



GAMING COMPLIANCE INTERNATIONAL

Illegal Streaming - Global: World Cup 2026

RELEASE DATE

August 2026

The World's Biggest Sporting Event Has An Illegal Streaming Problem

GLOBAL ILLEGAL STREAMING OF THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

174.3 bn

Qualifying illegal stream views of 90 seconds plus (90S+) globally across the entire tournament. 90 seconds plus views denote a “committed view”.

95%

Of qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ globally across the FIFA World Cup carried unregulated gambling advertising.

1.68 bn

Average qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ per match, globally.

Note: This is a stream-view measure, not a unique viewer count. A qualifying stream view requires at least 90 seconds of streaming. The methodology accounts for stream interruptions, forced refreshes, reloads, mirror switches and channel resets throughout each match.

Breakout Matches

THE FINAL

19 July 2026

Spain vs Argentina

6.2 bn

Qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ globally

The single match with the highest number of qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ across the entire tournament.

ROUND OF 16

7 July 2026

Argentina vs Egypt

2.97 bn

Qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ globally

A knockout match against the 2022 World Cup champions, drawing nearly twice the average qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ per match.

ROUND OF 16

6 July 2026

USA vs Belgium

2.79 bn

Qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ globally

The host nation's peak fixture. A high-interest game, boosted by controversy, with qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ well above the tournament average.

THIRD-PLACE FINAL

18 July 2026

England vs France

2.0 bn

Qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+ globally

Two tournament favorites in a ten-goal thriller, unexpected for a third-place match, generating 2.0 billion qualifying illegal stream views of 90S+.

The Value Extraction Question:

If just 1% of illegal stream views had gone through legal channels, how much more revenue could have been distributed to rights holders, broadcasters and other stakeholders in the wider sports ecosystem?

Legal Ad Breaks vs. Illegal Forced Ads



Legal Broadcast:

Monetized through scheduled ad breaks and subscriptions

Illegal Streaming:

Monetized through stream refreshes and reloads



Legal Broadcast:

Measured by TV households

Illegal Streaming:

Measured by qualifying stream views of 90S+, not unique viewers



Legal Broadcast:

Revenue supports rights holders, broadcasters and the wider sports ecosystem

Illegal Streaming:

Each refresh delivers new advertising impressions that the operator is paid for

Matches with drama make more money for illegal streaming:

- **Stoppage time, extra time and penalty shoot-outs are exploited with higher frequency refreshing and reloading – all leading to more advertising upon illegal streaming.**
- **Illegal streamers earn the most in the build up to moments where audiences cannot look away – the frequency of forced refreshes peaked during penalty shoot-outs and red cards.**
- **95% of monitored illegal streams carried advertising for unregulated gambling.**

The Dark Nexus



Born in the pandemic

A dark nexus exists between illegal streaming and unregulated online gambling. This relationship was forged during the pandemic, when all professional sports were cancelled, restricting traditional sports betting and the customer acquisition funnel. Unregulated gambling took this problem to illegal streaming, who presented stolen movies and TV shows and innovated amateur sports events – snail racing, tramp fighting, and more – to create a new economy where any content could convert audiences.



An exploitable industry

When professional sports returned at the end of the pandemic, the dark nexus between illegal streaming and unregulated gambling had become a cornerstone of the unregulated online gambling economy. The pressures driving consumers towards illegal streaming are clear within the one marketplace that consumers experience. In the US, for example, analysis published by [The Guardian](#) in 2024 found that accessing the full NFL season required seven separate streaming services costing around \$1,600. Illegal streaming competes within that same marketplace for the same audience, offering all the content in one place, for “free”.



The gateway for unregulated gambling

Illegal streaming of sports is now a core gateway for the unregulated online gambling economy. Unregulated online gambling operators can reach huge mainstream audiences through illegal streaming, and pay for this exposure and customer acquisition via pay-on-performance affiliate deals.

