

# Legacies of dialogue, risk and securitization: The renewed insecurity of citizenship–state relations in European football fandom

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## Abstract

Sociologists of sport have explored how the transformation of European football is characterized by a movement for stronger, democratic and citizen-centred supporter dialogue and governance. Whilst research has analysed mobilizations on citizenship and democracy, it neglects the longer-term, relational–temporal field in which such mobilizations are embedded. We address this gap by investigating and theorizing the regulatory *timescape* of European football (1985–2025) and, in turn, unpack citizenship–state relations in a novel context, thus contributing to knowledge of contemporary debates on dialogue, risk and securitization. The importance of supporter dialogue and democratic engagement is becoming politically salient but also embedded in more institutionalized forms of social control, through the planning, management, and regulation of high-profile events. Synthesizing the fields of sociology, risk studies, citizen-centred governance, and social movement studies, we critically engage with relevant literature; draw on analyses of policy-documents, press releases, and legal texts; and develop a temporal analysis informed by our prior-empirical work on European football fandom, to unpack the role and outcomes of supporter-based collective action within new legal-regulatory frameworks, and consider what this reveals about the historical and contemporary views of supporters as deviant and risky populations. In doing so, we add conceptual and theoretical value to the study of *insecure* citizenship–state

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relations, required for future empirical analyses to unpack the challenges and possibilities of prefiguring a more participatory, and accountable governance of football and its fans.

### Keywords

citizenship, football fandom, securitization, dialogue, governance, regulation

## Introduction

In this paper we argue that mobilizations for stronger, democratic, and citizen-centred supporter dialogue and governance in European football, currently produce social movement outcomes which renew an insecurity of citizenship–state relations. In light of a new critical juncture on the safety–securitization of European football supporters, evidenced by new forms of collective punishment; poor service provision; and inadequate event management planning operations, new legal–regulatory frameworks are emerging which aim to safeguard, integrate, and empower supporters as citizens, with human and democratic rights (Millward, 2009; Jackson, 2025; Soulé and Lestrelin, 2026). Whilst new mechanisms of supporter dialogue seek to transcend insecure state–citizen relations, highlighting the incompatibility of specific forms of security practices with the everyday, lived experiences of citizenship and supporter democratic societies *in* and *through* football, their capacity to reproduce dominant discourses of social control, security and risk, limit the potential to prefigure a more participatory and accountable governance of football and its fans. Thus, the implementation of citizenship through supporter-based relational collective action remains shaped by historical processes, political ideologies on risk and deviance, and state–government relations on social control and safety–securitization, which constitute the political *being* of football fan as ‘deviant’, and a resource of political contestation.

Synthesizing the fields of risk studies, relational–temporal sociology, citizen-centred governance, and social movement studies, this article provides novel analysis of European football’s political transformation, focusing on the relational process of *institutionalization*, of both dialogue *and* social control and their interdependent legacies. Whilst the existing literature recognizes a ‘participatory shift’ (Oleart, 2023) in the efforts of democratic governments and private organizations to recalibrate their governance systems around the citizen (Grube, 2013) and the ‘citizen-as-a-stakeholder’ (Skelcher and Torfing, 2010), there is a knowledge gap on how citizen-centred governance schemas develop temporally, diachronically, and relationally when introduced into contexts already characterized by insecure state–citizen relations (Numerato, 2018). Advancing this field, we analyse the regulatory *timescape* of European football (1985–2025), paying attention to how citizenship and democracy are constituted and negotiated through governmental practices of risk and securitization and their historical–contemporary interdependency and legacies.

We adopt a novel relational framework of institutionalized supporter dialogue and social control, situating a new, contemporary ‘*crisis*’ of repression and securitization, evidenced by recent reports from high-profile European finals and competition fixtures in France, Turkey, Germany, and France (UCLF22, 2023; Liew, 2024; Jackson, 2025),

within a wider theorization of European football's long-term political transformation and governance. No study to date has theorized how mobilizations *for* stronger supporter dialogue and de-securitization policies and practices, speak to debates on the active citizenship of football supporters. In doing so, we seek to unpack (i) the role of supporter-based relational collective action to prefigure new legal-regulatory frameworks on dialogue and control, and (ii) what these frameworks tell us more broadly about the historical and contemporary views of football supporters as deviant and risky populations, and legitimate and illegitimate security practices.

At the European level, there is currently a strong policy interest in the role of supporters in football's governance (García and Welford, 2015). Former Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) President, Michel Platini, described supporters as the 'lifeblood at the very heart of professional football' (UEFA, 2011). His successor, Aleksander Ceferin, echoed this, suggesting that '[s]upporters' groups are vital members of the football community, and it is imperative that we have an open line of communication with them' (UEFA, 2017). Signs of citizen-centred governance appear also in the *Memorandum of Understanding* between UEFA and Football Supporters Europe (FSE) from January 2023, and UEFA's (2023a) expression that their institutional priority is to make supporters more central to the planning of future finals, in light of the organizational safety failures at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris. Here, the inadequate management of the football crowds prior to, and after the final led to severe issues and unsafe conditions around the stadium (Soulé and Lestrelin, 2026).

