinions-into-money/>; Rex Salisbury, host, “Tarek Mansour, Founder & CEO at Kalshi: Building a Prediction Market,” 31 August 2021, <https://youtu.be/lmvGj1YExkl>
  23. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “Tarek Mansour and Luana Lopes Lara (Kalshi Co-Founders),” Crowd Money Cast (podcast), 15 September 2021, 28:20-28:32, [https://youtu.be/M7CmVN3B\\_gI?t=1689](https://youtu.be/M7CmVN3B_gI?t=1689).
  24. Chougule, host, “Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt and Polymarket? + Harvard Affirmative Action Case,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 22 February 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/02/22/did-kalshi-kill-predictit-and-polymarket-harvard-affirmative-action-case/>; Twitter post, 29 August 2022, 2:14 PM, [https://twitter.com/mansourtarek\\_/status/1564315602184978435?s=20](https://twitter.com/mansourtarek_/status/1564315602184978435?s=20)

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some of Kalshi's markets are directly related to politics, most are in tangential areas such as economics, finance, law, pandemics, and transportation. Of the 17 markets on Kalshi that have ever reached trading volume greater than 500,000, none were on political as opposed to financial or economic topics.<sup>25</sup>

Neither Kalshi's engagement with the CFTC, nor the high-profile [comments](#) that were submitted to the agency on its behalf,<sup>26</sup> have convinced the Commission to grant Kalshi approval to offer election markets.<sup>27</sup> In the absence of CFTC approval for election markets, Kalshi has struggled to determine the types of political markets it is permitted to offer.<sup>28</sup> Amid this ambiguity, Kalshi has chosen to refrain from offering markets not only on elections, but also on a wide variety of markets on political questions generally that are generating interest on other sites.

Seeing little prospect for liberalization under CFTC Chairman Rostin Behnam, Kalshi has scaled back efforts to influence the policy community. Along with other layoffs, Kalshi has not renewed contracts for certain political consultants and has not followed through

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25. Bransfield, "Kalshi Turns Two," 1 July 2023, <https://mickbransfield.com/2023/07/01/kalshi-turns-two/>
26. For reporting on the comments, see Chougule, host, "Another CFTC Review of Kalshi's Election Markets"; Harty, "Political betting: Is it a 'gambling den' or 'better than polls'?" *Politico*, 28 October 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/10/28/inside-the-fight-to-legalize-election-betting-before-the-midterms-00063693>
27. The comments are available at CFTC, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/CommentList.aspx?id=7311>. Letters from the Futures Industry Association, Jason Furman, former Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers under President Obama, Robert Shiller, recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences (joined by seven other academics in economics, law, and political science), and Christopher Hehmeyer, former Chairman of the National Futures Association and board member of the Futures Industry Association were specifically referenced by Mersinger in her dissent from the Commission's decision to commence a 90-day review of Kalshi's revised election contracts. CFTC, "Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Summer K. Mersinger Regarding Commencement of 90-Day Review Regarding Certified Derivatives Contracts with Respect to Political Control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives," 23 June 2023, n19, n3, <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/SpeechesTestimony/mersingerstatement062323>
28. Chougule, host, "Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt and Polymarket? + Harvard Affirmative Action Case," *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 22 February 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/02/22/did-kalshi-kill-predictit-and-polymarket-harvard-affirmative-action-case/>

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on some of its plans to engage Washington-based think-tanks in an effort to enlist support for election markets. Regarding the CFTC’s current review of Kalshi’s election contracts and the associated public comment period, Mansour [announced](#) on June 27 that Kalshi is “not going to spend a ton of time repeating an advocacy campaign for the same matter.”<sup>29</sup>

Kalshi’s ability to contribute to the broader prediction market community has been constrained without permission to offer election markets and other political lines. Although Kalshi is focused on markets in the financial and economic spaces, U.S. election markets tend to generate particular interest among traders and political influencers. British gamblers, as an example, wager [more money](#) on American elections than those in their own country.<sup>30</sup> Superforecasters also have a particular interest in U.S. election markets, as they offer regularly-scheduled opportunities to train and build credibility and confidence in their long-term political forecasting methods. This interest in U.S. elections drives revenue and social currency for prediction markets and political betting more generally.

Kalshi’s attempts to increase volume and liquidity in its political markets with generous incentives to traders are yielding limited success. The three-fold [growth](#) in trading volume Kalshi has seen from 2021 to 2023 has come disproportionately from its daily NASDAQ-100 and S&P 500 markets, which account for about a third of all volume on the site.<sup>31</sup> A relatively small number of users, some working for the company, still account for a disproportionate amount of activity on its political order books.<sup>32</sup> This weakens Kalshi’s arguments to regulators about the ability of its political contracts to serve hedging and price-basing functions.

Notwithstanding the restrictions associated with operating as a DCM, PredictIt executives see this as a promising path forward in the current regulatory landscape. They are seeking

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29. Twitter thread, 9:52 AM, [https://twitter.com/mansourtarek\\_/status/1673690848574177281?s=20](https://twitter.com/mansourtarek_/status/1673690848574177281?s=20)

30. Tony Batt, “Nevada Looks to Follow UK’s Lead On Election Betting,” *Gambling Compliance*, 27 March 2013, <https://www.leg.state.nv.us/App/NELIS/REL/77th2013/ExhibitDocument/OpenExhibitDocument?exhibitId=3698&fileDownloadName=Article-Gambling%20Compliance.pdf>

31. Bransfield, “Kalshi Turns Two”

32. Chougule, host, “How to Bet the Trump Indictments + Julie Su’s Confirmation Problems”



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to establish a DCM called PredictIt Exchange, which would operate separately from PredictIt. Whether PredictIt Exchange's DCM application, which was filed in October 2021 and is substantially complete, will be approved by the CFTC remains to be seen. Nor is it clear what types of markets PredictIt Exchange would be permitted to offer as a DCM. In a [note to users](#), PredictIt maintains that the effort is part of a plan to “offer new election markets for the current political season.”<sup>33</sup> Yet PredictIt CEO John Phillips has [claimed](#) in a public interview that PredictIt Exchange would not be able to offer election markets due to CFTC precedents.<sup>34</sup>

### Avoid the Regulatory Net

Manifold has decided to use platform currency as opposed to fiat money or cryptocurrency, in part to avoid saddling its markets with regulatory challenges associated with facilitating real money bets. This approach has allowed Manifold to make considerable progress in building community, offering a diversity of markets, and experimenting with novel governance models. Manifold generates more traffic than many of its real-money competitors.<sup>35</sup> However, it remains unclear whether a lack of ‘skin in the game’ will ultimately impede the growth and efficiency of its markets.<sup>36</sup>

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33. Steve Bittenbender, “PredictIt to Liquidate Political Markets if Injunction Bid Fails, May Reinvent Itself,” Casino.org, 20 January 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/predictit-to-liquidate-political-market-if-injunction-bid-fails-may-become-a-dcm/>
  34. Technology Policy Institute, host, “John Phillips and David Mason of Aristotle Discuss Political Prediction Markets,” Two Think Minimum (podcast), 16 February 2023, <https://techpolicyinstitute.org/publications/miscellaneous/john-phillips-and-david-mason-of-aristotle-discuss-political-prediction-markets/>
  35. Twitter thread, 24 May 2023, 1:54 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ManifoldMarkets/status/1661430510285979653?s=20>
  36. Scott Alexander, “Play Money And Reputation Systems,” Astral Codex Ten, 21 February 2022, <https://astralcodexten.substack.com/p/play-money-and-reputation-systems>; David Chee, “Reflecting on 2022,” Above the Fold, 6 January 2023, <https://news.manifold.markets/p/above-the-fold-reflecting-on-2022>; Austin Chen, “Workshop: Forecasting | Austin Chen | EAG DC 22” Centre for Effective Altruism, 18 January 2023, <https://youtu.be/YfDI7C6UAPw>; Dwarkesh Patel, host, “Manifold Markets Founder - Predictions Markets & Revolutionizing Governance,” Lunar Society (podcast), 5 May 2022, <https://youtu.be/XoRXrnHg084>; “Play-money efficacy,” Above the Fold, 21 November 2022, <https://news.manifold.markets/p/above-the-fold-play-money-efficacy>; Twitter thread, 7 November 2022, 2:37 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ManifoldMarkets/status/1589703623935565826?s=20>

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While it is too early to draw firm conclusions, the 2022 U.S. midterm elections provide a mixed picture on the potential of Manifold and its regulatory model. Manifold's markets were slightly [more accurate](#) than those on Polymarket and PredictIt.<sup>37</sup> However, because they drew considerably less interest from traders, Manifold's markets have invited questions about their ability to aggregate the 'wisdom of the crowds.'

Over time, Manifold may provide an important test case of how platform currency markets relate to real money markets. In terms of producing accurate estimates, it is possible that Manifold's market prices will converge to within a few percentage points of similar markets with real money, or even consistently produce more accurate estimates on important questions. Experimentation on Manifold may also help the broader political betting community to improve its business models. The development of platform currency markets that generate meaningful liquidity, and produce accurate price signals on a broad, diverse array of questions could help fulfill the public interest potential of prediction markets without the regulatory scrutiny that has dogged real money political betting sites.

### Innovate on the Traditional Prediction Market Model

Entrepreneurs are building political betting platforms that operate under different regulatory restrictions from real-money prediction markets yet provide many of their benefits. A notable example is the over-the-counter (OTC) [swaps](#) offered by the American Civics Exchange (ACE), which allow traders to bet on a wide array of political outcomes. Because ACE OTC operates as the sole counterparty and liquidity provider, it is subject to different regulatory restrictions from the event contracts on PredictIt and Kalshi which match orders to other traders. ACE OTC does not operate on an exchange model with an order book. Contracts have a \$500 minimum payout value, but no trading fees or fixed upper position limits. Unlike Kalshi and PredictIt Exchange, ACE OTC has not sought to register with the CFTC as a DCM.

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37. Jack Chen, "What can we learn from scoring different election forecasts?" *First Sigma. Substack*. 20 November 2022. <https://firstsigma.substack.com/p/midterm-elections-forecast-comparison-analysis>



While there is no regulatory limit on the size of bets allowed on the site, participation on ACE OTC is limited by statute to a small class of investors—generally institutions and high net worth individuals. Because the site can only serve U.S.-based [eligible contract participants](#), as defined by the Commodity Exchange Act, the vast majority of retail traders have no legal way of opening an account, usually because they do not have an investment portfolio of more than \$10 million. The extent to which ineligible traders face the threat of sanction for using the site remains unclear. ACE verifies biographical information and requires users to affirm they meet eligibility requirements during the onboarding process. However, ACE [does not do independent financial vetting](#) of its customers beyond asking them to affirm that they understand the site’s terms of service and that they meet the legal specifications.<sup>38</sup> To date, neither the site, nor any of its users, have faced any kind of enforcement action.

Transactions on ACE OTC do not, in a pure sense, reflect the ‘wisdom of the crowd’ and are not as [transparent](#) as those on prediction markets.<sup>39</sup> However, prices of the OTC swaps may prove to be more accurate or informative than those in more democratized prediction markets with betting limits. This could be the case in particular on events that tend to attract irrational speculation in prediction markets by low-information and unskilled traders with minimal ‘skin in the game.’ The swaps also facilitate speculation and hedging on conditional and custom contracts, which are not typically offered in prediction markets.

### Build Outside of the United States

The most vibrant political prediction markets such as Betfair Exchange, Polymarket, and Smarkets are operating outside of the United States. A challenge with this model is that it is difficult for American users to access these markets. The lack of an American user-base exacerbates challenges associated with running a profitable prediction market with suffi-

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38. Chougule, host, “A New Way to Bet on Politics...Legally,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 7 February 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/02/07/a-new-way-to-bet-on-politics-legally/>

39. *Ibid*

cient liquidity and knowledgeable traders about U.S. politics. This, in turn, deters investment in these companies, as well as media and research interest in their insights. It remains to be seen whether non-American companies will be able to expand into the United States, with all the legal and regulatory hurdles that entails. Insofar as they seek to offer political markets along with their more profitable sports betting lines, it will be difficult for them to focus on the most socially valuable applications of prediction markets.

### Drivers of Regulation

We identified in our study several overlapping reasons why political prediction markets are highly regulated in the United States and why the trend line appears to be moving in the direction of tighter regulation.

### Opposition By Elected Officials

Elected officials in the United States have shown little appetite for liberalizing regulations on political betting. Opposition by elected officials has been consistent over many decades even as regulations have liberalized on sports betting and gaming. At least 27 states explicitly [outlaw](#) betting on elections<sup>40</sup> and every state [prohibits](#) bookmakers from taking wagers on these events. Recent initiatives to permit election betting in Nevada and West Virginia were blocked by elected officials who feared that they would corrupt the democratic process and tarnish their state's reputations.<sup>41</sup>

Prohibitions on political betting and the treatment of election betting as gaming at the state level inform restrictions at the federal level. The CFTC's [order](#) to prohibit the North

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40. "CFTC Faces Lobbying Blitz Over Bets on U.S. Elections," *Capitol Account*, 27 September 2022, <https://www.capitolaccountdc.com/p/cftc-faces-lobbying-blitz-over-bets>

41. David McIntire, "They Won't Take Your Bet On The Election In Las Vegas," *FiveThirtyEight*, 3 November 2016, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/they-wont-take-your-bet-on-the-election-in-las-vegas/>; Katherine Sayre, "West Virginia Approves, Then Disapproves, Betting on Elections," *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 2020

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American Derivatives Exchange (Nadex) from offering election contracts under CFTC Regulation 40.11 in 2012 cited the fact that “several state statutes, on their face, link the terms gaming or gambling...to betting on elections.”<sup>42</sup> In both their [2022](#) and [2023](#) questions for public comment on Kalshi’s Congressional control contracts, the CFTC asked whether it should consider if election betting is defined as gaming under state law and whether state laws permit betting on elections or political outcomes.<sup>43</sup>

Attitudes of American politicians stand in marked contrast to those in the UK. Liberal regulations on political prediction markets were [enacted](#) by parliament in 1960 through the Betting and Gaming Act and have not been tightened meaningfully since then. Political betting has become part of mainstream British political culture. With the rise of online betting exchanges and sportsbooks, public interest in political betting has increased over the past decade.<sup>44</sup>

### A Complex Web of Legal Regimes

Political betting is regulated under a complex web of federal and state laws, federal agency regulations, and legal precedents, which create severe roadblocks for companies that seek to offer political prediction markets. Relevant restrictions on gaming and event contracts are codified in the Federal Wire Act of 1961, the Unlawful Internet Gaming Enforcement Act of 2006,<sup>45</sup> the Dodd-Frank Act of 2010, the Commodity Exchange Act,

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42. In the Matter of the Self-Certification by North American Derivatives Exchange, Inc., of Political Event Derivatives Contracts and Related Rule Amendments under Part 40 of the Regulations of the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, Order Prohibiting the Listing or Trading of Political Event Contracts, 2. Note 1 in the order specifically cites statutes in Illinois, Nebraska, New Mexico North Dakota, Georgia, Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas.