The Dark Network



The problems persist

Illegal streaming has become a “normalized” activity for many consumers, especially those under-35 years old. The example of illegal streamer StreamEast shows how hard it is to effectively remove illicit operators from the online marketplace. Targeted and taken down in September 2025, following the efforts of the Alliance for Creativity and Entertainment (ACE) and Egyptian authorities, it did not disappear. During this World Cup, StreamEast, and copycats, rebuilt presence, prevalence and popularity via theft from legitimate rights holders and with the commercial support from one core client industry: unregulated gambling.



Contagion of the marketplace

Unacknowledged gambling platforms, including prediction markets (outside of the US), sweepstakes, and social casinos, advertise across illegal streaming alongside traditional unregulated gambling operators. Illegal streaming of sports events delivers valuable betting prospects, with each game acting as fresh bait.



A trap for your data

Video players, pop-ups and fake “click to watch in HD/4K” buttons can hide malware, spyware and keystroke loggers, exposing audiences to data harvesting and other forms of cybercrime.

Displacement to Replacement

DISPLACEMENT

For legal streamers, hosting exclusive sports contests is an all-or-nothing event.

Failure to deliver high quality and reliable streams at affordable price points triggers a **displacement event** for the marketplace: if the audience cannot afford to pay to watch, or the legal stream fails, what other option do they have with exclusive live sports events?

Illegal streaming exploits this displacement by offering the one-stop sports shop, where every sport is available, and everything is “free”.



REPLACEMENT

Legal streaming can introduce additional consumer friction through access restrictions, platform fragmentation, latency, buffering and differences in service or picture quality. Audiences have options outside of simply becoming frustrated.

Those options are delivered by illegal streaming. When audience members find and engage with illegal streaming – typically carrying all the sports in one place, for “free”, they begin to question their use of paid-for legal services. Displacement to illegal streaming is acting as a potential **replacement event**.

The Illegal Streaming Playbook

SHORT GAME

Unregulated gambling is the short-term revenue engine fueling illegal streaming.

Illegal streaming receives payment for ads and referring audiences to unregulated gambling. These referrals carry affiliate deals offering between 25% and 50% of net gaming revenue produced by the unregulated gambling operator from customers referred by illegal streaming. What this means? Illegal streaming participates in the gambling losses of the viewers they refer to become gamblers.

No other business could present the extraordinary revenue potential that unregulated gambling offers to illegal streaming.



LONG GAME

Illegal streaming can expose viewers to data harvesting, malware, spyware, keystroke loggers and other forms of cybercrime. Given the duration of sports events, particularly with content like World Cup matches, audiences are unwittingly providing crime with a 90-minute plus window into their digital soul.

When audiences become victims of online crime, one question they should be asking is: "When did I last illegally stream?" Illegal streaming can expose audiences to data harvesting, malware, spyware, keystroke loggers and more.

The long game business of illegal streaming is to produce content for crime from the audience.

The Three Stages of Illegal Streaming

1

SPAWNING

WEEKS & DAYS BEFORE EVENT

A few raw locations become many in the hours leading up to the event start time. These then massively multiply with many new locations, spread via social media, messaging, user forums, video platforms, etc.



2

SEEDING

HOURS BEFORE &
DURING EVENT

Illegal streamers seed URLs, search and socials with locations and links for the placement of the to-be-stolen content, building their relevance and authority next to obvious event and athlete identifiers.



3

STREAMING

DURING EVENT

Throughout the event and pre-event buildup, mirrors and redirects are added to balance and consolidate the audience and prevent churn from broken feeds and buffering.

High Level Opportunities for Disruption



SEEDING

“Watch World Cup Free” drives a dominant majority of Socials, Search and AI engagement leading to illegal streaming.

MISSION: Pressure & Persuasion across Big Tech



SPAWNING

Who hosts the content and enables the mirrors and redirects?