The supporter-centred discourses' frequency undoubtedly feed into Numerato's (2018) suggestion that we can observe, from European football and political authorities' perspective, a formal recognition of supporters through the lens of *citizenship*. In addition to the organizational failures at recent European fixtures (e.g., at *Stade De France*), the European Super League proposal accelerated this continuum. However, the recognition of supporters as 'citizens' and 'active social actors' (Numerato, 2018) has not automatically translated into progressive, democratic or rights-compliant outcomes. Across Europe, away supporters have recently been met with collective punishment in the form of 'blanket bans' (FSE, 2021) and regularly endured poor service provision and treatment upon attending fixtures, with reports of stadium 'holdbacks', teargassing, and some supporters unable to access toilets, water, or adequate transport (Jackson, 2025; Millward, 2009; Soulé and Lestrelin, 2026). The emphasis on supporters' *citizen dimension* has, evidently, not led to coherent abandonments of the 'criminalising posture taken by football and political authorities' (Numerato, 2018, 74) that continues to impact thousands of ordinary supporters.

This is sociologically and politically important because it demonstrates how the citizenship of football fans is not coherently applied to current regulatory frameworks on safety-securitization, namely, the pre-during-post event planning of European football matches. The emancipatory potential of citizen-orientated initiatives, rests upon, we suggest, a reimagination of citizenship that transcends dominant policy discourses on fan safety-securitization in the corridors and meeting rooms of state actors and governance practices. And thus embeds – rather than '*stakeholdership*' – citizenship at the micro-level, on the ground, day-to-day policing and management of football crowds and mechanisms for stronger democratic supporter engagement and representation.

This, we argue, has potential to transcend insecure state–citizen relations in and through football, and prefigure a longer-term shift towards a more participatory, and accountable governance of football and its fans.

Upon proceeding, this article adopts a conceptual approach, drawing together frames from conceptualizations of social control and activism in European football that, again, are influenced by social scientific work on risk-based social control and citizen-centred governance, while unpacking how fan-led mobilizations have influenced the relationship between control and dialogue over time. This is supplemented by available press releases and policy-documents from European level actors, including UEFA, the Council of Europe and FSE. The article's next section conceptualizes the post-1985 risk-based control of European football. We then outline the related turn towards citizen-centred governance, before unpacking three periods (1990–2008, 2009–2021, 2022–2025) across which the institutionalization of dialogue evolved, leading us to the current critical juncture in European football.

## **Deviance, control, and the football supporter**

Since the 1950s, sociological and criminological insights have critically analysed the processes through which individuals or groups become classified as 'problematic', 'at risk' or 'disruptive' to the normative social or political order. 'Deviance' has operated as an umbrella concept encompassing a series of activities, spanning criminal, juvenile delinquent, risky, and subcultural behaviours. Whilst extant theories emphasize the power dynamics within the labelling process of 'rule-breakers' (Becker, 1973), others recognize the ways in which boundaries of (un)acceptable behaviours are drawn up, normalized, corrected and, in turn, subjected to processes of governance through risk management and social control (Foucault, 2008).

Whereas football spectatorship was associated with unruliness in national context prior to the 1980s, football-related disorder and violence was predominantly addressed through regular legislation or penal codes (Tsoukala, 2009a, 2009b). While UEFA's guidelines on the prevention of crowd disturbances entered force in 1976 (Vieli, 2015), it is widely established that the Heysel disaster (29 May 1985) in Brussels hurried the securitization of football (Numerato, 2018) and, specifically, what Tsoukala (2009a) conceptualized as the *institutionalization of the control of deviance*. This captures, conceptually, the legal-regulatory processes and stances developed by supranational institutions post-Heysel, that were 'set up when football supporters [were] turned into key targets of the social control apparatus because of their belonging to an allegedly risk group' (Tsoukala, 2009a: para 17). The public acceptance of these measures was aided by the 'post-Heysel moral panic', whereby supporters were increasingly regarded as 'potential criminals' or 'security threats' (Young, 1986; Numerato, 2018). With Heysel (re)affirming the need for European-wide responses to curb 'hooliganism', these efforts were directed by the Council of Europe, UEFA and, later, the Council of the EU. Accordingly, the increasingly pro-active attempts to regulate and manage the risk of supporters, initiated on the supranational level, contributed towards the construction of a grey zone characterized by blurred boundaries between delinquent, deviant and ordinary behaviours and activities. To *control* these behaviours, the

mentioned institutions' regulations relied heavily on the emerging risk-focused crime control model that favoured anticipation and suspicion over rehabilitation (Tsoukala, 2009a, 2009b).

This became visible three months after Heysel, when the Council of Europe (1985, 2) ratified a European Convention on Spectator Violence and Misbehaviour whose target population for newfound situational, cooperative and repressive measures included 'known' and 'potential troublemakers', and 'people under the influence of alcohol or drugs'. Crucially, this open-ended stance was replicated by UEFA, who endorsed the 'idea that counter-hooliganism measures should target "potential troublemakers"' (Tsoukala, 2009a: para 10). These patterns continued into the 1990s and 2000s, with the Council of the EU beginning to address 'hooliganism', most notably, with its articulation in 2006 of a common definition of a 'risk' supporter, defined as anyone regarded a 'possible risk' to public order or anti-social behaviour in relation to football fixtures (Tsoukala, 2009a; Pearson and Stott, 2022). With 'risk' defined on such subjective and vague terms, its impact on states' attempts to control football supporters and stadiums cannot be downplayed, because:

A literal application of the definition would extend to all members (or potential members) of Ultra or carnival fan groups, as well as what the police often colloquially describe as 'drinkers' and therefore likely to transgress the normal boundaries of behaviour acceptable to the police. (Pearson and Stott, 2022, 148)