43. See CFTC Release Number 8578-22, questions 2 and 4; CFTC Release Number 8728-23, questions 3 and 5

44. Chougule, host, “Does Political Betting Threaten Democracy? Lessons from the UK,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 15 July 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.libsyn.com/does-political-betting-threaten-democracy-lessons-from-the-uk>; “The UK Has a Long History with Political Betting,” *London Post*, 4 May 2021, <https://london-post.co.uk/the-uk-has-a-long-history-with-political-betting/>

45. Ye Li, “Online Information Markets and the Unintended Consequences of Internet Gambling Legislation,” *US-China Law Review* 11, no. 12 (December 2014): 1587-1608.

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CFTC regulations, and state gaming laws. All of these laws and regulations raise questions as to whether political event contracts constitute an illegal form of gaming, are contrary to the public interest, or are otherwise prohibited from being listed.

The CFTC faces difficult questions related to how political event contracts should be regulated under the Commodity Exchange Act. CFTC Rule 40.11 and agency precedents related to event contracts have been interpreted by CFTC commissioners in ways that curtail political prediction markets. The Commission has yet to allow a for-profit venture to offer election contracts. The Nadex decision has prompted a debate within the CFTC on whether the order creates precedents, broad limitations, or rules of general applicability that apply to Kalshi's applications to offer contracts on election markets.

Predictions that the legalization of sports betting since the Supreme Court's 2018 decision in *Murphy v. NCAA* would lead to a similar cascade in the political betting arena have not materialized.<sup>46</sup> In some respects, the opposite has occurred. Once the Court struck down the Professional and Amateur Sports Protection Act on federalism grounds, numerous states moved to legalize sports betting, undeterred by the possibility of future enforcement actions by the CFTC under the Commodity Exchange Act. Yet many of these same advocates of sports betting have refused to endorse political betting, fearing that the “[taint](#)” of political markets could undermine support for sports betting and other legal lines that generate far more profit than what political lines would bring in even under the most optimistic projections.<sup>47</sup> At the same time, concerns about the power, tactics, and agendas of the sports betting lobby have created a more skeptical outlook among politicians and regulators toward the gaming industry generally, further adversely impacting political betting interests.<sup>48</sup>

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46. Parallels between the liberalization of sports betting and political betting were discussed by Behnam in his October 2022 public remarks, available at: Chris Brummer, “DC Fintech Week 2022,” 6th Annual DC Fintech Week, 11 October 2022, interview, 3:23:21-3:23:47, <https://www.youtube.com/live/Kzcb9cRIEpl?feature=share&t=12201>.

47. McIntire, “They Won’t Take Your Bet On the Election In Las Vegas”

48. Chougule, host, “2024 Republican Longshots for President + Debt Ceiling Negotiations,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 11 April 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/04/16/2024-republican-longshots-and-debt-ceiling-negotiations/>; Twitter post, 23 July 2023, 4:49 AM, <https://twitter.com/shadsy/status/1683036717203218433?s=20>

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The refusal of the states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories to follow suit on political betting leaves unsettled the question of whether the political betting industry could pursue a regulatory pathway similar to the one undertaken by the sports betting industry. Somewhat paradoxically, Casino.org reporter Steve Bittenbender, who has covered both the sports and political betting industries extensively, believes that the political betting industry might benefit from greater federal regulation of sports betting. This is because sports betting regulation could potentially fall under the purview of a single regulatory body. Such a body could, in turn, permit sports betting operators to offer political lines. The earliest Bittenbender foresees this happening is in the run-up to the 2028 U.S. elections.<sup>49</sup>

Creating safe harbors for political betting in the current legal regime requires regulators and elected officials to adopt controversial positions and spend considerable political capital. Permitting election markets could expose the CFTC to the criticism that it had de facto preempted state laws without authorization from Congress. Federal and state legislators advocating for the liberalization of existing laws could face a great deal of blowback, likely without any commensurate political or financial upside for them or their constituents.

### CFTC Decision-Making

Regulation of political event contracts at the federal level falls under the CFTC,<sup>50</sup> which is overseen by the House and Senate Agriculture Committees. Although the CFTC has provided more leeway to prediction market operators than any other federal or state regulator, the current commissioners, [particularly the Democratic appointees](#), have moved to tighten regulations.<sup>51</sup> In the absence of clear guidance from Congress, a combination of

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49. *Ibid*

50. On the CFTC's oversight over political event contracts, see Brian Quintenz, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 70786, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=70786&SearchText=>

51. "Republican Congressional Takeover May Spur Biden's Regulators to Move Even Faster," *Capitol Account*, 7 November 2022, <https://www.capitolaccountdc.com/p/republican-congressional-takeover>

personal conviction, legal precedent, and bureaucratic incentives appear to be steering the CFTC towards a restrictive approach on political event contracts. Although CFTC commissioners have not published thorough explanations of their views,<sup>52</sup> there appear to be four primary considerations weighing on their calculus.

First, Behnam is disinclined to spend the political capital necessary to bring clarity to the space. In public remarks in October 2022, Behnam [characterized](#) prediction market regulation as “something that is high on my priority list.”<sup>53</sup> However, policywise, his higher priority as commissioner is to gain new funding and authorities for the CFTC, particularly jurisdiction over the regulation of digital assets. Delaying a decision on event contracts furthers his strategy of avoiding litigation or confrontation with Congress and the public while he pursues his core agenda.

Second, CFTC officials are unpersuaded that they can allow companies to offer political and election markets in a way that is consistent with federal and state laws and that advances the public interest. Even where the CFTC has opened the door to political betting markets in limited ways such as on PredictIt and Kalshi, the CFTC has struggled to define the parameters of a “significant political event,” “meaningful political question,” and other tests related to the scope of allowable political event contracts. Division of Market Oversight (DMO) officials have offered differing interpretations of these tests since 2014, without formal regulatory changes. More constricted readings have prevailed at the agency in recent years.<sup>54</sup> Informing the CFTC’s deliberations in this respect is the fact that agency officials, in contrast to prediction market operators, have deemed markets on certain topics such as COVID-19 to be in “poor taste.”<sup>55</sup>

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52. For Behnam’s public remarks on political event contracts, see Brummer, “DC Fintech Week 2022,” 3:19:21-3:24:08, <https://www.youtube.com/live/Kzcb9cRIEpl?feature=share&t=11961>.

53. *Ibid*, 3:19:59-3:20:00

54. Chougule, host, “Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt and Polymarket?”; Chougule, host, “The Right’s Problems with Educated Voters,” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 24 May 2023, <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/star-spangled-gamblers/id1437934639?i=1000614353172>; Letter from Steve Nightingale and Scott Barker, Buddle Findlay, to McGonagle, 6 April 2023, <https://az620379.vo.msecnd.net/static/files/docs/ffbf556e-977e-4931-b9dc-6948261e2e6a.pdf>.

55. Donald Luskin, “The Feds Don’t Want You Betting on Elections,” *Wall Street Journal*, 1 November



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Third, CFTC officials are concerned that the regulation of political event contracts requires the agency to spend resources and expand its jurisdiction in ways that exceed its mandate. In his letter to Victoria University explaining why the DMO was withdrawing PredictIt's no-action letter, DMO Director Vincent McGonagle noted that the considerable time CFTC staff had spent on PredictIt "far exceeded the level of CFTC staff involvement contemplated by Letter 14-30 [the no-action letter]" and that, in the DMO's judgment, this is "not an appropriate use of taxpayer resources."<sup>56</sup> Behnam has warned that CFTC approval of election contracts could exacerbate this issue because it carries the risk of turning the CFTC into an "election cop" in ways that would extend beyond Congressional intent.<sup>57</sup>

Finally, CFTC officials' conflicting views on process and procedure have made it difficult for the Commission to reach consensus on how to bring regulatory clarity to the political betting space. Commissioner Caroline Pham [dissented](#) from the CFTC's decision in August 2022 to review and impose a stay on Kalshi's Congressional control contracts, arguing instead for allowing Kalshi to operate the markets immediately.<sup>58</sup> Commissioner Summer Mersinger is reportedly among the more supportive voices at the CFTC for approving political event contracts, but she has expressed concern about the wisdom of [relying on no-action letters](#) for long periods of time without laying down predictable

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2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/federal-wager-politics-cftc-predictit-no-action-letter-presidential-election-futures-contract-regulation-11667310803>; Jeff Solomon, "Why Prediction Markets are Better at Predicting Covid than Public Health Experts," Polymarket, <https://blog.polymarket.com/prediction-markets-better-predict-covid-health>; Twitter post, 4 January 2022, 9:17 AM, <https://twitter.com/TradeandMoney/status/1478370060083286018?s=20>. For details on PredictIt's deliberations regarding COVID markets, see James Altucher, host, "How to Supplement your Income with Money Betting with PredictIt.Org Co-Founder John Phillips," The James Altucher Show, 18 March 2020, 1:33:59-1:35:21, [https://youtu.be/li\\_Dtc5RCR0?t=5639](https://youtu.be/li_Dtc5RCR0?t=5639).

56. Letter from McGonagle to Hyland, 2 March 2023, <https://twitter.com/Bittenbettor/status/1631839206996680707/photo/2>

57. Joe Weisenthal and Tracy Alloway, hosts, "CFTC Chair Rostin Behnam on the Fight to Regulate Crypto," Bloomberg's Odd Lots (podcast), 18 May 2023, <https://omny.fm/shows/odd-lots/cftc-chair-rostin-behnam-on-the-fight-to-regulate>

58. CFTC, "Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Caroline D. Pham Regarding the Review and Stay of KalshiEX LLC's Political Event Contracts," 26 August 2022, <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/SpeechesTestimony/phamstatement082622>

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rules.<sup>59</sup> CFTC no-action letters have not only allowed PredictIt to operate, but also enabled Kalshi to offer binary options on economic and commercial events without the Commission addressing whether these options are “consistent with any statutory or regulatory requirement.”<sup>60</sup>

The Commission’s decision to initiate a 90-day review of Kalshi’s revised election contracts has also exposed process-related divisions among the Commissioners. Pham [dissented](#) from the decision based on the way the review arguably relates to the PredictIt lawsuit and due to her belief that it is unfair for PredictIt but not Kalshi to offer election contracts.<sup>61</sup> Mersinger [dissented](#) on the grounds that the delay in approving the contracts is inconsistent with the Commodity Exchange Act, is a “fundamentally unfair” delay tactic, and amounts to a punishment of Kalshi for the Commission’s “failure to avail itself” of a “necessary and overdue” rulemaking process that would allow the CFTC “to give thorough consideration to the issue of DCM event contracts, including those related to political control.”<sup>62</sup>

Amid these divisions, the Commission’s prevailing approaches have led to litigation with PredictIt, suspended Congressional contracts by Kalshi, stalled the approval process for other firms in the political event contract space seeking to register as DCM’s, and left the political betting community without regulatory clarity.

