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'Underneath the shirt or the scarf is an ordinary person': risk and democratization in football supporters' collective action

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ABSTRACT

The globalization of risk has restructured the roles and interactions between states, corporations, and civil society actors. This paper examines how movements and collective action contest risk-based narratives by linking specific issues to wider ideals of democracy, citizenship, human rights and civil liberties. By stretching Beck's under-developed concepts of risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies into new settings, this article explores how movements develop frames, arguments and alliances to build public awareness of indifference to democratic principles. Using three cases of football supporter-based activism in England and Europe, including historical and contemporary campaigns opposing the side-effects of pro-active risk management, the article contributes to an understanding of how movements strategically fluctuate between specific and wider issues, using 'personal narratives' (Beck) to draw attention to occasionally blurry local/national/global (il)legitimate risk management and indifference to democratic principles.

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Introduction

Following Ulrich Beck, the creation of *public awareness*, through strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization, constitutes a key tenet of civil society movements' (counter-)power in global risk societies and in their demands for democratic standards, values, and governance. This relies on movements, strategically and deliberately, linking together information and legitimization, to challenge states and corporations (Beck, 2005, 2010). To create awareness, social movement scholars highlight that protests, social movements and collective action regularly link 'specific issues' to 'broader ideals of social justice and democracy' (della Porta, 2020, p. 76) thus enhancing an issue's universality. This linkage is regarded as crucial for movements' reality constructions, sustained engagement, and ability to shape public opinion, as attention is paid to how movements use frames, or frame-bridging tactics, and introduce new arguments, concerns, or public debates (Benford & Snow, 2000; della Porta & Lavizzari, 2024). This, in turn, may convert an issue from a structural grievance into collective action (Caiani, 2023), and add sophistication to activists' argumentation (Numerato, 2018). Accordingly, this generality elevation can enhance the 'worth' or seriousness

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of actors' claims or statements (Aradau & McCluskey, 2022) and build a broader coalition of stakeholders.

Social scientists have considered movements' or groups' framing of issues, and the mentioned interplay between the 'general' and 'specific' in contexts including water referendums (della Porta, 2020), climate activism, environmentalists, and workers' unions (Cable et al., 2008), Covid-19 (della Porta & Lavizzari, 2024), and digital or public surveillance critiques (Aradau & McCluskey, 2022). Whereas the contested issues at stake here resonate strongly with those manufactured risks Beck (1992) attributed to the risk society, the question of how movements or campaigns link specific issues to broader ideals of human rights, safety, democracy, or social justice within the global risk society's context has remained unexplored. This is despite the fact that Beck's risk society is characterized by contestations over techno-scientific experts' dominance and the importance of the subpolitical sphere. For Beck, on the civil society level, social movements and advocacy networks engage in *strategies of risk dramaturgy* and *democratization* when attempting to question dominant risk narratives and discourses and articulate bottom-up understandings of risk that, more broadly, aim to expand democratic ideals (Beck, 2005).

Yet, the question of how movements' argumentation and framing fluctuate between the specific and general when engaging in the said strategies is left empirically unexplored, despite Beck's (2005) suggestion that civil society movements' success depends partly on their ability to link specific issues associated with the management of risk to broader processes more likely to garner universal compassion, such as violations of freedoms, democracy, or human dignity.

Empirically addressing this question remains important to understand the frames, tactics, and argumentations that movements utilize to question dominant risk narratives as part of their strategies of risk and democratization. Whilst Beck's work does not offer *one* coherent social movement theory (Lee Ludvigsen, 2026), he assigned importance to social movements across his work – as actors challenging the power of expert systems (Beck, 1997, 2005, 2015). Though the question of how precisely social movements do so – within an evolving risk context – requires further examination. Thus, this article contributes to an understanding of this matter by addressing two questions: (i) How does the risk society give rise to social movements or collective actions that contest hegemonic risk discourses or practices? (ii) How do these movements – through argumentation, alliance-building, and frame-bridging – draw links between the *specific* issue of contention and *broader* ideals or processes?

Beck (2011) maintained that people's exposure to risk could have a unifying effect and mobilize groups affected by a shared risk. However, few studies explore how notions of risk, or indeed, its management and side-effects may motivate or mobilize social movements or protests. As sociologists demonstrate, the new risks generated by inadequate stadium infrastructures, heavy-handed policing, and repressive security and surveillance measures that regularly jeopardize fans' civil liberties have brought fans together in spite of club rivalries for four decades (Cleland et al., 2018; Numerato, 2018; Turner, 2023). An understanding of the domain of football fandom, hence, can contribute to plugging this knowledge gap and extend Beck's ideas speaking to social groups' mobilizations around renegotiations and interpretations of risk in contemporary societies. Thus, to mobilize answers to the above questions, the article utilizes three empirical cases of football-based collective action, capturing how social movements or collective action mobilizing against the contradictions of the risk society utilized tactics that balanced between singularity and general frames that could arouse 'universal compassion' (Beck, 2005). The cases include the fanzine movements' opposition to technological and legislative changes in English football in the 1980s and 90s; the Football Supporters Association's (FSA) *Watching Football Is Not A Crime* (*WFINAC*)

campaign; and the collective action that emerged after the mistreatment of football supporters at the 2022 Champions League final in Paris. As argued, these cases demonstrate the fluid nature of movements' strategic use of single issues and macro-argumentation, with evolving discourses attached to notions of civil liberties, citizenship, and legitimate policing. Context-specific issues like *fans'* rights thus serve as a 'personal narrative' (Beck, 2005) drawing to attention to and making visible a wider, transnational indifference to democratic principles.