MISSION: Pressure & Persuasion across Hosting, ISPs, Audience Content Hubs (YouTube, Reddit, Twitch, Kick, X)



STREAMING

Enforcement Education – Project Fear: What’s behind the Stream? The risk of malware, spyware, keystroke loggers and data theft. When content is “free”, the audience can become the product. When audiences become victims of online crime, they should ask themselves: “When did I last illegally stream?”

MISSION: Media Campaigning

Online Gaming Handle World Cup 2026 Estimate: Global

GCI estimated the 2026 FIFA World Cup would generate \$593 billion in global online betting handle – the value of money wagered on World Cup betting online.

While regulated operators saw record activity, the majority of wagering value flowed through offshore, unregulated and unlicensed channels.

REGULATED
\$184B

31%

UNREGULATED
\$409B

69%



About GCI



Gaming Compliance International (GCI)

GCI is a proven leader in regulatory gaming compliance technology and consultancy, providing end-to-end oversight of the ever-expanding online and land-based gaming industry.

The focus at GCI is on enhancing revenue optimization, insight, and market transparency. We provide strategic results within the rapidly expanding regulated iGaming and sports betting industry, delivering complete oversight without interfering with day-to-day gaming operations.

AS SEEN IN:

Bloomberg

The New York Times

Forbes

FORTUNE

FINANCIAL TIMES

The Guardian

NOTABLE IMPACT:

US States

Ohio Casino Control Commission (OCCC)

The Montana Department of Justice (DOJ)

Forbes

US Prediction Markets | World Cup 2026

US Crypto | 5.9 Trillion in Unregulated Global Wagering

Bloomberg

GB Illegal Streaming

GB Crypto

Multi-Level Monitoring

The GCI Platform incorporates:

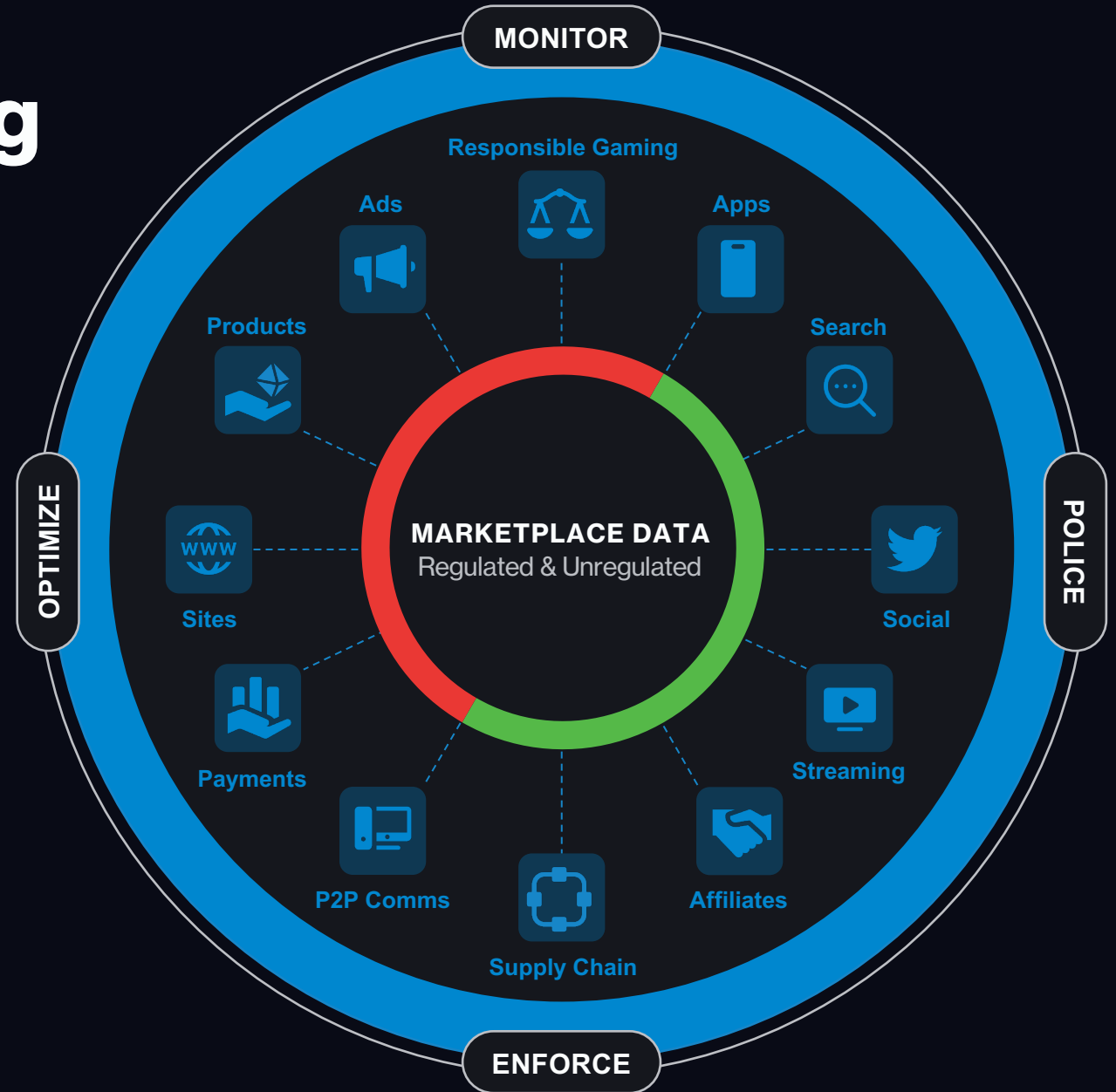
Integrated platform covering the legal and illegal sectors to present the total marketplace view. GCI data is from multiple sources (proprietary and third-party licensed).