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59. Mark Baker, “No-action action: Why Mersinger wants the CFTC to stop wasting its time,” *Euromoney*, 18 October 2022, <https://www.euromoney.com/article/2arpowssc9okk0f7m598g/capital-markets/no-action-action-why-mersinger-wants-the-cftc-to-stop-wasting-its-time>

60. CFTC Letter No. 21-11, 22 April 2021, <https://www.cftc.gov/LawRegulation/DoddFrankAct/CurrentlyEffectiveStaffLetters/index.htm>

61. CFTC, “Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Caroline D. Pham on Political Event Contracts,” 23 June 2023, <https://www.cftc.gov/PressRoom/SpeechesTestimony/phamstatement062323>

62. “Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Summer K. Mersinger Regarding Commencement of 90-Day Review Regarding Certified Derivatives Contracts with Respect to Political Control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives”; Harty and Zachary Warmbrodt, “A political betting revival?” *Politico Morning Money*, 30 June 2023, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/morning-money/2023/06/30/a-political-betting-revival-00104355>. For background on CFTC rulemaking, see CFTC, “Commission Rulemaking Explained,” <https://www.cftc.gov/LawRegulation/Commission-RulemakingExplained/index.htm>



### Prediction Market Performance

A core thesis of prediction market enthusiasts is that the ‘wisdom of the crowds’ can disrupt a discourse characterized by poor forecasts, unreliable polling, and fake news. Variants of this argument, advanced routinely by Kalshi, Polymarket, and PredictIt,<sup>63</sup> have weighed on the CFTC. The possibility that these markets could become “better than polling,” Behnam [acknowledged](#) in his October 2022 remarks, is among the reasons why regulatory issues in this space are “a very important question.”<sup>64</sup>

Even as liquidity has increased, however, market prices have not shown enough [predictive value](#) in recent elections to demonstrate that prediction markets are clearly superior forecasting tools to the polls, models, and expert analyses that are more familiar to political establishments.<sup>65</sup> The perceived failure of prediction markets in the last few election cycles to forecast accurately the outcomes in high-profile races has undercut the thesis

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63. See for example, Altucher, host, “How to Supplement your Income with Money Betting with PredictIt.Org Co-Founder John Phillips”; Richard Chen, host, “Polymarket with Shayne Coplan and Richard Chen,” 1confirmation (podcast), 9 February 2021, <https://youtu.be/WNturf2x18o>; Eddy and Graubard, hosts, “John Phillips, PredictIt Co-Founder and CEO,” Crowd Money Cast (podcast), 9 December 2021, <https://youtu.be/xRxZ-lhniAc>; Joseph, host, “John Phillips: A-Bomb Kid Powers PredictIt,” The Political Trade (podcast), 17 April 2020, <https://youtu.be/LIPPZJLW-xw>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, “Pod: Are We About to Become POLYMARKET Prophets?” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 19 October 2020, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2020/10/19/pod-are-we-about-to-become-polymarket-prophets/>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, “PredictIt CEO: We’re Not Quitting,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 8 August 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/08/08/predictit-ceo-were-not-quitting/>; Luana Lopes Lara, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 70795, 25 September 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=70795&SearchText=luana>; Andy Pickering, host, “The Information Market - Polymarket lets traders bet on real-world events,” Brave New Coin (podcast), 5 October 2020, <https://youtu.be/gggSgPUYGtc>; Polymarket, “Introducing Polymarket Microgrants”; Polymarket, “Why Prediction Markets are Good for Society,” Polymarket, <https://blog.polymarket.com/why-prediction-markets-are-good-for-society/>; Jacob Stern, “PredictIt Already Won,” *The Atlantic*, 14 November 2022, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2022/11/political-betting-elections-forecasting-future/672113/>; Terris, *The Big Break*, 104.
64. Brummer, “DC Fintech Week 2022,” 3:23:47-3:23:53; <https://www.youtube.com/live/Kzcb9cRIEpl?feature=share&t=12227>
65. Maxim Lott, “Deep Dive: Election Betting vs 538,” *Maximum Truth. Substack*. 28 November 2022. <https://maximumtruth.substack.com/p/deep-dive-on-predicting-elections>

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that these markets serve the public interest. Among the most conspicuous of these failures occurred in the November 2022 U.S. midterm elections. At a time when prediction markets were under heightened regulatory scrutiny, betting markets, unlike the polls, forecasted a large Republican wave that did not materialize. This mispricing was widely noted in coverage of the issue.<sup>66</sup>

Much of the scrutiny from the policy community on prediction markets has been directed at PredictIt. Notwithstanding the attention PredictIt is receiving by virtue of its lawsuit against the CFTC, PredictIt executives have not provided a compelling defense of their markets' public interest value in the wake of the 2022 elections. David Mason, counsel to PredictIt's service provider Aristotle, [hypothesized](#) that PredictIt's performance can be blamed on the site's regulatory challenges, which allegedly drove away skilled traders.<sup>67</sup> This explanation, while plausible, does little to account for why [UK bookmakers](#)<sup>68</sup> and Polymarket also forecasted a large Republican victory. Phillips, meanwhile, simply [asserted](#) as recently as February 2023 that prediction markets are “notoriously more accurate than pollsters and pundits when it comes to forecasting election outcomes.”<sup>69</sup>

## Election Integrity Concerns

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66. Bransfield, “Did Bookmakers & Prediction Markets Fare That Badly in the 2022 Senate Races?” 18 December 2022, <https://mickbransfield.com/2022/12/18/did-bookmakers-prediction-markets-fare-that-badly-in-the-2022-senate-races/>; George Calhoun, “Prediction Markets Failed The Midterm (Election) Exams,” *Forbes*, 14 November 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/george-calhoun/2022/11/14/the-un-wisdom-of-crowds-prediction-markets-failed-their-midterm-exams/?sh=71f9099d179a>; Steve Friess, “2022 Election Predictors Show Political Gambling Market’s ‘Real Limitations’” *PlayUSA*, 29 November 2022, <https://www.playusa.com/2022-election-prediction-gambling-market/>; Anthony Pickles, “A Republican bubble? How pollsters and pundits got the US midterms so wrong,” *The Conversation*, 22 November 2022, <https://theconversation.com/a-republican-bubble-how-pollsters-and-pundits-got-the-us-midterms-so-wrong-194684>; Stern, “PredictIt Already Won”
67. Technology Policy Institute, host, “John Phillips and David Mason of Aristotle Discuss Political Prediction Markets”
68. Devin O’Connor, “Republicans Heavy Betting Favorites on Eve of 2022 Midterms,” *Casino.org*, 7 November 2022, <https://www.casino.org/news/republicans-heavy-betting-favorites-on-eve-of-2022-midterms/>
69. Technology Policy Institute, “John Phillips and David Mason of Aristotle Discuss Political Prediction Markets”

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Concerns that political betting markets might corrupt the democratic process have deepened since the fallout of the 2020 elections. Accusations by prominent political leaders of widespread voter fraud and waning confidence in the integrity of elections have underscored fears that liberalized political event contracts would exacerbate risks to democratic institutions.<sup>70</sup> Former CFTC Commissioner Jill Sommers, who voted against Nadedx's application in 2012 to offer election contracts, stated in regard to Kalshi's proposal, "When we think about what happened in 2020, do we really want another excuse for the American people to question the integrity of our elections?...This is not something we want to be introducing into federally regulated financial markets."<sup>71</sup> These arguments are resonating in particular in [progressive circles](#).<sup>72</sup>

While the overall impact of political prediction markets on the democratic process is a source of debate, critics of political prediction markets can point to numerous instances of market manipulation on PredictIt and in the UK markets. These include spending by political campaigns in prediction markets to inflate candidate prices, alleged death threats by traders against political candidates potentially related to betting lines, and the dissemination of fake polls to move market prices.<sup>73</sup> Some in the prediction market community believe that, at the end of 2022, it was a PredictIt trader who submitted a fake candidate filing to the Federal Election Commission. This was allegedly to profit in the PredictIt market on the issue of whether former Vice President Mike Pence would announce his candidacy for president before the end of that year. While none of this activity, to our

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70. Harty, "Political betting"

71. Harty, "Washington weighs plan to let Americans wager on elections," *Politico*, 5 September 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2022/09/05/voters-betting-elections-trading-00054723>

72. Chougule, host, "When Will Biden Announce His Re-Election Bid," *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 2 March 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/03/02/when-will-biden-announce-his-re-election-bid/>

73. Chougule, host, "Bet Against Senator Feinstein Resigning," *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 10 June 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.libsyn.com/bet-against-senator-feinstein-resigning>; Chougule, host, "Does Political Betting Threaten Democracy? Lessons from the UK"; Tom Harris, "The Curious Case of Brian Rose: Is the London Mayoral Candidate Betting on Himself?" 5 February 2021, <https://www.tomharris.org.uk/politics/the-curious-case-of-brian-rose-is-the-london-mayoral-candidate-betting-on-himself/>; Adam Sherman, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC. Comment No: 69618, 30 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69618&SearchText=>; Sia, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002

knowledge, has meaningfully impacted the outcome of any event, some critics argue that they distort the political discourse enough to [warrant criminal liability](#).<sup>74</sup> Phillips has [acknowledged](#) that the PredictIt comments boards are replete with “spinning and counter-spinning and bluffing,”<sup>75</sup> but the company has done little to prevent traders from using the comments sections on its site to manipulate market prices.<sup>76</sup>

The intersection of political betting markets and election integrity concerns has caused the CFTC to tread cautiously in approving election contracts. In a May 2023 [podcast](#), Behnam pointed to the possibility that allegations of election manipulation could lead to demands that the Commission police hardware, software, and news associated with CFTC-approved election contracts that are supposedly implicated in the alleged fraud. This type of scenario, in Behnam’s view, raises “a lot of legal questions and policy questions about whether or not you would want a financial regulator policing elections.”<sup>77</sup> Thirteen of the 41 questions the CFTC has requested public comments on in the context of Kalshi’s congressional markets—nine of which were among the [24 questions](#) in the most recent batch—relate to election integrity concerns.

### Economic Instability

Concerns that political prediction markets can exacerbate systemic financial risk have gained currency in light of the 2022 ‘crypto winter’ and FTX’s collapse. Critics have seized on the idea that political event contracts are similar to cryptocurrencies in that they

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74. Tyler Yeargain, *Fake Polls, Real Consequences: The Rise of Fake Polls and the Case for Criminal Liability*, 85 MO. L. REV. (2020), <https://scholarship.law.missouri.edu/mlr/vol85/iss1/7>

75. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “John Phillips, PredictIt Co-Founder and CEO”

76. David Hill, “The Wolves of K Street,” *The Ringer*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.theringer.com/2018/3/21/17130490/predictit-politics-elections-gambling>; Brian Golden, “The Art of the Pump,” *Washington Monthly*, 3 April 2022, <https://washingtonmonthly.com/2022/04/03/the-art-of-the-pump>; Joseph, host, “John Phillips: A-Bomb Kid Powers PredictIt”; Twitter post, 5 August 2022, 11:26 AM, <https://twitter.com/Domahhhh/status/1555575894961446914?s=20>; Twitter post, 5 August 2022, <https://twitter.com/Domahhhh/status/1555575897553526785?s=20>; Twitter post, 5 August 2022, <https://twitter.com/Domahhhh/status/1555575900380487680?s=20>

77. Weisenthal and Alloway, hosts, “CFTC Chair Rostin Behnam on the Fight to Regulate Crypto”

‘gamify’ finance and create losses for the majority of retail investors. Reports that FTX was offering [tokens](#) on Donald Trump’s electoral fortunes feed into this narrative.<sup>78</sup>

### Limited Advocacy Presence

While political prediction markets have drawn support from a distinguished group of Americans across industries, the political prediction market community generally has been poorly organized and suffered setbacks in advocating for its agenda.<sup>79</sup> A standing, Washington-based non-profit organization would help address many of these issues, but it would need sufficient funding to spearhead legal challenges, engage regulators and political leaders, convene working groups, and conduct grassroots campaigns. To date, the political prediction market community has not shown the capacity to engage effectively in these activities.

Instead, retail traders, researchers, political leaders, and other users tend to rely on companies for advocacy efforts even though their interests often do not align with the broader community. Politicians and regulators, as a result, feel little constituent pressure to prioritize the issue.

When journalists, researchers, and regulators seek out information on political betting, they stumble upon the most conspicuous element of the community: gambling forums replete with toxic discourse. To an outsider’s eye, this status quo fuels skepticism about the wisdom empowering self-described ‘degens’ who seem more adept at trolling, fabricating polls, and pumping positions than forecasting elections or engaging the political process.<sup>80</sup>

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78. Sam Reynolds, “FTX’s TRUMPLOSE Token Isn’t Proof of an FTX-Democrat-Ukraine Conspiracy,” *CoinDesk*, 15 November 2022, <https://www.coindesk.com/markets/2022/11/15/analysis-ftxs-trumplose-token-isnt-proof-of-an-ftx-democrat-ukraine-conspiracy/>

79. Keeney and Chougule, hosts, “How PredictIt Got Knifed,” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 4 August 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/08/04/how-predictit-got-knifed/>

80. For notable examples, see Stern, “PredictIt Already Won”: “Scrolling through the discussion forms that PredictIt hosts for each market, you will find the same unhinged trolling and rampant disinformation and culture-war battle cries that you will find most everywhere else online...You will find



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Negative public perceptions of FTX CEO Sam Bankman-Fried have further eroded the credibility of the political betting community. In large part, this is due to the corresponding reputational blow taken by the effective altruism movement, one of the few political actors that has been willing to invest meaningful resources to advocate on behalf of political prediction markets.<sup>81</sup>

Case in point is the controversy surrounding Data for Progress founder, former Kalshi consultant, and self-described effective altruist Sean McElwee. Prior to the FTX scandal, McElwee openly bet tens of thousands of dollars on PredictIt while building a progressive think-tank and polling firm. He [encouraged](#) his staff to do the same in order to “train heuristics” and “[calibrate](#)” political instincts. McElwee led [weekly wagering sessions](#) at Data for Progress in order to help his team “understand and engage with risk.”<sup>82</sup>

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bettors engaging in psychological warfare in an effort to tilt the markets in their favor (‘pumps’), and you will find bettors engaging in magical thinking because markets are not tilting in their favor (‘copium’). You will find some of the most extreme megalomania observable anywhere on the internet—which is saying something. As outcomes start to become clear, you will find gloating, endless gloating...And if you look hard enough, sprinkled in here and there, you will find a bit of genuinely astute analysis.”; Golden, “The Art of the Pump”: “To say that prediction markets reward truth is not to say they are immune from the poisonous political world they exist to reflect. The comments under any PredictIt market demonstrate this reality...PredictIt is, by its own admission, a male-dominated space, and the same casual racism, sexism, homophobia, obnoxiousness, juvenile idiocy, and outright irredeemable batshit nonsense exists here that subsumes many online spaces...As in many online spaces, the racist, lunatic fire just burns too hot for it to be completely put out.”