Several scholars have analysed how football-based social movements – since the 1980s – have challenged football-specific and non-football issues. Whilst supporters have mobilized against club owners, ticket prices, and stadium relocations, wider issues such as food poverty and climate change are also contested by supporters (Amann & Doidge, 2023; Cleland et al., 2018; Fitzpatrick, 2025; Numerato, 2018; Turner, 2023). The distinction between activism *in* and *through* football becomes visible here (Numerato, 2018). Specifically, this article remains focused on supporters' mobilization against risk management strategies and practices. Yet in this context, the mentioned argumentation, frame building, and linkages to ideals of freedom, democracy, and human dignity are less explored. While Numerato (2018, p. 14) correctly submits that fan activists may proceed on a rather football-specific argumentation, *inter alia*, that surveillance technologies ruin stadium or match-day atmospheres, he also maintains that '[m]ore sophisticated versions of fan criticism further argued that some security measures are at odds with privacy rights and can undermine human rights and civil liberties such as freedom of speech or freedom of movement'. Crucially, it is precisely this dynamic that this article will unpack and contribute towards an understanding of, in order to explore one important aspect of the risk society: the dynamics lying beneath movements' risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies.

Globalization of risk, (counter-)power and civil society

The following two sections develop an argument holding that, although Beck theorizes the counter-power of social movements as related to their moral authority, this contention is seldom re-applied or tried in new empirical settings. Specifically, a research gap remains as to how claim-making over risk evolves over time and how movements navigate their argumentation. It is possible to start, then, by asking what constitutes the foundations of movements' counter-power in societies characterized by contested risk claims? This section unpacks two concepts with relevance to analyses of social movements and collective action, mobilized by Beck in *Power in the Global Age* (2005). Beck argued that *strategies of risk dramaturgy* and *democratization* formulate two of the bases for civil society actors' power in a global age of risk. To fully understand these concepts and why they are ripe for extensions into new empirical settings, we must view these through the risk society's theoretical lens, and the associated, changing nature of power that he theorized as a 'power game' between states, organizations, businesses and, most central here, civil society movements (Beck, 2005).

Predominantly concerned with macro-social diagnoses and transformations, Beck (1992) argued that second modernity – famously theorized as the 'risk society' – gave life to new sets of risks and hazards that increasingly reflexive individuals and institutions must grapple with. These new (man-made) risks like climate change, financial crashes or toxic pollution are more tempo-spatially fluid and uncontrollable than their more naturally occurring predecessors (say, an earthquake). Further, these risks are consequences of society's modernization in the fields of science, knowledge and technology. When the social production of wealth is accompanied by the social production of risk, this means that 'the problems and conflicts relating to distribution in a society of scarcity overlap with

the problems and conflicts that arise from the production, definition and distribution of techno-scientifically produced risks' (Beck, 1992, p. 19). Subsequently, managing risk and its consequences becomes a primary socio-political imperative (Beck, 2008).

For scholars of social movements and collective action, this shift is of high importance because it is imbued in contestations and conflicts between different social actors, which drive citizens to consider risk in political terms (Wales & Mythen, 2002). With its individualizing processes, the risk society 'enables new social movements to face what were previously extra-institutional and unpolitical issues, like the environment and the family' (Bronner, 1995, p. 75). Hence, the risk society is characterized by an increased scepticism from citizens towards hegemonic experts like scientists, governments, and institutions (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a; Kossakowski & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a). These contestations open opportunities for alternative action that questions existing expert systems and demand new institutional ways of dealing with risk on the subpolitical level (outside formal politics' channels and spheres) (Beck, 1997). Here, social movements may promote a progressive, emancipatory politics (Mythen, 2020); drawing attention to the fact that the risk definers and managers may also be the source, or even cause, of relevant risks (Beck, 1992, 1997). Beyond parliamentary debates or elections, politics from below, that is more spontaneous and informal (Holzer & Sørensen, 2001), must be considered an integral dimension of the risk society. As argued elsewhere, although Beck himself did not mobilize a coherent theory on social movements or collective action, his theories of risk, power, globalization, and associated concepts may constructively aid understandings of this engagement from below and its dynamics (Lee Ludvigsen, 2026).

While *Risk Society* (1992) theorizes the shift from a wealth to a risk society, his subsequent work, including *Power in the Global Age* (2005), captures more holistically the subpolitical influence on the 'reinvention of politics' (cf. Beck, 1997) and the emerging competition for power in a de-nationalized, de-localized, and globalized risk society. The globalization of risk has reorganized and rescaled power, including who may define, manage and contest risk.

This backdrop remains central to his theory on (counter-)power. Following Beck, the eroded significance of the nation-state and its reduced legitimation means that 'new' actors possess a more important role in the (global) quest for power. In risk societies, power no longer relates solely to (traditional) state-centric questions of territorial control. Thus, states, international organizations, corporations and civil society movements all compete to shape narratives on risk, norms, values and (inter)national agendas (Bennett, 2012). As such, the struggle for power is a struggle for the ability to change the rules of the national and international power relations (Beck, 2005).