Following Bourdieu (1986, 481), '[t]he fate of groups is bound up with the words that designate them'. Indeed, the vague threat designation of football supporters as potential troublemakers, or potential risks, has had significant short- and long-term impacts and national reverberations, since it opened and held the door for legal-regulatory frameworks that quickly emerged in states and European competitions. Placing little or no emphasis on participation or citizenship in form of dialogue with supporter groups, the posture that was consolidated on the European and EU levels led to the national and continental *normalization* of regulatory-legal measures covered in-depth elsewhere, including extra-judicial football banning orders, databases on 'risk' supporters, footballs-specific laws, enhanced surveillance and restrictions on practices like standing and alcohol consumption within the stadia (see Coenen et al., 2016; Lee Ludvigsen, 2025; Tsoukala, 2009a, 2009b; Turner, 2023a).

Notwithstanding, in the absence of a legal definition of 'football hooliganism' (Coenen et al., 2016), the policies, laws and regulations embedded across European football targeted not only criminal acts or bodily harms or damage to property; but a collection of 'loosely defined', deviant behaviours (Tsoukala, 2009a) like (in)offensive language or chanting, standing in all-seated areas, or heavy drinking, which are often culturally normalized around football stadia, but whose anti-socialness or disorderliness depended on subjective criteria and definitions (Pearson and Stott, 2022) emanating from the top-down.

As such, the control of football supporters, which has been continuously fine-tuned and revised since the 1980s has regularly impeded supporters' civil liberties and human rights and blurred boundaries between delinquent, deviant and ordinary

behaviours all warranting control (Coenen et al., 2016). The multi-level goal, operated between supranational and national spheres, of upholding the social and political order, while keeping out deviance from football stadiums, has been pursued largely through repressive tools, and by criminalizing aspects of football fandom. Whilst occasionally questioned – illustrated by MEP Claudia Roth’s report, adopted by the European Parliament, warning about the problems of conflating *criminal* and *deviant* acts (Joern and Havelund, 2012) – we argue that the legal-regulatory framework that emerged in the mid-1980s continue to shape the present, and is temporally and relationally important for, first, our understanding not just the continuous poor treatment of supporters in Europe (UCLF22, 2023) but, second, the formal recognition of supporters via the citizenship lens (Numerato, 2018). Here, the legacies of historical and contemporary social control mechanisms are related to the turn towards citizen-centric governance, in form of supporter dialogue, *and* its contradictions.

## **Citizen-centred governance, citizenship, and supporter dialogue**

For three decades, democratic governments and organizations have increasingly engaged in recalibration attempts of their governance systems around the citizen (Grube, 2013). Citizen-centred governance highlights the importance of dialogical, collaborative and emancipatory governance, and the need to engage with citizens’ needs and engagement in decision-making processes (Numerato, 2015). Reflecting a wider ‘participatory shift’ (Oleart, 2023), citizen-centred governance’s basic premise is that, by meeting individual citizens’ expectations, ‘and tailor government to their needs, you will simultaneously solve the problems of the whole’ (Grube, 2013, 371). As one important exemplar of citizen-centred governance, European football provides a potent case of the recognition of a social group through the lens of citizenship (Numerato, 2015, 2018). Here, the enhanced focus on the ‘citizen’ dimension of football supporters moved public debates on football supporters ‘away from “hooliganism” issues to focus instead on fans as actors with political and social rights in the decision-making processes of football clubs, associations and communities’ (Numerato and Giulianotti, 2018, 338).

Far from exclusively related to football’s security, legislative or policing arenas, scholars have recognized the increased formalization, prominence, and contradictions of ‘supporter dialogue’ and ‘engagement’ discourses across European football over the previous two decades (Cleland et al., 2018; García and Welford, 2015; Numerato, 2018; Turner, 2023a; Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025; Ziesche, 2023). On the European level, and across certain national context (e.g., the UK), a renewed focus upon dialogue with football supporters has emerged, aiming to ‘use football as a tool to embed, and structure, supporter democracy’ through the use of fan advisory boards and supporter consultations on governance, safety and security and club-specific matters in football (Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025: 37). A discursive reconfiguration in the understanding of football supporters in Europe is therefore on-going (Numerato, 2018).

Though, despite the centrality of supporter dialogue and engagement within policy corridors and discourses, the terms are rarely defined, and their boundaries often remain unclear and contentious even within club-specific, national and European supporter groups (García and Welford, 2015; Ziesche, 2023). Whereas pre-existing analyses

explore how top-down concessions or promises of dialogue in some cases have followed long-term fan pressure, lobbying or protest, much of this work has focused on these issues in football's governance and commercial context (Cleland et al., 2018; Ziesche, 2023). Whilst Numerato (2018) produced a pioneering understanding of the emerging institutionalization of supporter dialogue in the securitization of football against the background of criminalizing processes, his work does seek to unpack, in-depth, ways in which those (historical) regulatory-legal frameworks advance the role of supporter dialogue in centralizing citizens at the heart of democratic decision-making and collaborative, contemporary governance. Whilst he locates an important participatory shift, it remains sociologically important to explore *how* this shift is relational, and temporally dependent upon the regulatory-legal frameworks unpacked above, and how the legacies and diachronies of this control-based framework have played out, shaped, and reflected the social change *vis-à-vis* citizen-centred governance, rights and democratic engagement. This allows for more longitudinal, diachronic analyses, which have been called for in the study of supporter-based movements (Turner, 2023a; Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025).