81. On effective altruism investment in political prediction market infrastructure, see, for example, Long-Term Future Fund grants at “Long-Term Future Fund.” For authors’ discussion of the effective altruism movement’s interest in political prediction markets, see Keeney, host, “The Behind the Scenes Battle at the CFTC,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 27 October 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/10/27/the-behind-the-scenes-battle-at-the-cftc>
82. Zac McCrary, host, “Politics According to Sean McElwee,” Pro Politics (podcast), 16 August 2022, <https://podcasts.apple.com/bb/podcast/politics-according-to-sean-mcelwee/id1554218352?i=1000576216809>; Terris, *The Big Break*, 105-6; Terris, “This site bet big on political gambling. Regulators want it shut down.” *The Washington Post*, 24 January 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/2023/01/24/predictit-gambling-on-politics>. For McElwee’s views on prediction markets, see McElwee, “Why Prediction Markets Make The World A Better Place,” *Medium*, 26 October 2022, <https://medium.com/@SeanMcElwee/why-prediction-markets-would-make-the-world-a-better-place-ceded9760846>.

McElwee’s practices have raised eyebrows within progressive circles, particularly due to perceptions that he had conflicts of interest. McElwee disclosed to *Washington Post* reporter Ben Terris that he “make[s] a lot of bets that would make progressives cry”—that is, bets against progressive candidates, sometimes informed by privileged data he would acquire from doing polling work for them.<sup>83</sup>

Nevertheless, McElwee’s alignment with the effective altruism community bolstered his credibility as an advocate in the political prediction market space. Gabe Bankman-Fried, who hired McElwee to assist him with effective altruism advocacy, viewed McElwee political betting activities as a “really good practice” that enhanced his ability to defend claims.<sup>84</sup> This support in turn helped McElwee to [mobilize](#) prominent progressive leaders, including Congressman Richie Torres, in an advocacy campaign on behalf of election prediction markets.<sup>85</sup>

The FTX scandal generated criticisms of McElwee’s ties to the Bankman-Frieds and his political betting.<sup>86</sup> The air of controversy allowed critics of McElwee’s engagement with political betting markets an opportunity to oust him as executive director of Data for

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83. Terris, *The Big Break*, 3-4, 7-8.

84. *Ibid*, 160-1.

85. Harty, “Ritchie Torres and a group of progressive advocates are urging regulators to let Americans bet on U.S. elections, arguing it would help build public trust in democracy.” *Politico*, 1 November 2022, <https://www.politico.com/minutes/congress/11-1-2022/torres-leads-election-bet-push/>

86. Ed Burmila, “How Trump Left Washington Even Swampier,” *The New Republic*, 21 May 2023, <https://newrepublic.com/article/172475/trump-left-washington-even-swampier>: “Adherents of ‘Effective Altruism’ claim that betting on political outcomes is a for of reinforcing one’s beliefs, a kind of putting money where one’s mouth is. Maybe so. But it comes off more as simply frattish behavior, a big kid with a big pot of money, blowing it on online poker with supreme confidence that there will always be more of someone else’s money with which to play.”; David Freedlander, “Fall of the Progressive Boy King,” *New York Magazine*, 22 December 2022, <https://nymag.com/intelligencer/2022/12/sam-bankman-fried-and-sean-mcelwees-fateful-alliance.html>; Jeet Heer, “Sean McElwee’s Betting Against Democracy,” *The Nation*, 1 May 2023, <https://www.thenation.com/article/politics/sean-mcelwee-democracy-betting/>; Kaleigh Rogers, “How The Cool Kid Of Progressive Politics Gambled It All Away,” *FiveThirtyEight*, 23 February 2023, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/how-the-cool-kid-of-progressive-politics-gambled-it-all-away/>

Progress and institute at the organization a new “Gambling and Wagering Policy” prohibiting employees from betting on events related to Data for Progress clients or projects.<sup>87</sup> Subsequent investigations by Data for Progress and FiveThirtyEight [found](#) no evidence that McElwee manipulated polls for financial gain<sup>88</sup>—an accusation McElwee categorically [denies](#).<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, FiveThirtyEight [banned](#) polls conducted under McElwee’s direction from its polling averages, database, and forecasts. FiveThirtyEight’s rationale is that “a pollster betting on politics can be akin to insider trading,” and that “pollsters having a financial stake in these markets raises questions about their polls’ intent and the integrity of their design and results.”<sup>90</sup>

### Limited Market Interest and Revenues

Political betting lines are relatively unprofitable for both retail traders and companies in the space. Traders struggle with the relative infrequency and inconsistency of political events that lend themselves to betting with a sustained edge. Paul Krishnamurty, as an example, one of the most prominent political gambler in the world, recently [estimated](#) that only about five percent of his winnings as a professional gambler over the past 20 years have come from politics, the rest being from sports.<sup>91</sup> While sportsbooks make money off political lines, in large part by banning accounts perceived to have an edge, companies offering traditional prediction markets often lose money on political markets and justify

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87. Ryan Lizza, Rachel Bade, and Eugene Daniels, “Inside the scramble to trace SBF’s dirty money,” *Politico Playbook*, 22 December 2022, <https://www.politico.com/newsletters/playbook/2022/12/22/inside-the-scramble-to-trace-sbfs-dirty-money-00075128>; Rogers, “How The Cool Kid Of Progressive Politics Gambled It All Away”; Terris, *The Big Break*, 294-6.

88. Rogers, “How The Cool Kid Of Progressive Politics Gambled It All Away”

89. Chougule, host, “When Will Biden Announce His Re-Election Bid.”

90. Nathaniel Rakich and Mary Radcliffe, “Why We’re Preemptively Banning A Pollster—And Not Banning Another,” *FiveThirtyEight*, 23 February 2023, <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/why-were-preemptively-banning-a-pollster-and-not-banning-another>.

91. Chougule, host, “Is DeSantis Definitely Running for President?” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 15 March 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/03/15/is-desantis-definitely-running-for-president>. For background on Krishnamurty, see Krishnamurty, “How I Became A Pro Gambler,” *SL.Man*, 11 April 2020, <https://slman.com/life/how-i-became-pro-gambler>; Pete Ling (host), “Episode #43—Paul Krishnamurty/Political Betting Expert,” *The Smart Betting Club Podcast*, October 2022, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/0P6X8k2dH19yk5oGGKTcEo?si=Ej pzA5q9Qfmz-VuSbXC4VPg>; Adam Payne, “Meet the professional gambler who has made a living betting on Brexit



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their costs as loss leaders, academic endeavors, or as a public service. Even state legislators who favor legalized election betting acknowledge that revenues from political lines would be relatively small. In a state like Nevada, with a mature gaming industry, political bets would amount to a “[tiny](#)” subset of sports betting revenues.<sup>92</sup>

Conservative forecasts about the commercial viability and revenue generating potential of political prediction markets have been borne out to some extent by publicly available data on PredictIt’s users and finances. In their filing to the CFTC, plaintiffs associated with PredictIt tout the fact that, between 2014 and 2022, [more than 120,000](#) participants have traded on the site.<sup>93</sup> Activity on PredictIt peaked in the run-up to the 2020 U.S. presidential election, when [close to \\$150 million](#) was traded on the site. This is the only time in the site’s history when PredictIt revenues exceeded its expenses.<sup>94</sup> In the run-up to the 2022 U.S. midterm elections, the site averaged around 80,000-100,000 users, 30,000 of which PredictIt [described](#) as active traders.<sup>95</sup> While an increase from [22,000 users in 2016](#),<sup>96</sup> the site has not grown its user base much [since 2018](#).<sup>97</sup> Additionally, only a small

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and Corbyn,” *Business Insider*, 8 September 2016, <https://www.businessinsider.com/paul-krishnamurty-political-betting-gambling-labour-corbyn-us-election-2016-9>; “The Political Gambler,” <https://www.politicalgambler.com>; Alex Vella, host, “Politics Betting,” Trademate Sports Betting Podcast, 23 July 2021, <https://youtu.be/A0eor5Bo2Kk>

92. Katy Steinmetz, “Bet on Red! Nevada May Legalize Gambling on Federal Elections,” *Time*, 27 March 2013, <https://swampland.time.com/2013/03/27/bet-on-red-nevada-may-legalize-gambling-on-federal-elections/>
93. Complaint for Declaratory and Injunctive Relief at 16, Kevin Clarke, in his individual capacity, Trevor Boeckmann, in his individual capacity, Corwin Smidt, in his individual capacity, PredictIt, inc., a Delaware corporation, Aristotle International, Inc., a Delaware v. Commodity Futures Trading Commission (2022), 1:22-cv-00909-LY, <https://www.courthousenews.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/predictit-versus-commodity-futures-trading-commission.pdf>
94. Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023
95. Danny Funt, “Betting on Elections Can Tell Us a Lot. Why Is It Mostly Illegal?” *The New Yorker*, 3 November 2022, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/the-political-scene/betting-on-elections-can-tell-us-a-lot-why-is-it-mostly-illegal>; Golden, “The Art of the Pump”; Joseph, host, “Palin, PredictIt & Political Wagering,” *The Prediction Trade* (podcast), 14 April 2022, <https://www.podcastone.com/episode/Palin-PredictIt--Political-Wagering-48>
96. Chougule, “Volume and Liquidity on PredictIt,” *Political Prediction Markets*, <https://politicalpredictionmarkets.com/volume-and-liquidity-on-predictit/>
97. David Hill, “The Wolves of K Street,” *The Ringer*, 21 March 2018, <https://www.theringer.com/2018/3/21/17130490/predictit-politics-elections-gambling>

percentage of PredictIt users trade on a weekly or monthly basis, and most do not appear to trade large amounts of money. In 2020, the average first time [deposit](#) was \$216.<sup>98</sup> PredictIt's no-action letter requires the site to limit each market to 5,000 participants, but that number is typically only reached in a handful of marquis election markets close to election day. As a consequence, PredictIt's expenses have exceeded revenues over the history of the site's operation.<sup>99</sup>

Currently, PredictIt's user base and revenues are almost certainly below its 2022 levels. Beyond the fact that engagement on the site drops in non-election years, PredictIt has seen an exodus due to its regulatory constraints and uncertainties. PredictIt's counsel disclosed before the Fifth Circuit that [14,478 traders](#) held positions in 75 contracts on the site that were expected to expire after February 15, the deadline the CFTC gave PredictIt in August 2022.<sup>100</sup> In the months following the August 2022 notice, many of the site's highest-volume, prominent traders withdrew funds, particularly after the November 2022 midterm elections and the December 7 Georgia run-offs. Between August and December 2022, traders withdrew \$18 million from PredictIt; 7,500 traders withdrew all of their funds and shut down their accounts. More than 4,700 of these traders did so between November and December.<sup>101</sup> By December, trading volume on PredictIt lost more than 75% of the volume it had before the CFTC's August 2022 announcement.<sup>102</sup> Exacerbating doubts about the site's future has been PredictIt's refusal to clarify how it would resolve existing markets if legal appeals fail. PredictIt's decision not to create new markets or even, until late June 2022, add new candidates to its election market has further diminished interest in the site. Lingered traders have been left with low liquidity, highly vola-

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98. Altucher, host, "How to Supplement your Income with Money Betting with PredictIt.Org Co-Founder John Phillips"

99. Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023

100. Clarke et. al. v. CFTC, 22-51124, Plaintiffs-Appellants' Opening Brief, (5th Circ. 26 January 2023), 7, [https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/A40\\_Appellant\\_Brief.pdf](https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/A40_Appellant_Brief.pdf)

101. Declaration of John Phillips, 31 December 2022, in Clarke et. al. v. CFTC, 22-51124, Appendix to Plaintiffs-Appellants' Opposed Motion for Injunction Pending Appeal or, in the Alternative, Petition for a Writ of Mandamus, (5th Circ. 3 January 2023), [117](#), [https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/22-51124\\_Documents.pdf](https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/22-51124_Documents.pdf)

102. *Ibid*, 118.

tile markets.<sup>103</sup>

Evidence from the UK suggests that the limited interest and profitability of political betting in the United States is only partly related to regulation. On the one hand, in the absence of restrictive regulations, major political events—notably U.S. presidential elections—have been among the [largest single](#) and [most profitable](#) betting events for UK bookmakers.<sup>104</sup> Compared to \$261 million (\$281.9 million [adjusted](#) for inflation) in the 2016 U.S. election, \$744 million was bet on Betfair Exchange alone on the 2020 U.S. presidential election, making it the [largest betting event](#) in the site’s history. These sums far surpassed comparable sporting events. For comparison, the August 2017 fight be-

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103. Bittenbender, “PredictIt Founder Gets More Time to Respond to CFTC Claims as Lawsuit Continues,” Casino.org, 21 March 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/predictit-founder-gets-more-time-to-respond-to-cftc-claims-as-lawsuit-continues/>; Chougule, host, “2024 Republican Longshots and Debt Ceiling Negotiations”; Chougule, host, “Argentina’s Upcoming Presidential Elections,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 30 April 2023, 45:36-52:03, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/04/30/argentinas-upcoming-presidential-elections/>; Declaration of Clarke, 18 November 2022, in Clarke et. al. v. CFTC, 22-51124, Appendix to Plaintiffs-Appellants’ Opposed Motion for Injunction Pending Appeal or, in the Alternative, Petition for a Writ of Mandamus, (5th Circ. 3 January 2023), 66-, [https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/22-51124\\_Documents.pdf](https://mickbransfield.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/22-51124_Documents.pdf); Joseph (host), “This Part-Time (Profitable) Political Trader Shares His Midterm Bets,” The Prediction Trade (podcast), 18 August 2022, <https://www.tastylive.com/shows/the-prediction-trade/episodes/this-part-time-profitable-political-trader-shares-his-midterm-bets-08-17-2022>. Trader pessimism about PredictIt’s prospects can be seen through the prices on markets offered by Insight Prediction, Polymarket, and Manifold about questions such as how long the site will continue operating, and whether it will release new contracts. For details, see Bransfield, “Prediction Markets Bet On PredictIt Surviving in the Short Term,” 31 January 2023, <https://mickbransfield.com/2023/01/31/prediction-markets-bet-on-predictit-surviving-in-the-short-term/>; Bransfield, “Remaining PredictIt Markets with 75 Days Left,” 2 December 2022, <https://mickbransfield.com/2022/12/02/remaining-predictit-markets-with-75-days-left/>; Chougule, host, “CFTC Makes Its Case Against PredictIt,” Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 25 March 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/03/25/cftc-makes-its-case-against-predictit/>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, “PredictIt CEO: We’re Not Quitting”, 42:45-43:12. In June 2023, PredictIt, without explanation, added Robert Kennedy Jr. to its market on the Democratic nominee for president in 2024, and Chris Christie and Vivek Ramaswamy to its market on the Republican nominee for president in 2024.
104. Chougule, host, “Is DeSantis Definitely Running for President?”; Devin O’Connor, “2020 Presidential Election Setting Betting Records, \$1B in Wagers Possible,” Casino.org, 28 October 2020, <https://www.casino.org/news/2020-presidential-election-betting-records-1b-wagers-possible/>