Accordingly, attention is paid to the question of civil society movements' counter-power. This counter-power, Beck (2005) argued, is tightly linked to the 'power of public awareness'. While in earlier times, the power of social movements typically proceeded on a capital-versus-labour basis (e.g. the power to withdraw one's labour), globalization processes have reconfigured this relationship. Now, the movements' counter-power also originates from *inter alia* their ability to refuse to make a purchase; to make national or even transnational alliances; or to establish values and standards in the search for democratic governance. Beck argued that social movements possess a legitimacy that states (and businesses) lack – 'legitimatory capital'. This legitimacy enables them to (more) efficiently counter governments or organizations' narratives. Thus, a movement's power derives not from economic significance or being elected, but from their *legitimacy* (Beck, 2005, p. 75) which is helpful for the creation of public awareness locally, nationally, and globally:

> The 'power of public awareness' that advocatory movements have is *specific* because it publicly mobilizes and highlights legitimatory resources: it *generates the production, distribution and strategic*

> *use of information*. Note, it is not the use of information as such, but rather the *creation of global public awareness* of that information which constitutes the particular parameters of advocatory movements' power, their particular power resource (pp. 238–239, original emphasis).

In this respect, the power of movements and collective action is extended when they draw attention to, and challenge, the legitimacy of more politically and economically powerful actors and their claims (e.g. states, corporations, international organizations).

Hence, from a starting point where civil society actors cannot make any binding decisions, and are not elected servants, their counter-power stems from how they can illuminate contradictions of trans-legal domination systems. Undoubtedly, movements' argumentation, frame-bridging and incorporation of new arguments – to borrow from social movement studies (cf. della Porta, 2020) – matter here. Essentially, the ways in which movements 'deliberately and strategically link information and legitimation as a strategy of global public awareness', determine their position against the state and corporations (Beck, 2010, p. 28). To conceptualize movements' ability to do so, Beck mobilized two concepts: strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization.

Strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization

First, the strategy of risk dramaturgy seeks to expose the 'discrepancy between claims and reality and to make an issue out of it' (Beck, 2005, p. 243). Accordingly, we may approach this as a collective variant of the expert-public contestations that were visible already in *Risk Society* (1992), and as a counter to governments' or organizations' risk 'staging' whereby public attention is brought to a risk through processes of pre-visualization (Mythen, 2018). By engaging in strategies of risk dramaturgy, movements openly *question* the definition of risk and its management strategies; they demand to have a say in the risk matters that impact them. For example, movements or NGOs may publicly illuminate 'the discrepancy between safety pronouncements of corporations (and governments) and the perceived risks, uncertainties and fears harboured by consumers' (Beck, 2005, p. 243), as Beck demonstrated in the case of genetically modified foods, whose dominant narratives on safety and non-risks were challenged from below by actors questioning their unknown consequences and industrial and technological production to mobilize support. In this 'triumph for subpolitics', campaigns argued that such food could be associated with long-term risks to those consuming it and to the environment (Wales & Mythen, 2002). As Beck (2005, p. 244) argued, '[o]ne reason why the strategy of risk is so successful is that it calls for the implementation of one basic right: the thinking consumer's right to information'.

Second, Beck also maintained that movements' counter-power stems from their ability to address the 'conspicuous contradiction between universal professions of commitment to democracy and the sharp decline in actual democracy' (p. 245). These strategies emerge when earlier attempts to mobilize support have failed. Still concerned with raising public awareness, *strategies of democratization* must proceed beyond the use of 'facts' and 'figures'. The information movements possess must here be given a 'voice, a face and a story' that is told publicly. It is here that Beck argued that movements must seemingly balance between the specific and general in order to 'arouse universal compassion' (p. 245). In line with Beck's 'both-and' logic – which emphasizes the impossibility of separating traditionally dichotomous categories like national or global – this process depends on a type of framing that seeks to resonate both with agreed-upon universal standards (like the importance of human dignity) whilst being rooted in a specificity (personal examples/narratives). The potential of this strategy, Beck claimed, is related to the fact that it

can make the cost of ignoring, *inter alia*, human rights, dignity or democratic principles larger than the cost of neglecting these.

This section makes two key arguments. First, Beck showed that '[p]art of the power of advocacy networks and movements derives from their ability to draw on themes of justice and develop a sense of moral authority' (Hopke, 2015, p. 3). Yet, while Beck's work recognizes the counter-power of social movements in risk societies, and the bases of their power, this section argues that limited work remobilizes and extends these two concepts into new empirical contexts. Second, the research gap speaking to how discrepancies between risk claims and realities are highlighted, and *evolve over time*, and how movements attempt to arouse universal compassion requires further research. The strategies are dedicated to limited space and applied examples in Beck's (2005) work. While scholars have explored subpolitical and movement contestations of techno-scientific risks (Wales & Mythen, 2002), further work is required to understand the more specific frames, argumentation and coalitions of movements situated *within* the strategies of risk or democratization. Indeed, this raises important questions as to what lies beneath the two wider strategies – aimed at creating public awareness in a risk society – and the contestation over illiberal practices, risk narratives, and logics.

Risk, collective action and social movements in football

For space reasons, an extensive account of the nexus between social movements, collective action and football supporters cannot be given here. However, since the 1980s, football supporters have increasingly emerged as organized, politically engaged actors that have shifted from focusing almost entirely on football-specific issues towards 'a wider political agenda, with fan activists seeking to engage and build alliances with other groups and social movements' (Fitzpatrick & Hoey, 2022, p. 1235). This is underpinned by organized supporter networks' engagement with identity politics, climate change, surveillance and food poverty, to mention a few (Amann & Doidge, 2023; Millward, 2023; Lee Ludvigsen, 2026). Fans' anti-racism efforts were also a key driver for the development of pan-European fan networks (Cleland et al., 2018).