Internal:

Monitoring, auditing, and reporting of legal operator back offices.

External:

Monitoring and reporting across Audience and Activity, All of the Time, throughout the total marketplace.



Methodology

MATRIX

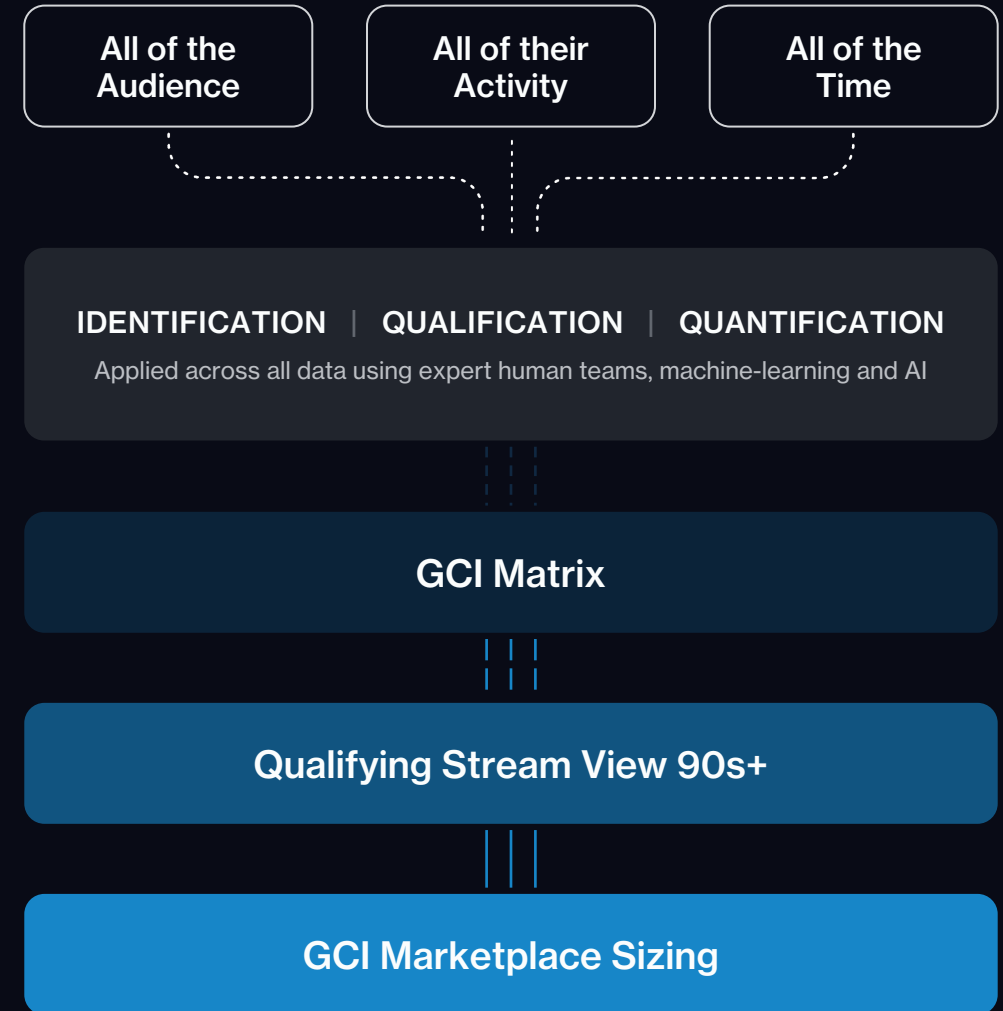
A rigorous site-versus-site and app-versus-app analysis of every platform carrying live streaming content across the tournament. All relevant signals are synthesized to deliver a single, core unit: the qualifying stream view of 90 seconds plus (90S+).