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tween Conor McGregor and Floyd Mayweather, the most-bet-on sporting event Betfair had offered to date, brought in \$71.5 million.<sup>105</sup> On Betonline.ag, more money was bet on the 2020 election [than that year's Super Bowl](#).<sup>106</sup>

The absence of betting limits appears to have drawn 'smart whales' to take advantage of mispriced odds driven by retail traders. Although 46.6% of the [money](#) wagered was on Trump compared to 50.6% for Joe Biden, the 10 largest bets placed on Betfair were for Biden. These include a \$1.3 million bet on Biden, which was [the third largest wager](#) in Betfair history, and at least [six other Biden bets of more than \\$400,000](#).<sup>107</sup>

Nevertheless, election betting revenues in the UK [pale in comparison](#) to lines such as horse racing and soccer, which present far more repeatable betting opportunities than elections.<sup>108</sup> The limited profitability potential of current affairs markets is compounded by the fact that operators must hire experts who can write complex rules for infrequent, unrepeatable events that can be understood by traders well enough to avoid ambiguous settlement situations.<sup>109</sup> The UK-based betting exchange Smarkets, as an example, was founded by an American CEO, Jason Trost, who became interested in the space after learning about political prediction markets. However, the economics of the industry have led Smarkets to treat current events markets as a niche "[passion project](#)" subsidized by sports and other lines [more likely to see growth](#).<sup>110</sup> Because Smarkets's goal of produc-

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105. Charles Riley, "The person who bet \$1.3 million on a Biden win hasn't been paid yet," *CNN*, 9 November 2020, <https://www.cnn.com/2020/11/09/business/biden-betfair-wager/index.html>; Darren Rovell, "2020 Election Odds: Record \$564 Million Bet on Trump vs. Biden Presidential Race at Betfair, Double 2016 Election," *Action Network*, 14 December 2021, <https://www.actionnetwork.com/politics/2020-election-odds-trump-vs-biden-presidential-race-sportsbook-rovell>
106. Chris Bumbaca, "2020 U.S. presidential election expected to involve more than \$1 billion in wagers," *USA Today*, 3 November 2020, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/gaming/2020/11/02/2020-election-betting-odds-donald-trump-joe-biden/6128882002/>
107. Riley, "The person who bet \$1.3 million on a Biden win hasn't been paid yet"; Rovell, "2020 Election Odds"
108. Batt, "Nevada Looks To Follow UK's Lead on Election Betting"
109. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, "Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO"; Star Sports, "#BettingPeople Interview MATTHEW SHADDICK Smarkets Head of Politics 2/4," 19 October 2021, Interview with William Kedjanyi, <https://youtu.be/zcjGZsJLuOE?t=607>
110. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, "Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO"; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "Smarkets CEO Jason Trost Joins the Boys for 2020 Political Picks," *Star Spangled Gamblers*

ing a publicly-available, “very accurate set of probabilities” with “social utility” requires the site to attract “clever, clued-up, informed” bettors, Smarkets deprioritizes profitability considerations for its current events lines and welcomes long-term winning accounts even as their competitors restrict them.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, Trost concedes that he “wouldn’t put too much stock” in Smarkets’s political markets as an “information source” because they are “thinly-traded” and lack “critical mass” and a sufficiently “diverse group of bettors.”<sup>112</sup>

While the 2020 elections point to a favorable trend for political betting, the [awareness](#) they have generated for political betting may prove to be a fleeting phenomenon.<sup>113</sup> Industry veteran Matthew Shaddick has [cautioned](#) that recent spikes in political betting involvement, which [crossed \\$1 billion globally](#) in 2020, may largely stem from the unique “worldwide fame and notoriety and interest” that Trump personally engenders. Shaddick questions whether more conventional politicians would produce comparable levels of “excitement” in the betting markets.<sup>114</sup> These doubts make it difficult for companies to expand product development, hire talented specialists in the political prediction betting space, and invest in the lobbying, public relations, and research efforts needed to influence regulators and build the political forecasting community.<sup>115</sup> Even when they do occur, such investments tend to be inconsistent, as this area is one of the most obvious and immediate targets when companies are forced to cut costs.

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(podcast), 29 July 2020, [https://youtu.be/hnxwn2\\_9EyE](https://youtu.be/hnxwn2_9EyE); Star Sports, “#BettingPeople Interview MATTHEW SHADDICK Smarkets Head of Politics 2/4”

111. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO”; Star Sports, “#BettingPeople Interview MATTHEW SHADDICK Smarkets Head of Politics 2/4”

112. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO,” <https://youtu.be/vySli47rB-Jw?t=2168>

113. Star Sports, “#BettingPeople Interview MATTHEW SHADDICK Smarkets Head of Politics 2/4”

114. Mack DeGeurin, “Is the U.S. Ready for Election Betting? We’re About to Find Out,” *Gizmodo*, 28 October 2022, <https://gizmodo.com/election-betting-sports-betting-midterm-elections-1849715401>; Pierre Lindh, host, “Podcast #30 - Matthew Shaddick, Head of Politics GVC (Topic: US election predictions),” iGaming NEXT (podcast), 30 October 2020, [https://youtu.be/klvu\\_NKDpck](https://youtu.be/klvu_NKDpck). On the relation between Trump and interest in political betting, see also Ling (host), “Episode #43—Paul Krishnamurty/Political Betting Expert”

115. Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO”



### Industry Missteps

Companies seeking to offer political prediction markets have made strategic choices that have yielded limited success in liberalizing the regulatory climate.

The choices these companies have made have led regulators to approach the space with a skeptical eye. The ways that they have navigated the regulatory environment are not only questionable in retrospect, but have been criticized consistently and prophetically by a wide cross-section of the political betting community. An irony of their missteps is that they are replete with the same types of forecasting errors and overreliance on experts that their products are ostensibly aimed at correcting. A full catalog of their dubious decisions is beyond the scope of this report, but the case studies of PredictIt and Kalshi described below are illustrative.<sup>116</sup>

It is little surprise that the CFTC withdrew PredictIt's no-action letter in light of how cavalierly the company managed its relations with the agency. Indeed, while we are sympathetic to PredictIt's mission and its team, our research into the topic left us wondering how PredictIt even managed to retain no-action relief for as long as it did. PredictIt's agreement with the CFTC makes clear that the Commission was granting PredictIt regulatory relief in order to operate a non-profit, educational experiment overseen by university faculty, which would offer only limited political event contracts. Whether or not PredictIt violated the letter of its agreement as the CFTC alleges, it is difficult to understand why the seasoned Washington operatives managing PredictIt concluded that the company's business practices were consistent with the spirit of its understanding with the CFTC. Nor is it clear why PredictIt persisted in many of these practices even after being confronted repeatedly by CFTC officials who claim unilateral authority to rescind its no-action letter.<sup>117</sup>

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116. For Chougule's insights on the regulatory approaches of Kalshi and PredictIt, see Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "Yikes! Trump (& PredictIt) Raided By the Feds," Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 11 August 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/08/11/yikes-trump-predictit-raided-by-the-feds>

117. Chougule, host, "CFTC Makes Its Case Against PredictIt"

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The no-action letter permits PredictIt to charge fees necessary to cover regulatory compliance and operating costs for a non-profit, academic venture. In this sense, the rationale behind PredictIt's fee structure is unclear. On the one hand, PredictIt claims to be operating at a loss. At the same time, PredictIt charges fees on trades and withdrawals that are so high they distort the research value of its data and deter investors from opening accounts on the site.<sup>118</sup> In an interview on Star Spangled Gamblers in October 2021, Phillips [conceded](#) the market distorting impact of the fees but refused to lower them.<sup>119</sup> Nor has the fee structure satisfied CFTC concerns about whether PredictIt is adhering to the terms of its no-action letter. A potential explanation for why PredictIt persists with this fee structure is that it is part of a scheme in which PredictIt monetizes its markets and its users in coordination with data analytics firm Aristotle and its affiliates. Considering that Victoria University has not made money from PredictIt, collecting payments of just \$2,000 per month for a university subsidiary, Aristotle's business model [raises questions](#) about the extent to which PredictIt is in fact a non-profit venture.<sup>120</sup> Court rulings and journalistic investigations may shed greater light on the details of PredictIt's finances.

In terms of the contracts on the site, PredictIt has offered betting lines that bear little relation to the public interest. In its court filing before the Fifth Circuit, the CFTC specifically [lists](#) 17 markets PredictIt has offered that are "outside of the bounds" of the no-action letter.<sup>121</sup> One is a market on the number of times U.S. Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez would tweet in a random week in March.<sup>122</sup> Victoria University maintains that "all markets" identified by the CFTC are "within a reasonable and good faith interpreta-

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118. Crawley, host, "How to Trade Prediction Markets and Fade Political Hype"

119. Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "PredictIt's CEO Answers All Your Questions," Star Spangled Gamblers (podcast), 28 October 2021, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2021/10/28/predictits-ceo-answers-all-your-questions/>

120. Bittenbender, "CFTC's PredictIt Claims Focus on Relationship Between Aristotle and New Zealand University," Casino.org, 6 March 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/cftcs-predictit-claims-focus-on-relationship-between-aristotle-and-new-zealand-university/>; Chougule, host, "The Right's Problems with Educated Voters"; Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023; Victoria University Statement in "PredictIt Announcements," PredictIt, <https://www.predictit.org/platform-announcements>

121. Letter from McGonagle to Hyland, 2 March 2023.

122. *Ibid.*

tion of the scope of contracts approved by the NAL [no-action letter].”<sup>123</sup> For example, the market on Ocasio-Cortez’s tweets is justified by the university on the grounds that the “volume of her Tweets both constitute and relate to significant political events.”<sup>124</sup> The CFTC could have included even more dubious markets PredictIt has offered in the past. An infamous example is the market PredictIt offered on whether Trump would dance with Caitlyn Jenner at the White House ball. In another case, PredictIt markets may have led to death threats against presidential candidate Andrew Yang from someone with a stake in the number of times he would tweet.

Frequent warnings by PredictIt users about the way the company was navigating its political risk were dismissed by PredictIt’s management. As early as February 2016, Domer, one of the most prominent political bettors in the world,<sup>125</sup> began emailing PredictIt his concerns about how the site was handling regulatory risk with the CFTC. Domer argued that PredictIt was “far too cavalier in blurring the line between predicting politics and gambling.”<sup>126</sup> The following year, the chief counsel of the CFTC’s Division of Market Oversight questioned Aristotle about “how contracts predicting the number of candidate tweets were political event contracts.”<sup>127</sup> Chougule echoed these points in a series of tweets in 2019 and 2020. He reported that PredictIt’s markets on the number of times politicians were tweeting were controversial to the CFTC, likely because they were not the type of markets that “regulators had in mind when they permitted PredictIt.” Chougule warned that these markets would “invite regulatory scrutiny” and that “regulators would use them as an excuse to crack down on PredictIt broadly.” Rather than pursuing markets that “casts doubt on PredictIt’s claim that it is an academic research project,” Chougule counseled “a more cautious regulatory approach that leads to eventual deregulation of

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123. Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023

124. *Ibid.*

125. For background on Domer, see Aaron Fifield, host, “The Information Edge: Winning in Prediction Markets w/ Domer,” Chat with Traders (podcast), 26 May 2022, <https://youtu.be/TEBeRDMD-3ml>; Golden, “The Art of the Pump.” See also Domer’s appearances on Star Spangled Gamblers at <https://starspangledgamblers.com/?s=domer>.

126. Twitter post, 4 August 2022, 6:29 p.m., <https://twitter.com/Domahhhh/status/1555320074524770304?s=20>.

127. Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023



political prediction markets.”<sup>128</sup> Around the same time, prominent PredictIt user James Altucher publicly questioned Phillips on the “random” nature of Trump tweet markets in an interview. Phillips defended the markets without mentioning the regulatory scrutiny they were inviting.<sup>129</sup>

Eventually, the CFTC did indeed prohibit the tweet markets as part of a broader review of PredictIt’s compliance with its no-action letter. This review culminated in an agency order to shut down the site. Among the reasons cited by the DMO was that PredictIt’s “listing of contracts well outside of the scope of Letter 14-130 creates the false impression that DMO staff has determined that these contracts are acceptable.”<sup>130</sup>

Kalshi’s strategy, meanwhile, was centered around overconfident assumptions that misread the political environment in Washington. Encouraged by their success in gaining approval to offer event contracts as a DCM,<sup>131</sup> Kalshi’s leadership expressed confidence that the CFTC, even under a new Democratic presidential administration, would approve their application to offer election markets.