In Europe, supporters' activism thus occurs both *in* and *through* football. This follows the structural transformations that have socially, spatially and economically altered football, including overlapping processes of globalization, commodification and securitization (Numerato, 2018). Here, the latter is illustrated by the sharp rise in risk management techniques, logics, and technologies across European football from the mid-1980s, seeking to control (trans)national flows of supporters, football-related violence and disorder. New forms of pro-active risk management were thus embedded in football in the form of, *inter alia*, enhanced surveillance of supporters, football-specific laws, individual and collective banning orders, and policing according to classifications of 'high' or 'low' risk (Numerato, 2018; Pearson & Stott, 2022; Kossakowski & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025b). As Tsoukala (2009) notes, these measures have regularly been implemented at the expense of supporters' civil liberties in Europe.

Whereas academics have affirmed that these measures have been highly contentious among supporters and represented a key site for the emergence of supporter-based social movements, grievances, and campaigns (Numerato, 2018), less has been written about how, precisely, supporters draw public attention to processes of criminalization, securitization, and risk management. This remains particularly interesting because while Beck highlighted the importance of movements' credibility and legitimacy, supporter groups have not necessarily always been viewed as 'legitimate' actors, given the longstanding views on supporters as 'deviant' or 'troublemakers' (Turner, 2023).

Still, across Europe, supporter movements have utilized various tactics, including protest, boycotts, lobbying, fanzine writings, and the use of banners (Kossakowski & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025b). Yet, an underexplored aspect relates to how supporter movements or campaigns can be situated and used to extend the theoretical and conceptual tools outlined earlier. Which frames or argumentation do they utilize as part of their risk dramaturgy strategies? How do they engage in strategies of democratization, linking football issues to wider, more sophisticated and far-reaching questions including democratic and human rights, and civil liberties, and build coalitions with other civil society movements?

Method and approach: cases and data sources

To address the above questions, this paper adopts an exploratory case study approach that seeks to capture how football fan movements' use of risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies evolve over time. This temporal approach towards fan movements builds upon Turner (2023), who argues that *temporality* remains central for any understanding of fans' contestations given their historical and relational roots to structural changes occurring in the 1980s. In this view, key developments (or 'events') within the domain of football and fan activism are thus seen as interdependent and relational (Turner & Fitzpatrick, 2025). This includes the post-Heysel (1985) and Hillsborough (1989) securitization and commercialization of football, but also reactive changes to fan activism, which has become increasingly organized and professionalized (since the mid-1980s) and then transnational in form of international networks of collaboration, solidarity and ideas (from the 2000s onwards) (see Cleland et al., 2018; King, 2003). Hence, while the three selected cases, as a commonality, all emerged broadly in response to the contradictions of English or European football's expanding risk logics, they also capture fan contestations' evolution across the period from 1985 to 2022.

The cases include opposition towards techno-legal changes in English football in the late 1980s and 1990s through the loose football fanzine movement; the FSA's *WFINAC* campaign (*c.*2008) and, finally, supporters' collective action following the heavy-handed treatment of fans during the 2022 Champions League final in Paris.

That is not to say this constitutes an exhaustive list of supporter mobilizations in response to football's risk logics. The case selection is rationalized by the fact that they allow for capturing important aspects of the evolution of fan activism across four decades. And, further, how fan discourses have widened in line with the altered organizational structures of fan movements, operating between national and transnational contexts. Hence, the three case studies (situated across the 1980s/90s; mid-2000s/2010s; and 2020s) reflect King's (2003) suggestion that although fan activism in the 1990s was most advanced in English football, new networks of fans were emerging across Europe and were likely to become increasingly significant in the future.

The cases rely on different sources, including secondary literature, in form of perspectives in the social scientific work on football fan activism. As advocated by Millward (2008), the article also makes use of football fanzines (of English football clubs) that are archived at the British Library, and online sources relating to the relevant football fan movements or campaigns. Overall, no rigid selection criteria informed the sampling process of these texts, though they had to relate to, or be associated with the cases. Rather, the process can be described as purposive, whereby the overarching aim was to exploratively identify and unpack the arguments and frames – within existing literature, fanzines, fan media articles, and statements – as devised by supporters or their campaigns over time, in order to conceptually extend Beck's (2005) risk dramaturgy and

democratization concepts. As such, a limitation of the paper is that it cannot provide a totalized or generalizable historical or contemporary account of each case, though it must be noted that this was not the paper's aim. Moreover, given that the cases revolve around English football, and a European fixture (involving one English team), additional and future comparative work could explore mobilizations like *Fans Against Criminalization* (in Scotland), or the '12:12' movement (in Germany) that share some similarities with the cases unpacked below.

Fanzines, FSA, and FFACJA

From 1985, the popularity of football fanzines, and the emergence of the FSA – as the democratic, representative body for football supporters in England and Wales – are crucial to understanding supporters' attempts to question the newly inscribed risk logic that characterized English and European football throughout the 1980s and early 90s (Turner, 2023). After the stadium disaster at Heysel, Brussels, in May 1985, the FSA's emergence revolved around the reinvention of fan politics and the restoration of the criminalized image of supporters created by the mass media and politicians. The FSA, thus, argued that supporters should have a greater say in club-specific matters, and that stadium facilities should be improved (Cleland, 2010). Together, the FSA and fanzine movement therefore acquired 'national prominence as the "voice" of rank-and-file football supporters' (Jary & Horne, 1991, p. 29) seeking to protect a democratic ethic in football (Fitzpatrick & Hoey, 2022).

For Beck (2015), catastrophes and risks can have hidden emancipatory side-effects and the FSA, described by its co-founder as 'accidentally born out of the [Heysel] disaster' (FSA, 2021, p. 13), illustrates this. The disasters in Heysel (1985) and Hillsborough (1989) may accordingly be considered 'anthropological shocks' that 'occur when many populations feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their consciousness' (Beck, 2015, p. 79). These shocks bring about new worldviews, ways of doing politics, and collective memories that have implications for social movements who seek to create new, normative horizons. This is demonstrated by the host of post-Heysel and post-Hillsborough techno-legal and regulatory initiatives targeting football supporters that became key sites for mobilization, as supporters came together and coordinated beyond club rivalries to challenge football and political authorities.