Accordingly, the next sections describe and analyse, three sequential but interrelated periods: 1990–2008, 2009–21, 2022–25. Here, we observe how the institutionalization of dialogue, historicized up until the present, is relationally and temporally interdependent upon the institutionalization of control in European football, and responsive to trends and advances within the activist fan scene, citizen-centred governance, the politics of risk and international law, and crises are unpacked.

## The institutionalization of supporter dialogue

### *1990–2008: From national to European frames*

The post-Heysel-induced regulation of football supporters in Europe placed limited emphasis on dialogue with supporters, favouring instead pro-active and repressive modes of control. Whilst club-specific or nation-wide organized supporter groups emerged within this period across national contexts, calling, *inter alia*, for a better treatment of supporters in domestic and international football (Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2024), fan-led initiatives and dialogical projects remained largely limited to fans' embassies at UEFA or FIFA-owned football mega-events, as first set up by the Football Supporters Association (FSA) for English fans attending the 1990 World Cup in Italy (Tsoukala, 2018).

The fans' embassies were employed in host cities to provide travelling supporters with information, advice and assistance (Cleland et al., 2018), but also served as a mechanism that could counter supporters' violent or xenophobic behaviour and assist self-regulation among supporter groups (Marivoet, 2006). The 1990s also saw the use of certain *national* projects seeking to improve dialogue with supporters. This included fan coaching and fan workers, and the roll-out of supporter liaison officers (SLO) in German football, whereby the latter was introduced in 1992 as part of Germany's National Concept for Sport and Security (UEFA, 2011). Despite sporadic or national iterations of policies indicating some basic dialogue between supporters, clubs, and football authorities, the contours

of a more formalized and institutionalized supporter dialogue on the European level started to emerge after the turn of the millennium.

Specifically, in 2001, the European supporter network Football Supporters International (FSI) (which, in 2008, became 'FSE') was founded. In the early 2000s, FSI became increasingly formalized, drawing upon relationships between fan projects in Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Switzerland, subsequently receiving funding from the European Commission to be in charge of the fans' embassies at Euro 2004 in Portugal (Turner, 2023b). As contended here, following FSI's emergence and the success of fans' embassies, the contours of *new* discourse on football supporters began to take shape on the European level, emphasizing the importance of their involvement. In a recommendation on the prevention of violence in football from the Council of Europe's Congress for Local and Regional Authorities – from May 2004, just weeks prior to Euro 2004 – it was stated that:

[S]pectators should be treated as visitors to be welcomed and entertained. Local and regional authorities should recognise fan embassies' useful role in providing spectators with assistance and information and the positive influence they can have on their behaviour [...] measures should be taken to deal with the misbehaviour of a small minority of individuals. (Council of Europe, 2004, 2)

In stark contrast to the Convention from 1985 emphasizing repression, an exemplar of the new discourse is apparent. Highlighted here is the importance of dialogical approaches, hospitality and the formal recognition of fan-led initiatives like fans' embassies. During Euro 2004, the 'Good Hosting, Fewer Problems' project, funded by the European Commission's Justice and Home Affairs Council, was organized, bringing together fan coaching organizations from the Czech Republic, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and the UK, and individuals from the FSI network and Football Against Racism in Europe (FARE) to share experiences and knowledge in the field of socio-prevention of violence in football (Marivoet, 2006).

However, besides the emergence of networked (i.e., FSI) and physical focal points (fans' embassies) in the early 2000s (Cleland et al., 2018), the emerging patterns of institutionalized supporter dialogue and the reconfigured understanding of supporters cannot be disassociated from the staging of international football mega-events like Euro 2000 and 2004 which also served as arenas for scientific advances within the policing of football crowds. Accordingly, Euro 2004, in particular, was considered as a best practice exemplar, verifying the advantages of dialogue-based and tolerant policing, informing thus an evidence-base that would subsequently inform policy developed at the European level. Here, a facilitative low-profile policing approach, emphasizing positive social relations with the crowds, contributed to reduced levels of disorder and created a dynamic whereby 'strong norms of self-regulation' and a perception of legitimacy of the football supporters emerged among football supporters (Pearson and Stott, 2022, 201). Thus, the emergence of the new frames attached to football supporters in the early 2000s was impacted by active supporters' activities, scientific advances, institutional acknowledgements of the advantages of supporter dialogue and, broadly, the assigned

importance of dialogic democracy and civic participation within ‘third way’ politics (Giddens, 2000).

Yet, changes in the stance on supporters were not solely driven by security-related trends in international football. In the context of club football, supporters increasingly expressed their desire for more supporter involvement in matters relating to, *inter alia*, ticket prices, club mismanagement, and growing competitive inequalities between clubs and leagues (Numerato, 2018). Supporters’ discontent was coupled with a growing social movement industry, where increasingly professionalized actors like FSI, but also Supporters Direct and Supporters’ Trusts operated as mechanisms for a strong supporter (political) influence on football’s decision-making structures (Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). Accordingly, in 2007, Supporters Direct was tasked with conducting a survey on behalf of UEFA with (national) member associations which subsequently revealed that associations wanted a better, and more serious relationship with its supporters (UEFA, 2011).