In their appeals to the CFTC, Kalshi drew attention to the fact that their competitors were allowed to operate similar markets without being registered as DCMs.<sup>132</sup> Kalshi may have

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128. Twitter post, 19 May 2020, 5:14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/pjchougule/status/1262672924831625216>; Twitter post, 1 June 2020, 1:46 p.m., <https://twitter.com/pjchougule/status/1267512917831962633?s=20>; Twitter post, 1 June 2020, 1:52 p.m., <https://twitter.com/pjchougule/status/1267514286454251525?s=20>; Twitter post, 18 May 2020, 10:06 p.m., <https://twitter.com/pjchougule/status/1262565225460641794?s=20>. For Chougule’s reflections on these warnings, see Keeney and Chougule, hosts, “How Predictit Got Knifed.” For background on Chougule’s involvement in political betting, see Chougule, *How to Make Money from Political Predictions: A Guide to Generating High, Steady Returns on PredictIt*, 2016, <https://a.co/d/1t7YYOm>; Crawley, host, “How to Trade Prediction Markets and Fade Political Hype”

129. “How to Supplement your Income with Money Betting with PredictIt.Org Co-Founder John Phillips”

130. Letter from McGonagle to Hyland, 2 March 2023

131. Harry Stebbings (host), “Kalshi CEO Tarek Mansour: How to Build Moats Against Incumbents; How to Hire Engineers,” 20VC (podcast), 8:59-9:57, <https://youtu.be/h7IUgHnOb28?t=539>

132. See for example Eli Mishory to Secretary of the Commission, Office of the Secretariat, CFTC, 19 July 2022, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/ptc/22/08/ptc082422kexdc001.pdf>:

calculated that they would gain first mover advantage as a DCM in a growing election market space<sup>133</sup> once the CFTC approved their application and their competitors' business models were scrutinized by regulators. Instead, Kalshi's strategy not only failed to win approval for the company in its bid to offer election markets, it pushed the CFTC to act more urgently and aggressively against a status quo in which Polymarket and PredictIt were offering political lines of questionable legality.

Kalshi's failure to address forthrightly its role in the CFTC's actions against Polymarket and PredictIt has undermined not only its standing in the political betting community, but also its arguments to regulators.<sup>134</sup> In the 2022 CFTC comments period, at least six comments raised concerns about Kalshi's lobbying regarding its competitors and cited this as a rationale for the CFTC to deny Kalshi's election contracts while the agency was revoking PredictIt's no-action letter.<sup>135</sup>

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"Contracts on political control of Congress available to US participants have been trading for nearly a decade. Since 2014, a similar contract has been available for trading on an unregistered trading venue that purports to operate under a No-Action Letter that was issued by the Division of Market Oversight in 2014 and granted relief to operate without complying with a number of aspects of the Commodity Exchange Act and Commission Regulations."

133. On Kalshi's competition, see Graubard and Eaddy, hosts, "Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO"

134. Alexander, "The Passing of PredictIt," Astral Codex Ten, 15 August 2022, <https://astralcodexten.substack.com/p/mantic-monday-81522>; Christopher Brunet, "Kalshi Murders PredictIt," *Karlstack Substack*. 7 August 2022. <https://www.karlstack.com/p/a-textbook-case-of-regulatory-capture>; Chougule, host, "Another CFTC Review of Kalshi's Election Markets"; Chougule, host, "CFTC Makes Its Case Against PredictIt"; Bennett Conlin, "Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt? Friday's Decision On Election Wagering Will Be Revealing," *USBets*, 26 October 2022, <https://www.usbets.com/did-kalshi-kill-predictit/>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "How PredictIt Got Knifed"; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "Yikes! Trump (& PredictIt) Raided By the Feds"; Nuño Sempere, "Forecasting Newsletter: August 2022," *Forecasting Substack*. 10 September 2022. <https://forecasting.substack.com/p/forecasting-newsletter-august-2022>; Twitter post, 5 August 2022, 12:05 AM, <https://twitter.com/mansourtarek/status/1555404658541305856?s=20>. Although we were in close touch with the Kalshi team throughout the course of our study, Kalshi did not respond to our request for comment on the role of the company and its lobbyists and lawyers in the CFTC's enforcement action against Polymarket. Kalshi has likewise consistently refused to respond to questions on these issues from journalists.

135. Sarah Abhishek, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No. 69607, 29 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69607&SearchText=>; Bryce, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 69611, 30 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69611&SearchText=>; Peter Henderson,

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Of the many factors that help explain why companies have mismanaged the regulatory challenge, one is particularly noteworthy. Executives at the major companies have placed inordinate confidence in Washington-based lawyers and lobbyists.<sup>136</sup> While we are not entirely privy to the counsel they have received, we believe that the lawyers and lobbyists they retained sold these companies on the idea that they had sway with members of Congress and regulators, that their arguments would be well-received in the current political climate, and that a low-profile, secretive approach would prove the most prudent course of action.<sup>137</sup>

Kalshi's lawyers and lobbyists<sup>138</sup> facilitated meetings with members of Congress and the CFTC. Between late 2021 and August 2022 alone, Kalshi had [some 36 meetings](#) with CFTC commissioners and staff.<sup>139</sup> However, these meetings not only failed to convince

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Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 69605, 29 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69605&SearchText=>; Trevor Kelton, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 69630, 31 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69630&SearchText=>; Alan Phillips, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 69598, 29 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69598&SearchText=>; Nathan Prime, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 69599, 29 August 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=69599&SearchText=>

136. For discussion on the companies' reliance on lawyers and lobbyists, see Chougule, "7 Thoughts on the CFTC's Polymarket Settlement," *Star Spangled Gamblers*, 3 January 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/01/03/polymarket-cftc-7/>; Chougule, host, "Another CFTC Review of Kalshi's Election Markets; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "PredictIt CEO: We're Not Quitting"; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "How PredictIt Got Knifed"; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "Yikes! Trump (& PredictIt) Raided By the Feds"; Stebbings (host), "Kalshi CEO Tarek Mansour"

137. See for example, Conlin, "Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt? Friday's Decision On Election Wagering Will Be Revealing"; "Gambling on Politics: An Inside Look at the Issue That's Driving the CFTC Crazy," Capitol Account, 20 October 2022, <https://www.capitolaccountdc.com/p/gambling-on-politics-an-inside-look>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "PredictIt CEO: We're Not Quitting"; Vaughan and Bain, "A New Prediction Market Lets Investors Bet Big on Almost Anything, 26 May 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/features/2022-05-26/kalshi-s-stock-market-of-the-world-let-s-you-bet-on-anything>.

138. To date, Kalshi has spent at least \$290,000 on lobbying expenditures. "Client Profile: Kalshi Inc," Open Secrets, <https://www.opensecrets.org/federal-lobbying/clients/summary?cycle=2023&id=D000098069>

139. CFTC, "Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Caroline D. Pham Regarding the Review and Stay of KalshiEX LLC's Political Event Contracts"

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the agency, they may have contributed to a blowback by the Commission against the political prediction market industry. In a meeting on August 1, 2022, about the Commission's decision to shut down PredictIt, Behnam told Phillips that he's "tired of getting pressure from others who want to do what you do."<sup>140</sup>

While failing to achieve their regulatory goals, reliance on these insiders has saddled the political betting industry with allegations of cronyism. These perceptions are fueled by the fact that many of the lawyers and lobbyists for political prediction market companies previously worked in senior roles at the CFTC.<sup>141</sup> At a time when CFTC commissioners are facing criticisms that the agency is too indulgent of industry interests, acquiescing to the requests of Kalshi, Polymarket, and PredictIt—all of which retained former CFTC officials—risks inviting further allegations of regulatory capture.

The advice these companies received from their legal and political advisors likely played to the instincts of executives who were prone to misjudging the regulatory landscape and

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140. Terris, "This site bet big on political gambling. Regulators want it shut down."

141. See, for example, Abhishek, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002; Brunet, "Kalshi Murders PredictIt"; Bryce, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002; Henderson, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002; David L, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002, CFTC, Comment No: 70744, 29 September 2022, <https://comments.cftc.gov/PublicComments/ViewComment.aspx?id=70744&SearchText=>. The former CFTC officials include Kalshi Regulatory Strategy lead Jeff Bandman, Kalshi outside counsel Daniel Davis and Jonathan Marcus, Kalshi lobbyist De'Ana Dow, Kalshi Chief Regulatory Office and General Counsel Mishory, Kalshi board member Quintenz, PredictIt adviser Richard Shilts, Polymarket advisory board chairman Christopher Giancarlo, and Polymarket counsel James McDonald. See Letter from Davis, Katten, to Mishory, 31 May 2022, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/documents/2022/orgkexkalshiexhibitsff1221102.pdf>; Letter from Marcus, Reed Smith, to Sebastian Schott, Acting Deputy Director, Product Review Branch Division of Market Oversight Commodity Futures Trading Commission, 25 May 2022, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/documents/2022/orgkexkalshiexhibitsff1221102.pdf>; Kalshi, "Former CFTC Commissioner Brian Quintenz Joins Our Board," Kalshi Learn, 16 November 2021; Sridhar Natarajan, "Crypto Betting Service Polymarket Taps Ex-CFTC Head as Chair After Agency Probe," *Bloomberg*, 19 May 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-19/polymarket-names-cryptodad-board-chair-months-after-cftc-probe#xj4y7vzkg>; Twitter thread, 4 January 2022, 9:17 AM, <https://twitter.com/TradeandMoney/status/1478370047735341056?s=20>; Twitter thread, 19 May 2022, 4:25 PM, [https://twitter.com/shayne\\_coplan/status/1527384974239748097?s=20](https://twitter.com/shayne_coplan/status/1527384974239748097?s=20).

who showed little interest in leading grassroots advocacy campaigns on behalf of political betting. CFTC commissioners, lawyers, and staff, as an example, made frequent public appearances in forums in which they were available for questions and conversation. These events proved to be among the most insightful sources of information during our study. They provided opportunities for candid, off-the-record exchanges with those close to the decision-making process as well as with those in the policy community and in the public with an interest in the topic. Yet representatives of the companies rarely attended these events. Based on our conversations with executives and lawyers in the space, our impression is that they were too quick to assume that CFTC officials were not engaging transparently and in good faith in their public appearances, and that engagement in these forums was pointless in light of the inside tracks they believed they had.

At the same time, the companies have failed to invest sufficiently in their advocates in the prediction market community. They have provided relatively little support to traders, content creators, and analysts in the prediction market community, even though they have broken news with limited resources, their analyses have proven prophetic, and their advocacy has drawn favorable attention in national media.<sup>142</sup> Company executives are rarely transparent about their regulatory situation. While asking users for information and support, they tend to treat user feedback on regulatory matters as more of a chore to manage than an invaluable resource. What could have been a hand-in-glove partnership between companies and stakeholders in the prediction market space all too often has turned into an acrimonious relationship. Resentments and distrust aired on social media and Discord groups have spilled into the inboxes of reporters and regulators. Company executives have seethed when their users publicly criticized them. User complaints, while sometimes impolitic, have proved prescient in the sense that they foresaw how prediction market companies' ill-fated regulatory approaches would backfire against the entire community.

While companies in the space are taking some encouraging steps to engage the prediction

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142. For coverage of the prediction market community, see for example Golden, "The Art of the Pump"; Courtney Rubin, "Inside the wild subculture of traders who bet on elections," *Fast Company*, 7 November 2022, <https://www.fastcompany.com/90796054/inside-the-wild-subculture-of-traders-who-bet-on-elections>; Terris, "This site bet big on political gambling."



market community, the aforementioned dynamics generally have not changed.

### Pathways to Liberalization Before the 2024 Elections

Regardless of how regulations evolve in the space, retail traders will have opportunities of varying legal risk to place bets on political outcomes. Offshore, online betting sites and sportsbooks are increasingly offering political lines that are accessible to Americans.<sup>143</sup> If political betting continues to be one of the most rapidly growing categories, offshore sites and sportsbooks may emerge as the largest destination for 2024 election bets.

From a public interest perspective, it would be an unfortunate development if retail traders gravitate to offshore books. The business models and incentives of offshore sites make it difficult for them to serve the public interest in ways comparable to prediction markets. Many bookmakers move aggressively to restrict or prohibit gamblers from taking positions on political lines if they appear to have an edge in the market. In this respect, anti-money-laundering, know-your-customer, and other regulations work to the benefit of bookmakers. This is because these regulations give bookmakers the ability to deter traders with a perceived edge from using their sites by burdening them with onerous, intrusive requests to verify their income, identity, and other information. While there are offshore books that are committed to political betting and take high volumes for their political lines such as [Star Sports](#) and [BetOnline](#), the tradeoff is often big margins and prices that are considerably different from the ‘crowd wisdom’ in prediction markets. The transparency, liquidity, and community that allow prediction markets to facilitate price discovery, hedging, and other public interest benefits are generally lacking with offshore books.<sup>144</sup>

The question facing regulators is not whether Americans will have the ability to bet on

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143. Chris Blain, “Political Betting Online: Odds, Elections and Events,” 9 November 2021, <https://www.thesportsgeek.com/political-betting/>

144. For a discussion of the tradeoffs between political lines in sportsbooks and political prediction markets, see Chougule, host, “Is DeSantis Definitely Running for President?”



politics, but rather, whether prediction markets will be the main outlet for this activity. Liberalization of regulations on political prediction markets before the 2024 elections will likely require either an intervention from Congress or the courts, or unprecedented reforms across state legislatures.

Detailed below are pathways for how this could occur.

### Lawsuits

There are several scenarios in which the courts could intervene to liberalize regulations on political prediction markets.