Most notably, this included fanzines' and the FSA's opposition to the (supporter) identity card that the Thatcher government proposed as part of the Football Spectator Act 1989, and later, the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which enhanced police powers and criminalized certain aspects of supporter cultures (Giulianotti, 2011). The latter legislative attempt saw the rise of a new social movement called 'Football Fans Against the Criminal Justice Act' (FFACJA) that occurred in line with the fanzine movement (Greenfield & Osborn, 2002).

With regards to the identity card, representative of a pre-emptive risk technology, the coordinated campaign from football fanzine writers of different clubs relied on a selection of football-specific argumentation, whilst also linking the identity card to wider issues: its implications on civil liberties, potential for commercial exploitation, and the extent to which the card would serve to reduce football-related violence (Numerato, 2018). In some fanzines, the identity card was framed as problematic because of its high costs for clubs (The Trent Times, 1991), as its associated computer system was estimated to cost £5 million (FSA, 2021). Others argued that the identity cards, rather than bringing crowds back to stadiums, would create a drop-off in attendance and gate revenues for some clubs (Watch the Bluebirds, 1990).

Yet, the argumentation developed by the parallel, loose movements also revealed the dynamics of risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies (Beck, 2005). First, fanzines and the FSA drew

attention to the discrepancy between the authorities' pre-emptive logics, risk claims, and safety pronouncements, and those realities experienced by supporters themselves. Increasingly, the FSA received support from both football and political actors, including the Football Association, the Football League, and Wembley Stadium, from whom the FSA received funding to run the 'anti-ID card' campaign that relied on creating awareness through the media, challenging MPs to public debates, and organizing national meetings (FSA, 2021).

The movements' argumentation also tied into the wider contradictions of football's risk management strategies, namely, that new measures had not necessarily led to more safety in stadiums, nor respected supporters' rights to be heard. In one fanzine, it is conceded that, 'while football remains in the hands of unelected, unaccountable bureaucrats, then football will never be safe'. Therefore, it was claimed that demanding more democratic representation of supporters is to 'claim what is ours by right' (Eh Mate … ! What's the Score? 1989). The fanzine article seemingly refers to a type of moral ownership over football that, in turn, legitimizes fans' rights to be heard and consulted. Other fanzines would also question why spectators of other sports were not subjected to similar measures, highlighting also the indifference to football supporters' rights and civil liberties (Lee Ludvigsen, 2023, 2025b).

When the identity card proposal was abandoned following the Taylor Report that examined the causes of the Hillsborough tragedy, it was remarkable that the report also echoed some of those arguments held by supporters, mentioning serious doubts about the identity card scheme's impact on supporters' safety, and about whether the card would achieve its purpose of controlling the risk of football violence (Lord Justice Taylor, 1990). The abandonment of the scheme, thus, was commonly considered a success of supporter movements (Numerato, 2018) although determining the precise impacts of supporters' argumentation was impractical.

Throughout the 1990s, supporters' opposition towards new legal changes continued. The case of FFACJA remains important here because its creation of awareness depended on highlighting that the new law implemented to manage risk had the potential to create *new* risks. As Greenfield and Osborn (2002) write, the movement argued that the law created the risk that enhanced police powers would be disproportionately targeting certain social groups, like football supporters. Hence, this new social movement aimed to protect football supporters' civil liberties (Giulianotti & Armstrong, 2002) while building upon the work done by FSA, and connecting with other campaigns within and beyond football (Greenfield & Osborn, 2002).

In sum, the supporter-based movements' opposition to techno-legal measures in the late 1980s and 90s is important because it demonstrates how strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization reflexively emerged out of two 'anthropological shocks', relied on fan-produced, independent media, and sought to create a public yet mostly *national* awareness about the contradictory nature of state-led risk management and its wider implications on supporters' rights. Here, supporters' collective action called for greater democratic representation but also emphasized the side effects of risk management in the form of the criminalization of supporters and the indifference to their civil liberties that ensued.

'Watching football is not a crime'

Launched circa 2008, the FSA's (which was then called 'FSF') *WFINAC* campaign must be analysed in relation to the social movement organization's mentioned wider attempt to democratize football and provide a voice for supporters in England and Wales. As James and Pearson (2015) write, the FSA has therefore received hundreds of complaints from supporters about policing each season,

though few of these were acted on by the individuals lodging the complaint. They note that this is due to the normalization of 'intrusive policing practices' in football, which means supporters, as individuals and groups, are less likely to challenge and more likely to tolerate pre-emptive strategies of risk.

The *WFINAC* campaign, therefore, represents an important but under-researched case of supporters' collective action (see Lee Ludvigsen, 2023). First, it is one of the few sustained campaigns challenging football policing practices and the criminalization of fandom in recent years. Second, unlike club-based protests against stadium relocations or club ownership, the campaign united supporters from different clubs and developed in parallel to other FSA campaigns seeking to contest the side effects of 'modern' developments in football, including Twenty's Plenty (against high ticket prices) and the Safe Standing campaigns (Turner, 2017). The campaign, therefore, affirms how the policing and management of risk in football renewed its status as a *collective issue*, catalyzing, again, collective action.