The period between 1990 and 2008, therefore, reveals how the role of supporter dialogue and engagement within the regulation of football supporters underwent a gradual shift, from national projects and frameworks, towards, increasingly, becoming a European level priority. Here, we argue that supporters’ discontent, the expanding professionalization of supporter-led initiatives and policy-relevant (academic) evidence emphasizing the importance of dialogue with supporters contributed to the citizen-centric dimension’s emergence. This dimension, however, must be understood as relationally linked to the previous regulatory-legal regimes viewing supporters as troublemakers, because this regime both directly and indirectly created the conditions for social transformation and its desire.

The developments from 2000 onwards can be understood as contributors to an upgrade of supporters’ role; moving them ‘from their prior marginal position to a more central one’ in countering football-related disorder and violence (Tsoukala, 2018, 154). However, these provisional patterns remain highly important because they fed into the continued shift in discourses and understanding of football supporters on the levels of football and political authorities. Continuation and, specifically, the formalization of mechanisms meant to secure dialogue with supporters concretized in the following period.

### ***2009–2021: Formalization, political structures and international law***

The professionalization of supporter organizations like SD Europe and FSE, illustrating subsequently their formalization as social movement organizations, contributed to their gradual recognition – by UEFA and the Council of Europe – as formal dialogue partners (Numerato, 2018). As argued here, the period between 2009 and 2021 reveals how supporter representatives gained better and a more formal access to the European football’s political structures. Crucially, dialogue with supporters was even enshrined in international law, through the opening of Council of Europe’s updated Saint Denis Convention in 2016, which encouraged states to regularly communicate with supporter representatives ‘based on the principle of dialogue’ (Council of Europe, 2016). As a reflection of this, within the academic sphere, funded and published research,

increasingly, began to centre around the more *political* football supporter and the role of dialogue, engagement and activists within football's governance (García and Welford, 2015; Cleland et al., 2018; Numerato, 2018; Stott et al., 2020).

Notwithstanding, the years leading up to the Saint-Denis Convention were characterized by a set of newfound institutional priorities, relationships and policies all informed by the idea of supporter dialogue (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025). UEFA repeatedly began to engage with selected issues raised by the active football supporter scene, recognizing both SD Europe and FSE as dialogue partners. UEFA, for instance, engaged with FSE's annual European Fan Congress through financial support and by sending delegates to participate on the Congress's panels and discussions, which typically revolved around issues speaking to discrimination, ticketing, policing and legislation and the promotion of supporter cultures (Numerato, 2018; Ziesche, 2023; Cleland et al., 2018).

Indeed, it was at one of these congresses that the development of the SLO as a central actor in European football started, when the concept was discussed at the 2009 European Fan Congress in Hamburg. In the 2009/10 season, the SLO concept, originating from German football, received 'full approval' from national associations on the UEFA Club Licencing Committee (UEFA, 2011). Hired by clubs, individuals working as SLOs would accordingly operate as a bridge between supporters, club management, UEFA, the police and security, and primarily work to improve and streamline dialogue between the disparate actors often possessing conflicting interests (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024).

Whilst SD Europe was tasked with developing the role by UEFA (Stott et al., 2020), these efforts were assisted by an expert group consisting of FSE and pre-existing SLOs (UEFA, 2011). The European-wide SLO implementation, consequently, marked not merely an important moment in the history of fan activism and lobbying in Europe, when it became a mandatory feature of club football in 2012 through Article 35 of UEFA's Club Licencing and Financial Fair Play regulations, but similarly, this marked a significant institutional transformation and shift in the discourse and public understanding of football supporters (Numerato, 2018). As the related *SLO Handbook* – co-produced by SD Europe and UEFA – highlighted:

Rather than being seen as potential troublemakers, fans should be considered as people capable of making an active contribution to the wider agenda of their clubs. Club SLOs can help enable supporters to become more responsible partners and also improve the quality and utility of the dialogue. (UEFA, 2011, 7)

Hence, moving at least discursively away from the idea of supporters as 'potential troublemakers', the SLO implementation formalized a new channel for supporter dialogue through its enforcement by UEFA's regulatory framework. Outside football's governance structures, this formalization was amplified further when FSE (in 2009) and SD Europe (in 2016) were granted 'observer status' on the Standing Committee of Council of Europe's Convention, tasked with monitoring the implementation and application of the Convention in signature countries, though, for example consultative visits (Numerato, 2018). Drawing from fan representatives' own stories, Lee Ludvigsen (2022) demonstrates that these representatives saw this inclusion as a crucial turning point, allowing for the promotion of the SLO role on the national team level; to meet

more regularly with football officials and security stakeholders in the build-up to high-profile fixtures; and, significantly, feed back the fan viewpoints to those said stakeholders during stadium visits and following observations.

The inclusion of FSE on the Standing Committee, therefore, meant the recognition of an organization that, in its own fanzine, set out its future vision of European football and its clear *opposition* to the consequences of the dominant stance and vague target population of European football's regulatory policies, including collective punishment, travel and lifelong stadium bans and fan ID cards, which they noted could: '[cause] counter-productive solidarity effects of the vast majority of genuine [sic] supporters with the minority of actual troublemakers, and [increase] their scope for destructive behaviour' (*Revive the Roar*, 2012, 7).