Plaintiffs associated with PredictIt are suing the CFTC, alleging that the Commission's decision to withdraw PredictIt's no-action letter violates the Administrative Procedure Act. Plaintiffs are asking the courts to allow the site to "resolve in an orderly manner" its existing contracts, such as its 2024 presidential election markets. The Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals provided PredictIt with an injunction, allowing the site to continue operating while the appeals process plays out.<sup>145</sup> In February 2023, the Fifth Circuit convened a [hearing](#) to assess the case on the merits.<sup>146</sup> Victoria University and Aristotle have requested no-action relief to offer new markets with higher limits. Meanwhile, the CFTC has revoked its 2022 letter that vacated PredictIt's no-action letter. In doing so, the agency filed a motion to render the injunction moot and have the appeal by plaintiffs associated with PredictIt dismissed.<sup>147</sup> On May 1, the Fifth Circuit denied the motion and clarified that the CFTC is [enjoined](#) from "closing the PredictIt Market or otherwise prohibiting

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145. Bittenbender, "PredictIt Gets Reprieve, for Now, as February 15 Liquidation Deadline Halted," Casino.org, 26 January 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/predictit-gets-reprieve-for-now-as-feb-15-liquidation-deadline-halted/>

146. Clarke v. CFTR, 22-51124 (5th Cir. 2023), [https://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/OralArgRecordings/22/22-51124\\_2-8-2023.mp3](https://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/OralArgRecordings/22/22-51124_2-8-2023.mp3)

147. Bittenbender, "CFTC PredictIt Claims Focus on Aristotle-Victoria U. Relationship," Casino.org, 6 March 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/cftcs-predictit-claims-focus-on-relationship-between-aristotle-and-new-zealand-university/>; Bittenbender, "CFTC Says PredictIt Founder Will Get Fair

or deterring the trading of Market contracts until 60 days after a final judgment in this matter.”<sup>148</sup> On July 21, the Fifth Circuit [ruled](#) that the “CFTC’s rescission of the no-action letter was likely arbitrary” and remanded for the district court to enter a preliminary injunction for PredictIt while considering the case.<sup>149</sup>

Although the outcome of the case is uncertain as of this writing, the Fifth Circuit’s orders have had important consequences for political prediction markets. PredictIt is adding new names to its contracts on the Republican and Democratic nominees for president in 2024 and now seems to have permission to roll out new markets. The Fifth Circuit’s order may also be deterring the CFTC from a confrontational approach with Kalshi that could lead to litigation. This is because, as Pham [notes](#) in her recent dissent, the Fifth Circuit’s order “may prevent the Commission from suspending or prohibiting the listing or trading” of Kalshi’s certified congressional control contracts because PredictIt lists the same contracts.<sup>150</sup>

If administrative appeals do not succeed in the courts, PredictIt and its market service provider could consider constitutional challenges. Plaintiffs could argue that political prediction markets constitute protected expression under the First Amendment. This argument has been advanced by legal scholars dating back at least to 2008<sup>151</sup> and, argu-

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Chance to Refute Allegations Against Exchange,” Casino.org, 24 March 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/cftc-says-predictit-founder-will-get-fair-opportunity-to-refute-allegations-against-exchange/>; Bittenbender, “CFTC Takes New Direction in Attempt to Shut Down PredictIt,” Casino.org, 3 March 2023, <https://www.casino.org/news/cftc-takes-new-direction-in-attempt-to-shut-down-predictit/>; Bittenbender, “PredictIt Founder Gets More Time to Respond to CFTC Claims as Lawsuit Continues”; Chougule, host, “How to Bet the Trump Indictments + Julie Su’s Confirmation Problems”; Chougule, host, “CFTC Makes Its Case Against PredictIt”; Letter from McGonagle to Hyland, 2 March 2023.

148. Clarke v. CFTR, 22-51124 (5th Cir. 2023), Unpublished Order, 1 May 2023, <https://az620379.vo.msecnd.net/static/files/docs/ecf879d1-e837-4d16-8bf8-492f842c8db8.pdf>

149. Clarke v. CFTR, 22-51124 (5th Cir. 2023), Unpublished Order, 21 June 2023, <https://www.ca5.uscourts.gov/opinions/pub/22/22-51124-CV0.pdf>

150. “Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Caroline D. Pham on Political Event Contracts”

151. Miriam Cherry and Robert L. Rogers. 2008. “Prediction Markets and the First Amendment.” University of Illinois Law Review 3.

ably, received support in the Supreme Court's recent decision in *Citizens United*, which extended free speech protections to political campaign contributions.<sup>152</sup>

A decision by the CFTC on Kalshi's congressional contracts could also prompt litigation. If the CFTC denies its application, a lawsuit by Kalshi would likely contend, among other things, that the CFTC ruled incorrectly in its Nadex ruling.<sup>153</sup> If, on the other hand, the CFTC approves Kalshi's contracts, consumer advocacy group Better Markets would contemplate a lawsuit. A lawsuit by Better Markets would likely challenge the hedging and price discovery value of the contracts, claim that they are illegal gaming, and argue that they threaten democracy.<sup>154</sup>

An outcome of these lawsuits could be that the courts limit the CFTC's jurisdiction over political event contracts and create a roadmap for how companies can offer election contracts.

While the issue merits further legal analysis, our research indicates that, in the current political environment, regulators would pursue ways to restrict these markets regardless of how the courts rule on the CFTC's powers. This is especially true if, as a consequence of these legal challenges, election markets fall under the jurisdictions of even more heavy-handed regulators than the CFTC.<sup>155</sup>

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152. Nico Perrino, host, "Eugene Volokh and new frontiers in the First Amendment," So to Speak: The Free Speech Podcast (podcast), 18 May 2017, <https://www.thefire.org/news/so-speak-podcast-eugene-volokh-and-new-frontiers-first-amendment>; Sia, Comment for Industry Filing 22-002

153. Harty, "Political betting"; Paul Kiernan, "Betting on Elections Could Return to U.S. in Time for Midterms, if Regulators Approve," *Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/regulators-weigh-whether-to-allow-betting-on-midterms-11666782001>; "Republican Congressional Takeover May Spur Biden's Regulators to Move Even Faster," *Capitol Account*, 7 November 2022, <https://www.capitolaccountdc.com/p/republican-congressional-takeover>

154. Harty, "Political betting"

155. On the CFTC's jurisdiction over event contracts, see CFTC, Concept Release on the Appropriate Regulatory Treatment of Event Contracts," 73 Fed. Reg. 25,669 (2008), <http://www.cftc.gov/law-andregulation/federalregister/proposedrules/2008/e8-9981.html>; Federal Register Comment File: 08-004, <https://www.cftc.gov/LawRegulation/PublicComments/08-004.html>; Letter from Erik Sirri, Division of Trading and Markets, Securities and Exchange Commission to David Stawick, Secretary,

### CFTC Review

In January 2023, the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs released the Fall 2022 Unified Agenda of Regulatory and Deregulatory actions. Among the contributions related to the CFTC is a [notice](#) that the CFTC staff “expects to recommend that the Commission propose amendments on the regulation of event contracts under Regulation 40.11.”<sup>156</sup>

In the context of the Unified Agenda’s relation to event contracts, Behnam publicly [announced](#) that the agency would “tackle this issue and get a little more prescriptive in terms of clarity about what contracts can be listed and what contracts can’t be listed.”<sup>157</sup>

The contracts Kalshi [self-certified](#) in June 2023 have meaningful differences from the ones it proposed in 2022. The contracts have different position limits for individuals, entities, and eligible contract participants, and permit higher limits for those with a “demonstrated established economic hedging need.” Traders would only be permitted to purchase these contracts in multiples of 5,000 at a time. Nine categories of political insiders are prohibited from trading, including pollsters and Congressional and campaign staff.<sup>158</sup> According to Mansour, the “analysis and framework” of its revised Congressional contracts are [informed](#) by the Commission’s “feedback” and its “willingness to engage on what are perceived to be difficult issues,” as well as the “valuable information that the public provided during the comment period.”<sup>159</sup>

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CFTC, 3 September 2008, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/idc/groups/public/@Irfederalreg-ister/documents/frcomment/08-004c028.pdf>; Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, “Event Contract Markets,” 9 May 2008

156. <https://www.reginfo.gov/public/do/eAgendaViewRule?pubId=202210&RIN=3038-AF14>

157. Brummer, “DC Fintech Week 2022,” 3:23:05-3:23:17

158. Lydia Beyoud, “Hedge Funds Could Bet \$100 Million on US Election in Kalshi Plan,” *Bloomberg*, 16 June 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-06-16/hedge-funds-could-bet-100-million-on-us-election-in-kalshi-plan>; Bransfield, “CFTC Kalshi Cheat Sheet”; Bransfield, Comment for Industry Filing 23-01, Comment No: 71115, 23 June 2023, <https://comments.cftc.gov/Public-Comments/ViewComment.aspx?id=71115&SearchText=>; Chougule, host, “Another CFTC Review of Kalshi’s Election Markets”; Harty, “Kalshi makes new play for big investors to wager on U.S. elections”; Letter from Sottile to Secretary of the Commission.

159. Beyoud, “Hedge Funds Could Bet \$100 Million on US Election in Kalshi Plan”; Harty, “Kalshi makes new play for big investors to wager on U.S. elections”

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How the CFTC’s review will impact the regulatory landscape remains unclear as of this writing. On the one hand, CFTC staff appear to be receptive to engagement on the issue. CFTC staff have proposed the idea of convening public roundtables about election event contracts, reportedly after being [influenced](#) by the advocacy campaigns of retail traders and others who weighed in on Kalshi’s behalf.<sup>160</sup> Consistent with these reports, Behnam [stated](#) in a May 2023 podcast that the Commission “has to dig in and get stakeholder input” on political event contracts.<sup>161</sup> Some of the 24 [questions](#) the CFTC has put forward for public comment have not been raised in previous comment periods and speak to genuine dilemmas weighing on the Commissioners and staff. Examples include questions related to the enforceability of position limits, price forming information in election contracts, and the Commission’s role in cases of suspected market manipulation.<sup>162</sup> The current 90-day review may mark a step forward in a path that leads to a rulemaking process on event contracts.

On the other hand, if the current CFTC leadership’s actions to date are any indication, the agency’s willingness to deliberate on the issue is little guarantee that it will ultimately be disposed toward political event contracts or inclined to spend political capital to ease regulations in this space.<sup>163</sup> In her dissent, Mersinger raises the possibility that the actual purpose of the 90-day review “may be simply to give those opposed to the contracts a second chance to make their case” and “to suggest additional grounds of attack for commenters opposed to the contracts.”<sup>164</sup> Mersinger also notes that the review is effectively a

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160. “CFTC Looks to Soften the Blow From Its Coming Rejection of Political Betting,” *Capitol Account*, 31 October 2022, <https://www.capitolaccountdc.com/p/cftc-looks-to-soften-the-blow-from>.

161. Weisenthal and Alloway, hosts, “CFTC Chair Rostin Behnam on the Fight to Regulate Crypto”

162. Question on the KalshiEx, LLC Congressional Control Contracts, available at CFTC Release Number 8728-23

163. For further discussion on the regulation of political event contracts by the CFTC, see Chougule, host, “How to Bet the Trump Indictments + Julie Su’s Confirmation Problems”; Chougule, host, “CFTC Makes Its Case Against PredictIt,” Chougule, host, “Did Kalshi Kill PredictIt and Polymarket?”; Chougule, host, “PredictIt Survives for Now and Brian Golden’s Perfect Midterm Picks,” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 1 February 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/02/01/predictit-survives-for-now-and-brian-goldens-perfect-midterm-picks/>

164. “Dissenting Statement of Commissioner Summer K. Mersinger Regarding Commencement of 90-Day Review Regarding Certified Derivatives Contracts with Respect to Political Control of the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives”

substitute from a rulemaking process that would “build a foundation for evaluating event contracts.”<sup>165</sup> In Mersinger’s view, the “unmistakable take-away for DCMS” in the absence of a rulemaking process, “is not to expend resources developing innovative event contracts because the Commission may randomly subject them to a public interest analysis without providing any certainty as to the definitions and standards it will apply in doing so.”<sup>166</sup>

### Congress

Congress could pass legislation clarifying its position on prediction markets. The most likely opportunity for Congress to act will be in 2023 as part of its deliberations on digital asset regulation. A more permanent, though highly improbable, legislative solution would involve repeals of pertinent aspects of the Federal Wire Act, Unlawful Internet Gaming Enforcement Act, Dodd-Frank Act, and Commodity Exchange Act.

Particularly in light of the FTX fallout, we see little incentive for members of Congress to complicate legislation on digital asset regulation and other pressing issues for the sake of a contentious debate over political betting markets. These markets generate a relatively miniscule amount of economic activity, campaign contributions, and lobbying pressure when compared to other industries. Kalshi appears not to be making a strong lobbying push in this respect, as it was previously considering, and the grassroots activism that currently exists on behalf of prediction markets is likely insufficient to overcome inertia in Congress.

Insofar as there is appetite on Capitol Hill to act on this issue in the new Congress, we believe that the initiative would need to come from the House and Senate Agriculture Committees as well as from Massachusetts Senator Elizabeth Warren given her clout in the Biden administration and the Democratic Party on related issues. Kalshi’s advocacy as well as the comments that were submitted on behalf of its proposed contracts appear

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165. *Ibid*

166. *Ibid*



to have overcome some doubts among Agriculture Committee members and staff about the wisdom of approving congressional control markets. The possibility, however, that Senator Warren will publicly denounce political event contracts is among the factors that creates political risk around any effort to advocate for liberalization of the space. The extent to which the Biden administration has been influenced by Senator Warren and her office on issues related to financial regulation, consumer protection, and executive branch appointments suggests that her position on political event contracts could prove consequential during this presidency.<sup>167</sup> Short of a legislative fix, members of the Agriculture committees and other influential members of Congress could pressure the CFTC to liberalize regulations on political event contracts through the leverage they enjoy via their oversight, appropriations, and confirmation powers.

### The States

Initiatives at the state level could introduce political betting within certain areas of the country. This effort would require legislative action to revisit laws and norms against election betting, which, in some cases, date back to the 19th century. It would also require a baseline level of support from important political actors such as state attorneys general, secretaries of state, gaming boards, and lottery commissions.