On the one hand, the *WFINAC* campaign emerged in a *response* to a specific event: the police's pre-emptive use of Section 27 of the Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006 to remove around 80 Stoke City supporters from a pub in Manchester before a Premier League fixture, thereby preventing them from attending the game and escorting them back to Stoke. Consequently, FSA under the banner of *WFINAC* teamed up with the advocacy group, Liberty, to assist the Stoke supporters and challenge the legitimacy of the police's decision to remove supporters under Section 27 (FSA, 2012). This, in turn, led to the police issuing an apology to the supporters and financially compensating them (Giulianotti, 2011). On the other hand, the emergence of FSA, as *The Guardian* (2009) described it, as 'an unlikely new civil liberties crusader' campaigning for football supporters' rights, cannot solely be seen as responsive to the mentioned episode but is emblematic of the deeper and temporally evolving penetration of risk and its management into football's everyday life since the 1980s.

Importantly, following its launch, *WFINAC* broadened its focus beyond Section 27 related issues. In doing so, in the early 2010s, the campaign came to represent 'something of a rallying cry for supporters who feel they've been poorly treated' (FSA, 2012) and sought to monitor how football supporters are policed, and treated fairly and within the law (Stott et al., 2020). The expanded scope also led to the staging of public events with supporters' rights on the agenda – working as spaces of counter-expertise – featuring various stakeholders (FSA, 2013). The campaign's public awareness creation (cf. Beck, 2005) is also demonstrated by online articles relying on official statistics to show the long-term decline of football-related arrests (FSA, 2018). With the campaign's engagement with actors in and beyond football (e.g. Liberty) and the provision of legal advice for supporters (FSA, 2013; Lee Ludvigsen, 2023), it can be contended that *WFINAC* represented not merely a struggle framed in terms of football but over the illegitimacy of risk management strategies, democracy, and citizenship.

Crucially, the campaign sought to bring attention to the fact that, as one article put it: 'Underneath the [football] shirt or the scarf is an *ordinary person* going about their lawful business, exercising their *lawful right* of freedom of movement and association' (FSA, 2017, my emphasis). Meanwhile the campaign's slogan *per se* – later (re)iterated in other European contexts (e.g. 'Fans against criminalisation') – may be understood as an attempt to frame the football supporter in terms of citizenship and the rights attached to *watching football*, rather than as 'potential criminals' or 'hooligans' and to highlight the new risks that emerge – the erosion of civil liberties, human rights, and democratic ideals – when a suspicious stance is adopted towards citizens (Numerato, 2018). By emphasizing the ordinary and lawful nature of most football fans, who exercise basic

human rights (e.g. freedom of movement), the WFINAC campaign represents an important example of how the figure of the supporter is discursively (re)constructed as a citizen. In this sense, whilst the *WFINAC* campaign predominantly addressed legal and policing-related issues in English football, the campaign occurred temporally in a context where supporters, across Europe, grew increasingly conscious about their 'similar, shared experiences' (Cleland et al., 2018) – including those relating to policing and indifferences towards their rights – as pan-European networks like Football Supporters Europe (FSE) have advocated strongly for a re-definition of football fandom in terms of citizenship (Numerato, 2018).

The Paris protests

Football supporters' collective action following the Champions League final between Liverpool and Real Madrid at *Stade De France,* Paris (28 May 2022) was described by Rookwood and Hoey (2024) as the 'Paris protests'. While the crowd management, organizational, and policing failures, and the victim-blaming strategies of the organizers, French state, police, and European football's governing body, UEFA, have been well-covered in the literature and independent reviews (Pearson & Stott, 2022; UCLF22, 2023; Scraton, 2023; Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a, 2025b; Turner & Fitzpatrick, 2025), less attention has been directed towards how the event mobilized and united football supporters – on club, national, and European levels – who quickly acted and sought to disprove the emerging top-down narratives, and subsequently engaged in calls for greater supporter representation and recognition of supporters as citizens with democratic rights.

Prior to the final, thousands of supporters outside *Stade De France* were trapped in confined spaces and queues outside the stadium turnstiles and gates. Here, some supporters were subjected to riot policing and tear gas, which was 'deployed without provocation to affirm total, authoritarian control' (Scraton, 2023, p. 28). The scenes that delayed the fixture's kick-off by 36 min were immediately attributed – by UEFA and French authorities – to supposedly 'late arriving' supporters, and subsequently to the alleged mass of fake tickets that was in circulation (Rookwood & Hoey, 2024). This, in turn, created a 'double injustice': supporters were not just subjected to repressive policing but blamed for the ensuing disorder, too.

For Beck (2005, p. 242, original emphasis), a movement's power derives from the 'extent to which they are able to make *truthfulness* into a political issue' and achieve certain political goals. As argued elsewhere, the assertions – understood as experts' risk claims – were instantly disputed by individual supporters who were at the stadium, pan-European supporter networks, and journalists (many of whom were also caught up in the chaos), who utilized social media, mobile phone footage, and television and radio interview testimonies to highlight the discrepancy between claims and reality (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a). Supporters' actions – boosted by the endorsement in media coverage – were thus integral in disproving 'the "great lie" before it had a chance to root' (Rookwood and Hoey, 2024, p. 101) and demanding a formal inquiry (leading to the eventual publication of the Independent Panel's report). Only weeks after the final, supporter representatives from supporter groups Spirit of Shankly, Liverpool Disabled Supporter Association, Real Madrid socio and FSE also gave evidence to the French Senate's Law and Culture Committee (FSE, 2022). By then, UEFA had also confirmed that an independent panel – involving representatives from FSA and FSE – would investigate the events surrounding the final (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a). As Soulé and Lestrelin (2026) write, the FSE also published its own post-event report based on pre-match and match-day observations and communications with supporters.