Whilst the observer status granted to FSE indeed constitutes another important moment in the institutionalization of supporter dialogue in European football, the following years saw another set of important developments in this regard. In 2011/12, the Standing Committee adopted 28 recommendations for the improvement of safety and security at sports events (Hunter, 2022), which led to 'Recommendation Rec (2015)1 of the Standing Committee on Safety, Security and Service at Football Matches and other Sports Events' in August 2015. Highlighting the need for updating the earlier, increasingly outdated 1985 Convention, this report also underlined the desirability of engaging with supporter representatives, the potential counter-productive nature of repressive measures against football supporters, and similarly the:

importance of all agencies developing effective supporter liaison strategies: a process often labelled as 'dialogue'. In terms of football club engagement with supporters, designated Supporter Liaison Officers can play a key role in this area. (Council of Europe, 2015, 7)

Consequently, in July 2016, the updated and international legally binding 'Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events' (CETS No. 218) was opened for signature during Euro 2016 in France. Central here was the inclusion of 'service', a third pillar complementing 'safety' and 'security', which emphasized supporter dialogue and liaison and improving the treatment of football supporters through the creation of enjoyable and welcoming football stadia and surroundings. Specifically, the new Convention – known as the Saint Denis Convention – included an article that stipulates, in international law, the need for supporter dialogue (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025). States are hence encouraged to:

develop and pursue a policy of proactive and regular communication with key stakeholders, including supporter representatives and local communities, based on the principle of dialogue, and with the aim of generating a partnership ethos and positive co-operation as well as identifying solutions to potential problems. (Council of Europe, 2016: Article 8)

Whilst UEFA instantly welcomed the new Convention's positive impact on their relationship with the Council of Europe (UEFA, 2016), it remains important to acknowledge that the actual, consistent and practical implementation of the SLO role (Stott et al., 2020); the Saint Denis Convention (UCLF22, 2023) in different countries, and the extent to which

fans' are 'listened to' (Cleland et al., 2018) or treated at an 'eye-to-eye level' (Ziesche, 2023), have all been critically questioned by scholars and recent independent panel reviews. Notwithstanding, the Saint-Denis Convention's importance cannot be downplayed here, because its articles, and the developments leading up to it – three decades after the Heysel disaster – *fully institutionalized* supporter dialogue, by virtue of its embeddedness in international legal texts, and supporters' formal access to political corridors both *within* and *beyond* football's governance.

As argued, the institutionalization of supporter dialogue is thus relational to the post-Heysel institutionalization of control on two levels. First, the former emerged largely as a result of decades of wide-reaching, repressive regulatory-legal measures creating, in turn, a dissatisfaction on the level of supporters. Second, the interrelation between the two appears in their co-existence, whereby the participatory shift emphasizing citizenship, participation and rights remains shaped by the legacies of the pre- but now co-existing regulatory-legal framework which adds a *selective* nature to the lens of citizenship. Indeed, one illustration of this remains the proposal for more repressive measures, in 2015, by then-UEFA President, Michel Platini, holding that: '[w]e need tougher stadium bans at European level and [...] the creation of a European sports police force' (*The Guardian*, 2015). The institutionalization of supporter dialogue, as such, did not automatically translate into an erosion on the '*a priori* suspicious stance' towards fans from football's authorities (Numerato, 2018). Rather, a defining feature in the aforementioned shift in discourse on fans, and subsequent institutionalization of dialogue, has been the overhanging and latent legacies of several decades where football supporters were far removed from any status as *fully-fledged* 'stakeholders' (García and Welford, 2015) or 'vital resources' (Pearson and Stott, 2022).

In turn, this has contributed to a reluctance to fully, and seriously, allow supporter representatives into the 'inner-circles' of decision-making processes (Ziesche, 2023); and to fully let go of measures that withhold to the historically anchored idea of 'potential risks' and 'troublemakers', breed an indifference to supporters' rights, and more broadly, inverted the democratic, basic principle of the presumption of innocence (Tsoukala, 2009b; Coenen et al., 2016). These dynamics, and the practical implications of the parallelly existing institutionalizations of control and dialogue were rendered most clearly visible in this article's final period – 2022–25 – which have triggered a critical juncture (Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025), with potentially transformative, but still unknown implications for the future of security, safety, fans' rights and citizenship in European football.

### ***2022–2025: Crisis and critical junctures for European football's future***

By analysing historical and recent changes in English football, Turner and Fitzpatrick (2025) argued that recent ruptures speaking to football's governance, ownership, event (mis)management, and policing have coalesced to form a *transformative event*. Here, the importance and top-down politicization of supporters' rights and democratic engagement have attained new levels of urgency. The critical juncture English football stands at – they contend – must be viewed as a legacy of the Heysel and Hillsborough stadium disasters in the 1980s, given the neoliberal and regulatory policies that followed these events, paving the way for the current configuration. Building on this, we argue that

similar dynamics are at play in European football, too, where a crisis of the repressive logic has emerged. This was most vividly demonstrated by the 2022 Champions League final at *Stade De France* between Liverpool and Real Madrid, and its politicized aftermath (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025), but also the recurring issues of inadequate treatment of, and service provision for, football supporters, reported from the 2023 Champions League final in Istanbul, Euro 2024 in Germany (Liew, 2024) and other fixtures like *Olympique Lyonnais*'s match against Manchester United in Europa League in April 2025 (Jackson, 2025). Pre-emptive blanket bans on away supporters, as collective punishment, actioned by national authorities, have also remained a contentious issue in European competitions in recent seasons (FSE, 2021).