Recent attempts to offer election betting in West Virginia provides a case study on the challenges at the state level. In 2020, West Virginia was poised to become the first state to allow betting on U.S. elections when the state's lottery commission allowed FanDuel to post odds on the presidential election. Fifteen minutes later, the West Virginia Lottery

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167. On Warren's influence in the Biden administration, see Perry Bacon, "Joe Biden is in the Oval Office. So are Elizabeth Warren's ideas." *The Washington Post*, 29 December 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2022/12/29/elizabeth-warren-ideas-biden-presidency/>; Jess Bidgood, "Elizabeth Warren's influence in Washington rises as allies take Biden administration posts," *Boston Globe*, 6 February 2021; Kara Voght, "How Elizabeth Warren's Acolytes Infiltrated Biden-world," *Mother Jones*, 11 March 2021, <https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2021/03/how-elizabeth-warrens-acolytes-infiltrated-bidenworld/>; Zachary Warmbrodt, "'Most influential voice': Warren's network spreads throughout Biden administration," *Politico*, 15 March 2021, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/03/15/elizabeth-warren-aides-biden-administration-475653>

suspended its approval. Realizing that reports of legalized election betting were more than a “[joke](#)”, Governor Jim Justice lambasted the decision as “humorous” but “absolutely ridiculous.” Lingering hopes were quashed when the Secretary of State issued a [statement](#) that betting on presidential elections would violate state law dating back to 1868. “Gambling on the outcome of an election,” the statement added, “has no place in our American democracy. Not today. Not tomorrow. Not ever. This is a terrible idea.”<sup>168</sup> Rather than challenging state officials, the West Virginia Lottery Director [apologized](#) for the “mistake,” asserting that he lacked the “authority” to approve the betting line.<sup>169</sup>

### Non-Enforcement

Although incumbents in the political prediction market space have been stymied by regulators, entrepreneurs are innovating faster than law enforcement and tax bureaucracies can respond. They are seeking new jurisdictions, not only offshore, but in areas that present novel legal questions such as internet sites with a physical presence on [Indian reservations](#).<sup>170</sup> They are facilitating political bets through creative legal structures, such as the over-the-counter swaps offered by the [American Civics Exchange](#). Meanwhile, the increasing cohesiveness of the political betting community allows traders to place side bets with each other with ease. These bets are often publicized on social media.<sup>171</sup> The govern-

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168. “‘Are You Kidding Me?’: Presidential Betting Gets Axed Fast In West Virginia Katherine Sayre,” *CBS News Pittsburgh*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.cbsnews.com/pittsburgh/news/presidential-betting-gets-axed-fast-in-west-virginia/>; “West Virginia Approves, Then Disapproves, Betting on Elections,” *Wall Street Journal*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/west-virginia-approves-then-disapproves-betting-on-elections-11586384497>

169. David Li, “West Virginia became the first state to offer bets on politics - then quickly retreated,” *NBC News*, 8 April 2020, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/west-virginia-became-first-state-offer-bets-politics-then-quickly-n1179391>

170. An intriguing possibility is that a prediction market could be created in the Catawba Digital Economic Zone, which would raise interesting questions about the jurisdiction of the CFTC. See Tom W. Bell, *The Catawba Digital Economic Zone: A Native American SEZ* (August 21, 2022). 3 J. Special Jurisdictions 25 (2022), Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=4283973>

171. Chougule, host, “DeSantis’s Weirdness and Why He’s Overpriced,” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 10 June 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2023/06/10/desantiss-weirdness-and-why-hes-overpriced/>; Chougule, host, “Trump Nicknames for DeSantis,” *Star Spangled Gamblers* (podcast), 30 June 2023, <https://starspangledgamblers.libsyn.com/trump-nicknames-for-desantis>

ment has shown little inclination to crack down against retail traders who are using VPNs to trade in offshore political prediction markets like Polymarket and Insight Prediction. Political prediction markets with a diversity of contracts could become an accepted fact of life, notwithstanding formal legal regimes, if governments prove incapable or unwilling to take enforcement actions in this space.<sup>172</sup>

## Recommendations on the Long Game

Liberalizing regulations on political prediction markets in the United States and creating regulatory clarity in the space, in all likelihood, will require a long, uncertain, and potentially expensive campaign. Achieving this goal by the 2026 midterm elections could be a reasonable target, but it also could take considerably longer depending on an array of factors.

Below are areas we suggest prioritizing for those who are committed to the challenge.

### Contribute to CFTC Public Comment Periods

In the current regulatory framework, the CFTC is the agency best-situated to liberalize regulations on political prediction markets. Public comment periods commenced by the CFTC on event contracts, gaming, and related issues provide opportunities to deliver arguments on behalf of political betting markets directly to the most powerful regulators with jurisdiction over the issue. CFTC comment periods are the rare occasions on which senior officials in the U.S. government dedicate time and resources to engage on this issue, which is typically niche and rarely breaks into the news cycle. That the CFTC is staffed disproportionately by lawyers helps ensure that even long, complex comments are considered by government officials who have the training and inclination to engage complicated issues deliberately. The questions on which the CFTC seeks public comment are highly specific and indicative of the concerns weighing on regulators—concerns that,

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172. Crawley, host, “How to Trade Prediction Markets and Fade Political Hype”

otherwise, are often not publicized.

Even during periods when the CFTC leadership is inclined toward inaction, the process of submitting comments contributes to the long-term effort to liberalize regulations. Formulating responses to the CFTC's questions spurs dialogue and collaboration, which leads the political betting community to refine arguments and explore areas of both consensus and disagreement. The comments generate earned media. And in the absence of clear polling and other metrics, the quantity, quality, and sources of the comments are treated as a barometer of public sentiment on the issue.

The totality of public comments submitted to the CFTC on event contracts, notably in 2008 and 2022, are arguably among the most influential body of work that the political betting community has produced for the direct consumption of regulators. As seen by Mersinger's June 2023 dissent, the comments are already generating momentum for a rulemaking process that could legalize political event contracts with more regulatory certainty.

### **Pursue Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Requests and Litigation**

A small number of bureaucrats with limited democratic accountability play an outsized role in shaping regulation in this space. Recent history has shown that prediction market companies tend to try to influence them quietly and outside the public eye, even when this is not the most promising approach. In their correspondence to the CFTC, for example, attorneys for both Kalshi and Aristotle have requested FOIA confidential treatment.<sup>173</sup> Understanding the dynamics that are influencing regulation of this area will require the prediction market community to have greater insight into these deliberations. Previous FOIA requests have led to the [release](#) of the Iowa Electronic Markets no-action letters

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173. Paul Architzel to Assistant Secretary of the CFTC for FOIA Matters, 29 July 2021, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/documents/2022/orgarstAppConfPetReg220223.pdf>; Keeney and Chougule, hosts, "How PredictIt Got Knifed"; Mishory to Assistant Secretary of the Commission for FOI, Privacy and Sunshine Acts Compliance, U.S. Commodity Futures Trading Commission, <https://www.cftc.gov/sites/default/files/filings/ptc/22/08/ptc082422kexdcm002.pdf>

from the CFTC, Kalshi's DCM [application](#), and Victoria University's [correspondence](#) with the CFTC related to PredictIt.<sup>174</sup> Unredacted documents related to the CFTC decision-making process on PredictIt, Polymarket, and Kalshi would be particularly illuminating for today's debates. FOIA requests are a promising route to acquiring these documents, but meaningful disclosure could entail litigation.

### Invest in New Prediction Market Platforms

To realize the public interest potential of political prediction markets, we believe that platforms will need to solve five main challenges:

- Manage regulation
- Build reliable technology with appealing products
- Keep fees low and competitive
- Offer meaningful lines with sufficient liquidity
- Cultivate community

No company, university, or non-profit in recent decades has achieved all five.

The suboptimal business decisions that PredictIt, Polymarket, and Kalshi have made, in our assessment, may have stemmed from the fact that they lacked competitive pressure in the market. Each company, in different ways, tried to gain first mover advantage among a small pool of competitors in an uncertain regulatory environment. Their strategies were understandable but proved imprudent. Greater competition will allow for more innovation in all respects, including in the management of political and legal risk. If the number of market participants with a diverse array of legal structures grows beyond a certain point, enforcement actions in the space will test the limits of regulator capabilities. Greater competition from platforms with different models may also, in the aggregate, help realize

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174. CFTC, "Kalshi DCM Application"; CFTC, "Material Released Pursuant to FOIA Requests Which has Been, or is Likely to Be, the Subject of Future FOIA Requests," [https://www.cftc.gov/foia/repfoia/foirf05-003\\_1.htm](https://www.cftc.gov/foia/repfoia/foirf05-003_1.htm); CFTC, "Request for No-Action by Victoria University of Wellington," File Number: 21-00011, [https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia\\_freqrequestinfo.html](https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia_freqrequestinfo.html); CFTC, "Victoria University Communications," File Number: 19-00088, [https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia\\_freqrequestinfo.html](https://www.cftc.gov/FOI/foia_freqrequestinfo.html);

public interest goals in ways that no individual platform can reasonably do so.<sup>175</sup>

### Support Content Creators

Considering the limited resources at their disposal, content creators in the political betting space have made remarkable gains in helping the community realize its own potential. They have organized the political betting community, broken news, shared information, generated earned media, filed lawsuits, and improved the quality of forecasts emerging from traders.<sup>176</sup> Even as political betting analysis breaks into the mainstream discourse, the day-to-day coverage content creators in the space provide is unlikely to be matched by those outside the community who are not wagering their own money, who are guided by myriad incentives, and who possess limited forecasting skills and relevant expertise. As of now, the most prominent media assets in the political prediction markets space have garnered loyal followings but have not grown enough to conduct a meaningful degree of field research, polling, or investigative journalism. This in turn has limited their revenues and political clout.

It would be worth exploring how to increase the number, quality, and reach of content creators in the political betting community. The community is a diverse ecosystem that includes traders, platform operators, researchers, and forecasters. There is ample opportunity to increase cohesiveness of the community and its ability to share and disseminate information.

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175. On the potential fragmentation of political prediction markets, see Eaddy and Graubard, hosts, “Jason Trost, Smarkets Founder and CEO”

176. See for example Richard Hanania, “Why I’m Suing the Federal Government over PredictIt,” *Richard Hanania’s Newsletter. Substack*. 28 September 2022, <https://www.richardhanania.com/p/why-im-suing-the-federal-government>; Keendawg, “URGENT: Tell the CFTC Why Elections Matter,” *Star Spangled Gamblers*, 29 August 2022, <https://starspangledgamblers.com/2022/08/29/urgent-tell-the-cftc-why-elections-matter> (Keeney, who was the editor of *Star Spangled Gamblers* in 2022, estimates that the *Star Spangled Gamblers* podcast and blog alone led to the submission of close to 1,000 comments to the CFTC through the Save PredictIt campaign.); Twitter post, 18 May 2023, 3:36 PM, <https://twitter.com/ManifoldMarkets/status/1659281738726555649?s=20>; vandemonian, “The Base Rate Times, news through prediction markets,” *LessWrong*, 6 June 2023, <https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/DfQ3Ls45WnYuguqfc/the-base-rate-times-news-through-prediction-markets>.



### Sponsor Research on the Regulation of Prediction Markets

Although data from PredictIt has furthered academic research on political prediction markets,<sup>177</sup> the novel dilemmas associated with the regulation of political prediction markets remain an understudied area. Research and polling on key questions in this space would give the prediction market community greater insights and guidance on how to influence the political process.

Below is a research agenda we recommend prioritizing:

**Public Opinion:** Why has American public opinion remained resistant to the liberalization of political prediction markets even as legalized gaming is expanding in other areas? Why is betting on politics often regarded as unseemly? What are the similarities and differences in American public attitudes compared to those in other countries like the UK, which have more permissive regulatory regimes? What is the source of perceptions that political prediction markets impact the integrity of elections? Do concerns about political prediction markets differ meaningfully at the federal and state levels?

**Legal and Regulatory Reform:** What factors influence the ways Congress, the CFTC, and the states approach the issue of political prediction markets? What legal strategies stand the greatest chance of moving the debate forward? Is there a First Amendment or other constitutional challenge that stands a reasonable chance of inviting judicial intervention on behalf of political prediction markets? What can be done to ensure that individuals and movements friendly to political prediction markets are represented in key regulatory bodies? Are there regulatory reforms that would lend themselves to better regulation of prediction markets? Are there jurisdictions that should be explored as safe harbors for political prediction markets?

**Economic Purpose:** How can political prediction markets be used more widely for their

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177. Letter from Nightingale and Barker to McGonagle, 6 April 2023; “Research Opportunities,” PredictIt, <https://www.predictit.org/research>

price discovery and hedging functions? What prevents traders and other market participants, even in highly liquid markets, from using political prediction markets to hedge risk? Can political prediction markets be designed so that political event contracts play more of a role in price-basing for commercial transactions? Can political prediction markets be created that clearly meet the CFTC's economic purpose test by enabling price discovery and hedging in the manner of a traditional derivatives market? To what extent is it inevitable that retail speculation comprises the overwhelming percentage of market activity in political prediction markets?

***Prediction Market Community:*** Who trades in prediction markets? Who uses insights from these markets? Who researches them? What motivates these groups? Where do they organize? What impact have they had on the regulation of political prediction markets?

It is critical that these studies involve a broad array of researchers who can disseminate findings to stakeholders across the policy community. Cutting-edge research from the academic community has not fully penetrated the political discourse, which may account for why regulators still have a limited understanding of these markets' impact on the public interest. Part of the solution may involve partnerships between academics and think-tanks, advocacy groups, and content creators who are better situated than academics in shaping the political discourse.

### **Engage in Political Campaigns**

The political prediction market space needs elected officials at the federal and state levels who believe in this cause enough to spend time, resources, and political capital on the issue without the promise of electoral benefits. A PAC and other vehicles would need to be established and funded to recruit like-minded candidates, brief them, and provide them with the support they need to get elected. Priority should be placed on electing a U.S. president and House and Senate Agriculture committee members who will appoint and confirm executive branch officials with a mandate to liberalize regulations on political betting.

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