As a journalist and Liverpool supporter, Daniel Austin (2023) writes, the Panel's report that was published in February 2023 – and rejected that 'late arriving supporters were a cause of the problems' (UCFL22, 2023, p. 175) – came into being 'because fans organised themselves on the night and during the months after, conducting the type of high-quality communications campaign firms paid millions of pounds in consultancy fees could only dream of improving upon' (Austin, 2023). Following Cleland et al. (2018, p. 26), '[a]ny potential relational power of [fans'] collective actions might come from their mobilizing into a critical mass' (Cleland et al., 2018, p. 26). Austin's argumentation, similarly, emphasizes that fans, when linking together, may be able to shape dominant narratives. Hence, while supporters *a priori* lacked political and economic power, when juxtaposed to the French state and UEFA, supporters' strategies of risk dramaturgy, exposing the distance between claims and reality, and making an issue out of it (cf. Beck, 2005), therefore succeeded in creating a global awareness that again contributed towards the formal, documented establishment of the truth about what occurred outside *Stade De France*. The comprehensive report, importantly, maintained that UEFA bore the 'primary responsibility' for the chaos that transpired (UCLF22, 2023).

However, far from seeking only to vindicate 'late-arriving' or 'ticketless' supporters who were initially blamed and to ensure match-ticket refunds, the mobilizations in the aftermath of Paris also reveal how civil society actors' power derives from their development of a sense of moral authority (Hopke, 2015). It could be argued that the *Stade De France* case served to unite supporters and generated a (trans)national mobilization characterized by renewed demands for greater recognition of supporters' rights and the democratic participation of supporters in the governance of European football's safety and security management (see Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a, 2025b; Turner & Fitzpatrick, 2025).

For example, the long-term failure to incorporate the democratic voice of supporters in the planning for football fixtures (Turner & Fitzpatrick, 2025) was alluded to by FSE fan activist Ronan Evain (2022), who, in a piece for *The Guardian*, referred to how a historically grounded 'dehumanisation process' characterized by an indifference to supporters' rights meant that supporters outside *Stade De France* were 'policed like 1980s hooligans', and further translated into a reluctance to 'recognise Liverpool fans as victims of a failed police operation'. As Evain's article suggested, supporters' collective action after Paris had therefore set in motion potentially democratic and progressive outcomes: 'We are now at the beginning of a long process which will hopefully lead to accountability and transparency'. Further, the scenes in Paris were linked to both historical processes of criminalization and, indeed, the need for renewed commitments to democratic decision-making. Building upon Beck's (2005) strategies of democratization, we may thus see how the images, testimonies, and stories from *Stade De France* became a 'personal narrative' through which longstanding violations of norms and democratic principles against a social group were brought to life, made visible, and incorporated into the argumentation. The above framing of fans as 'victims', moreover, appears important insofar as it *humanises* fans, their experiences and demands for justice, and improved governance and treatment.

Accordingly, the 'Paris protests' were characterized by the 'both-and' logic within Beck's work. It transcended both online and offline spaces. It involved local, national, and transnational supporter networks. Meanwhile, the supporters' use of informal and formal political channels sought to counter not only the immediate ('local' or 'Parisian') symptoms of football's risk management (i.e. the heavy-handed policing, victim-blaming processes), but came to unite supporters across Europe, who, following years of experiencing the side-effects of football's increasingly harmonized risk-

management strategies, have strongly advocated for the need to re-state the importance of dialogue with supporter groups prior to, during and after football fixtures. Indeed, whilst one of the recommendations of the UCLF22 (2023, p. 202) report, emphasizing the importance of the integration of 'supporter perspectives and input into the planning and delivery stages' of future finals, suggests that supporter demands, not just after Paris, but across a four-decade-long period, have consolidated the supporters' role as a *citizen* and stakeholder with the right to be heard on matters concerning them, questions remain as to whether this will truly establish a more democratic governance of football, its risk management, and a version that empowers football supporters. As Beck (2005) noted, movements, whilst opposing states (and corporations) *still* rely on states to implement their ideas and goals. Thus, potential state and organizational co-option strategies may serve to dilute supporter movements' counter-power by 'colonizing' supporters' reflexive suggestions (Numerato, 2018).

Discussion and conclusion

The globalization of risk has reconfigured the roles of, and relationships between states, corporations, and civil society actors. Here, the question of social movements' power remains significant but empirically underdeveloped. Following Beck (2005), movements' *strategies of risk dramaturgy* and *democratization* are foundational for their ability to develop new moral frameworks, democratic standards, and governance. Hence, these strategies remain the basis of movements' counter-power. Despite their theoretical promise for movements' power and thus ability to achieve certain 'outcomes' or 'successes' in risk societies, Beck's concepts of risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies have seldom been utilized in studies of social movements, protest, or collective action. Specifically, it is unclear how, precisely, movements utilize frames, adapt argumentation, and mobilize upon engagement with these strategies.