As contended, the political significance of the Paris final and its aftermath (including the independent review *and* subsequent issues at European football events) – all taking place between May 2022 and April 2025 – reveal a critical juncture rendering visible the institutionally defined twofold role of supporters that has been crafted since 1985 and present, in terms of the regulation of European football supporters. On the one hand, the chaos and disorder surrounding the final in Paris – which saw thousands of football supporters subjected to disproportionate crowd control measures and congestion, with some supporters being tear-gassed – led to several investigations by academics, fan organizations, political bodies and UEFA themselves (Soulé and Lestrelin, 2026). Notably, UEFA commissioned a review by an Independent Panel, involving two supporter representatives (from FSA and FSE, respectively) that published their final report in February 2023 (UCLF22, 2023). The UEFA President also confirmed that avoiding future, similar issues remained an institutional priority (The Independent, 2023).

On the other hand, as much as the 'post-Paris' report affirmed patterns of outwardly expressed institutional reflexivity regarding the need for change and supporter representation (e.g., as represented on the panel), the aftermath also made visible the limitations of earlier, participatory reforms and the continued dominance of historically anchored regimes of control. The organizational failures at the Paris final, described by the Panel as a 'near-miss' (UCLF22, 2023, 10), and the continuing pattern of reported issues at European high-profile events demonstrate the legacies of decades-long views of supporters as 'potential troublemakers' or 'risky' and national reinterpretations of this stance. The Panel *rejected* the first narratives publicly articulated by UEFA, the French FA and *Préfecture de Police* which had blamed 'ticketless' supporters for the problem that transpired (p. 175). The report also maintained that the heavy-handed policing approach had:

[A]dopted a model aimed at a non-existent threat from football hooligans, together with a pre-occupation that ticketless supporters required a public order policing approach rather than one based upon facilities and engagement. (p. 15)

The Saint-Denis Convention's principles – which France had signed up to – were consequently 'ignored in favour of a securitized approach which was inappropriately based on incorrect assumptions that Liverpool FC supporters posed significant threats to public order' (p. 14). Far from an outcome solely of inadequate infrastructure, transport, planning, crowd control and power struggles between law enforcers, and national and local

authorities (Soulé and Lestrelin, 2026), it could be argued that, ‘at its heart, the policing operation in Paris also reflects a more fundamental flaw: the long-term failure to incorporate the democratic voice of fans in the event management of football’ (Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025: 37). And, adding to that, the inability to move on from preoccupations with supporters as risky populations.

If then, the delineation of a ‘post-Heysel’ epoch was characterized by the almost instant embrace of new, repressive and disciplinary measures, it could be argued that European football in what is now a ‘post-Paris’ period have seen the added urgency to, and reaffirmed those pre-existing patterns seen between 2009 and 2021. In October 2022, the Council of the EU adopted a resolution that recognized the importance of dialogue between the police and SLOs in the prevention of football-related incidents (Lee Ludvigsen, 2024). In early 2023, FSE (now merged with SD Europe) also signed a Memorandum of Understanding focusing on, *inter alia*, the safeguarding and enhancement of fan experiences at UEFA competitions, the promotion of the SLO role and ‘the development of structured fan dialogue policies at national level across Europe’ (UEFA, 2023b). UCLF22 (2023), similarly, recommended that UEFA must do more to integrate supporters’ perspectives and work with FSE before future European finals.

Largely reactionary, these policy developments clearly encapsulate how the recognition of supporters’ rights and democratic engagement characterizes European football *after Paris*. Yet, at this current juncture, as the described dynamics suggest, a bipolarity still exists; whereby institutionalized mechanisms hold onto understandings of supporters as potential threats *and* dialogue partners. However, significantly, the longstanding and deeply anchored history of the former means that those undertakings to ensure the latter must navigate not only hegemonically enforced ideas built up over decades, but the politics of risk which the former is tightly attached to. Here, ideals of citizen-centred governance and democratic engagement, while indeed desirable and discursively emphasized, lack purchase when juxtaposed to matters of (inter)national security, confirming that fan-centred initiatives are

[...] embedded in an otherwise solidly established conceptual and operational risk-oriented frame of action, with no genuine involvement of supporters in the decision-making process, it is to be feared that the primary role of these newly introduced actors [supporters] will consist in remedying the deficiencies of the security *dispositif*, while indirectly legitimizing its illiberal facets. (Tsoukala, 2018, 156)

The period between 2022 and 2025, therefore, is defined by periodic renewals of commitments to supporter dialogue, and a crisis-sparked, and intermittent importance assigned to supporters’ rights. Here, football and political authorities may frame dialogue with supporter representatives as progressive, or indeed a concession, enabling fan organizations who – at least comparatively – are closer to football’s political structures than in earlier times (Numerato, 2018), to experience or point to policy-victories (Turner, 2023a; Turner and Lee Ludvigsen, 2024) in form of representation, or new, but conditional outcomes on issues fans have campaigned for, like the approval of standing sections at European fixtures following its ban since 1998 (Turner, 2023b). Whilst this could be considered a co-optation strategy, whereby powerful actors answer positively to supporters’ suggestion

and, in the process, reconfigure or undo their status as a *challenger* (Numerato, 2018) another key dynamic becomes visible in the period between 2022 and 2025. Importantly, the chaos surrounding the Paris final was influenced by (i) measures that could be considered a latent legacy of the institutionalized control of deviance, and (ii) it was responded to by measures that collectively might underpin a new chapter to the institutionalization of supporter dialogue. We are hence faced with a situation where the long-term legacies of the renewed supporter dialogue commitments remain unknown, but what remains known is that its full realization is up against a robust but elastic repression regime whose remnants still, to this day, inform the ‘last link in a whole chain’ (Tsoukala, 2009b, 101), namely the policing of football supporters.