THE 90S+ QUALIFYING VIEW

One qualifying view is a single stream watched for at least 90 seconds. This is a “committed view” that strips out forced pop-ups and accidental loads which invariably last for much less than 90 seconds. Every viewer of illegal streaming will experience forced or voluntary refreshes, to continue watching an event. Reloads, forced refreshes, mirror server switches, and IPTV / channel resets will each count towards another 90 seconds plus stream view – we are measuring views, not viewers. Multiple viewers watching one stream together as a group, for example in a bar or restaurant, will not change the view count – it is still seen as one single illegal stream view.

MARKETPLACE SIZING

Aggregating qualifying views across every platform and region gives total illegal streaming volume and precise share of the audience for each match and the tournament as a whole.



Glossary

ACTIVITY: All states of online behavior, from browsing (looking) through to watching a live stream.

AUDIENCE: All potential, unique human beings in a specific jurisdiction using online services (including the underaged).

ILLEGAL ONLINE STREAMING: Any streaming service that is not authorized, licensed, or otherwise permitted under the laws of a jurisdiction or by the relevant content rights holders, but which targets, is accessible to, and delivers content to consumers in that jurisdiction, whether provided “free of charge” or in exchange for payment, advertising, or other forms of commercial benefit.

MIRRORS AND REDIRECTS: Websites and apps used for audience accessibility and to evade jurisdiction blacklists and blocklists — effectively “back doors” into illegal streaming destinations that the audience will have no knowledge of.

QUALIFYING STREAM VIEW (90 SECONDS+): One qualifying view = a single stream watched for at least 90 seconds — a “committed view” that strips out forced pop-ups and accidental loads. Reloads, forced refreshes, mirror switches and channel resets each count again after 90 seconds; co-viewers watching one stream together do not change the count.

REFRESHES AND RELOADS: Repeat loads of an illegal stream, whether triggered automatically to serve more advertising or initiated by the viewer to recover a dropped or delayed stream.

TRAFFIC VOLUME: The volume of visits made by the online audience to illegal streaming opportunities.

UNREGULATED ONLINE GAMBLING: Gambling platforms and products not authorized, licensed, or otherwise legal under the laws of a jurisdiction, but targeting, accessible to, and transacting with consumers in that jurisdiction.

VISITORS: Unique human beings visiting pages across a site — no matter how many pages they visit, they remain one unique user over the time period.



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