By seeking to uncover what lies *beneath* movements' risks and democratization strategies, this article argues that collective action in the case of football supporters offers an illuminating empirical scene. Whilst football is a proven sociologically important site for the study of social movements, collective action, identities, and memories (Fitzpatrick, 2025; Numerato, 2018), authorities' attempts to manage football crowds are emblematic of those trends Beck (1992) alluded to, as seen through the 'pre-emptive turn in criminal justice, the increased focus on risk management, and the development of the "culture of control"' (Pearson & Stott, 2022, p. 155). Whilst contestation remains a fundamental tenet of the risk society (Lee Ludvigsen, 2025a) and football provides an 'excellent way of understanding how social groups emerge and interact' (Amann & Doidge, 2023, p. 1343), limited work examines how supporter-based movements, over a four-decade period, have evolved alongside the global risk society's maturation. Exploring such movements remains particularly important because while Beck (2005, p. 77) attributes social movements' credibility and legitimatory power to their status as 'witnesses at the scene', supporter-based movements' credibility has, by default, been in a deficit and impeded by longstanding stances towards supporters as 'deviant' or 'troublemakers' (Turner & Fitzpatrick, 2025). Concurrently, existing work demonstrates that leading fan activists often have a background from trade unions, other political movements (Turner, 2023) and are well-educated (Millward, 2008) with academic backgrounds from law, social sciences and journalism (Numerato, 2018, p. 2). This existing work thus demonstrates how this has assisted the development of, *inter alia*, fanzines, (trans)national supporter coalition networks, and their argumentations which rely upon individual fan activists' media, legal, writing, and organizational skills. Fans' argumentation and claim-making, thus, is related

not merely to any legitimatory capital they may have, but also individuals' cultural and economic capital.

This article explored three important cases of supporter-based social movements or collective action between 1985 and the present-day. Notwithstanding important differences *vis-à-vis* their intensity, duration, online-versus-offline presence, national-global scope, and popular support, they all possess a shared characteristic insofar as they all mobilized in response to the legal, regulatory, technological, or policing side effects or contradictions of the management of risk. The three cases collectively demonstrate how movements seek to challenge the credibility of those institutions defining and managing risk. As this paper argues, the cases reveal broader patterns speaking to the limitations and opportunities coming from movements' counter-power in risk societies, and the associated frames, argumentations, and repertoires located *within* the strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization.

The paper posed two questions. First, how do movements and collective action emerge in response to dominant risk practices, discourses, and logics? Second, how do movements develop their frames, alliances, and argumentation – as lying beneath their overarching strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization? As argued, the fanzine movement, *WFINAC*, and the Paris protests reveal how collective action in risk societies is mobilized, partly, in response to the perceived fallacies, illegitimacy, and the disproportionate nature of legal, technological, and policing measures between 1985 and 2025. Whereas the exemplars of collective action were triggered by specific 'events' (i.e. the identity card proposal, pre-emptive policing or interpretations of laws), these events were viewed as symptoms of risk strategies that target supporters *en masse,* that have penetrated football's cultural spaces, and are based upon a suspicious stance maintaining that supporters are 'potential criminals' (Numerato, 2018). Yet, they are not disassociated from the wider struggle against overlapping commercial transformations in football that, similarly, express the need for democratic reform and governance (Fitzpatrick & Hoey, 2022).

Concerning the second question, it is apparent that the movements' argumentation and frames were not tied exclusively to football-specific issues like declining stadium atmospheres, club finances, or *fans'* rights, but evolved into broader discourses surrounding civil liberties, citizenship, and legitimate policing. It is possible to conceptualize the relevant mobilizations as relying on football as a 'personal narrative' that rendered visible the risk society's side-effects, longstanding violations, and indifference to democratic principles. Tying into this 'single issue' brings associated 'facts and figures to life' (Beck, 2005, pp. 106, 245). This matters because supporters' mobilizations against risk management are characterized by Beck's *both-and* (not *either-or*) logic. Whilst often viewed as activism *in* football, they can concurrently be regarded as an example of activism *through* football (cf. Numerato, 2018) directed at wider regimes and logics of risk that characterize modern societies.

This *both-and* logic also appears as the gradually de-localized, de-nationalized, de-territorialized, and transnational nature of supporters' activism becomes stronger and more visible over time. Indeed, the recent 'Paris protests' reveal a set of local (club-specific), national and European-wide supporters groups working – separately and collectively – to contest narratives and practices of the French state and an international organization's (UEFA) treatment of primarily British and Spanish supporters. Whereas this is illustrative of European football's format, the contours of fan activism's transnational scale also become apparent here (Numerato, 2018). Building on King (2003), it could be suggested that fans' exposure to European club (e.g. Champions League) and national team competitions has contributed to solidarities and a heightened awareness of shared struggles that fans across Europe encounter. These have been assisted by technological advances, as 'the internet and social media have facilitated communication and sustained [fans'] relationships across Europe' (Cleland et al., 2018, p. 173).

Moreover, this paper argues that this is also the outcome of the *globalization of risk*. It demonstrates risks' emancipatory potential, as shared experiences of risk can bring about new 'normative horizons' of action, and demands for social justice and democracy (Beck, 2005, 2015; Kossakowski & Lee Ludvigsen, 2025). However, this article nuances Beck's point, and conceptually, these normative horizons depend not only on risks' *global* dimension, as the cases of the fanzine and *WFINAC* movements suggest, operating predominantly with the nation-state-based points of reference and frames, mobilizing against the side effects of laws, regulation, and policing in the English football context.

Overall, this point remains significant as it extends Beck's conceptualization of how the bases of movements' power – risk dramaturgy and democratization strategies – proceed with argumentations, frames, and focal points that are characterized by both-and categories of fluidity between the specific (e.g. fans' rights) and the general (e.g. human rights or civil liberties). This paper's cases also reveal how, over time, the overlaps between the local, national, and global become more apparent in movements' creation of public awareness, with the *Stade De France* aftermath composing a case that drew attention to the indifference to supporters' rights as a national and European-wide problem.

Overall, synthesizing insights from Beck's social theory on global power, risk, social movement and fan activism studies, the article extends our understanding of the strategic framing that guides movements' strategies of risk dramaturgy and democratization.

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