Conceptually, the present-day regulation of European football supporters may thus be understood as a relational outcome of the interdependence between the institutionalizations of control and supporter dialogue. Yet their histories and thus existence are imbalanced. In the present-day, the tensions between the two, as informed by the disparate logics of repression and dialogue continue to exist and this tension, as argued, characterize the critical juncture European football stands at. As such, the period between 2022 and 2025 presents two departure points. Firstly, it shows that the temporal legacies of social control are not necessarily just *more* repression or added modes of surveillance. The temporal legacy of attempts to control blurred activities situated between delinquency, deviance and ordinariness (cf. Tsoukala, 2009a) relates to how they shape reform attempts, and even states’ commitment to international conventions, as a prerequisite for reform (UCLF22, 2023). Second, it is evident that the ‘*crisis*’ of the repressive logic – with symptoms appearing in the reports from Paris, Istanbul, Gelsenkirchen and Lyon to name a few – have led to new circumstances for social change in terms of an emphasis upon citizenship and more democratic participation. Though, a remaining unknown at the time of writing is whether the current critical juncture, resting upon an assemblage of promises, independent reports, and references to international legal texts’ importance, bring about transformative outcomes speaking to football’s governance, supporters’ rights and their democratic voice.

## Conclusion

This paper offers a conceptual framework for unpacking the movement for stronger, democratic, and citizen-orientated supporter dialogue and governance in European football is influenced by historical forms and discourses of social control, security and risk, which are embedded in new legal-regulatory frameworks. The *historical* and contemporary views on supporters as ‘deviant’ or ‘of risk’ constitute an *insecurity* of citizenship–state relations and continue to prefigure a safety-security nexus on football supporter behaviour during the pre-during-post event management, planning and policing of European football matches. This is despite the socially significant participatory shift encompassing governments and institutions’ turn toward citizen-centred governance, with a focus on citizens’ rights, democratic engagement and dialogue (Oleart, 2023; Grube, 2013; Numerato, 2015). No studies have analysed how new and emerging forms of citizen-centred initiatives – in the context they are deployed – remain shaped by pre-existing, historical and thus dominating regimes of social control and risk. This

gap, speaking to relational analyses of citizen-centred initiatives in a context previously characterized by a ‘criminalising posture’ towards the same citizens – remains sociologically illuminating because it enables a more temporally orientated understanding of the historical and contemporary limitations of citizenship *in* and *through* football (Numerato, 2018).

The regulation of European football supporters between 1985 and 2025 constitutes a rich setting for such temporal–relational sociological analysis. Addressing the role of supporter-based movements and their outcomes on stronger dialogue and democratic engagement to prefigure new regulatory-legal frameworks, the article has demonstrated how, after the turn of the millennium, European political actors have increasingly recognized supporters as ‘citizens’ with democratic, human rights, which in turn, challenges dominant discourses on fan safety-securitization and regulation (Numerato, 2018; Turner and Fitzpatrick, 2025).

Adopting a novel relational framework that draws closer together the two concepts of institutionalized control of deviance (Tsoukala, 2009a) and supporter dialogue in Europe (Numerato, 2018), both of which have characterized the post-1985 regulation of football crowds in Europe, this article has demonstrated how new forms of dialogical and engagement-based citizen-centred governance are relational to, and shaped over time, by the legacies of institutionalized legal-regulatory frameworks preoccupied with managing risk, that have played out across four decades and reached a new ‘crisis’ of repression and securitization between 2022 and 2025. As such, we contend that a temporally oriented sociological understanding, diachronically concerned with how public discourses and views on football supporters evolve in the long-term, enable us to capture how and when these discursive shifts occur and mature over time, and why. And, moreover, how they shape and reflect wider socio-political transformations related to the formal and discursive ‘recognition of football fans through the lens of citizenship’ (Numerato, 2018, 45) that remains largely conditional and subordinate to the ‘consumer’ or ‘troublemaker’. The significance of this speaks to how it underpins that the emancipatory potential of supporter dialogue initiatives rests upon ‘citizenship’ transcending from meso to micro levels and becomes positioned centrally to the planning and execution of the management of football crowds. This, in turn, would require a long-term shift towards more participatory and accountable governance of football and its supporters.

Importantly, we must acknowledge that this article has focused predominantly on the European level and, by doing so, it cannot provide detailed accounts of the many national – even local – variances in the levels of social control and dialogue with fans. Far from a monolithic domain, European football comprises 55 national associations and therefore spans multiple supporter, legal and security cultures. Hence, an important sociological task is to rigorously unpack divergences and integrations of citizen-centric governance across these national settings and particularly southern and eastern Europe, as extant work predominantly focuses on western and northern Europe. This, we argue, would also allow for understandings of how the mentioned critical juncture creates diverse effects and new contestations across new contexts.

Finally, then, beyond contributing to the sociological literature on supporters’ political engagement in sport, and by bringing prior, separate conceptualizations of social control (Tsoukala, 2009a, 2009b) and supporter dialogue and engagement (Numerato, 2015,

2018) tighter together, this article also makes an important addition to our understanding of citizen-centred governance and its position in sport, and more broadly, the contemporary and historical tensions that emerge as dialogical, collaborative and emancipatory schemas are shaped by the legacies of prior legal-regulatory frameworks.


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