

**Chapter 10: Farewell to the Hooligan?
Modern Developments in Football Crowd Management**

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Football crowd disorder and violence continues to pose challenges to police, security personnel, and football organisations globally. However the football crowd is often misunderstood and in much of the world the emphasis on crowd control, zero-tolerance, and 'show-of-force' policing has not only failed to control the problem, but in many cases has exacerbated it. This chapter seeks to challenge some of the traditional views about football crowds and their behaviour and the best ways to manage them. Based on a substantial base of qualitative European research, it proposes that in order to reduce the risk of serious violence and disorder, police and security bodies should seek to engage in positive interaction and dialogue with supporters to increase their legitimacy amongst crowd members and ensure that their own interventions do not lead to an escalation of incidents. Furthermore, police, security organisations and football bodies need to work with existing crowd science to ensure that the most effective methods of football crowd management are employed, measured and rigorously re-tested.

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Within sports and stadium-development industries, recent debates on the management of football crowds have focussed on *security*—providing technological and structural crowd control systems designed to prevent spectators from undermining crowd control and safety by engaging in violence or disorderly behaviour. Numerous trade magazines, exhibits at sports industry conferences and private consultancy firms emphasise the need for innovative monitoring and control mechanisms to regulate crowd movement, thereby providing “solution” to the risk of crowd misbehaviour, disorder and violence. The limited focus of these proposals ties in with the normalisation of crime and disorderly behaviour by neoliberal modes of governance and the move towards preventative rather than reactive approaches to criminal justice (Garland, 2002; Zedner, 2009). However, while we have learnt from the disasters at Heysel, Hillsborough and Ellis Park that it is vital that football stadiums are fit-for-purpose, a narrow focus on merely reconfiguring stadiums or adding surveillance systems to reduce the opportunity for violence and disorder fails to address the wider issues; there is much more involved when it comes to managing football crowds and reducing the risk of violence and disorder connected to the sport.

Security-driven approaches to football crowd and stadium management do not cast light on why football spectators have historically been considered disorderly, give sufficient importance to the numerous subcultures that exist amongst a team’s match-going support, acknowledge the ability of supporters of rival teams to engage in meaningful and peaceful interaction, or give sufficient weight to the importance of the relationship between spectators and those managing them. Fundamentally, approaches to football crowds that limit themselves to reducing the opportunity for ‘troublemakers’ to engage in criminal activity or anti-social behaviour at or around football stadiums provide no long-term solution given that much “football-related disorder” occurs far away from stadiums, and spectators are able to follow their teams internationally, encountering different legal and policing systems. This chapter casts a critical eye upon the limited progress that has been made to understand why football crowds can become disorderly, the influence of “hooligan” fans, and the role of crowd management outside as well as inside stadiums. The chapter also consists of a discussion of the new debates—particularly in Europe—about fan culture and human rights, and puts forward solutions that can be applied internationally to help develop the policing of football crowds in a way that will enhance the legitimacy of those managing football crowds and reduce the risk of disorder on a sustainable basis.

Assessing the Causes of Football Crowd Disorder

Football crowd violence, disorder and/or criminality—most often couched in terms of “hooliganism”—has been the focus of academic research in the social sciences since the 1970s. Based on sociological, criminological, socio-historical, socio-legal and social

psychological studies initially carried out in the United Kingdom—the supposed birthplace of “the English disease” (Pearson, 1998) — but increasingly also in Continental Europe, we can be relatively certain of the following:

- Football crowd disorder and violence existed long before the moral panic (Cohen, 2002; Hall, 1978) about hooliganism that developed in the late 1960s and 1970s (Dunning, Murphy, & Williams, 1988).
- The label “football hooliganism” came from media reporting of instances of football crowd disorder and does not have an accepted definition in law or elsewhere (Coenen, Pearson, & Tsoukala, in press; Pearson, 1998; Redhead, 1993).
- Groups of fans exist who attend matches with the intention of engaging in violence; however, the extent to which these are organised, and the seriousness of violence is usually exaggerated (Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1994; Marsh, Rosser, & Harré, 1978).
- Football crowd violence is irregular, often spontaneous, and arising from the dynamics of the situation within which it occurs (Armstrong, 1998; King, 1995; Stott, Hutchison, & Drury, 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998).
- Individuals who have not attended matches with the intention of engaging in violence, or had any prior motivation towards violence, take part in football crowd violence and disorder (Millward, 2009; Pearson, 2012; Stott et al., 2001; Stott & Pearson, 2007; Stott & Reicher, 1998).

However, less is known about why large-scale football crowd disorder occurs, or equally importantly, why it does not happen more regularly. The lack of research on causal explanations of football crowd disorder might be explained by the narrow focus on those identified by the state—or self-identified—as hooligans, at the expense of other football spectator subcultures that can on occasion engage in disorder, violence, criminality and/or anti-social behaviour. This focus has not only been criticised in restricting a wider understanding of football culture (Free & Hughson, 2003; Redhead, 1997; Richards, 2015), but it also fails to account for why violence or disorder occurs involving those without a prior motivation.

Both media and legislative responses to instances of football rioting in the United Kingdom and across Europe have implicated predisposition as a causal factor of large-scale football crowd disorder, criminality or antisocial behaviour. For example, arguably the biggest football riot involving England supporters, in Marseilles at the 1998 FIFA World Cup, was understood by the media to be the result of “thugs”, “troublemakers”, and hooligan “ringleaders . . . heard issuing orders” (see Stott and Pearson 2007: 133-135). Similarly, large-scale disorder in Charleroi at the 2000 European Championships was considered to be the result of English hooligans, troublemakers (*The Economist*, 2000) and thugs (*The Guardian*, 2000; *The Telegraph*, 2000).

Influence of alcohol is another suggested causal factor in football crowd disorder and violence, as evidenced by media reportage of most incidents of disorder involving British fans (e.g., England fans in Albufeira 2004, Manchester United fans in Rome 2007 and Glasgow Rangers fans in Manchester 2008). As the BBC claimed in their first report of the developing disorder in Marseilles during France 1998, “only a small number of English supporters were involved – probably those who had drunk the most” (BBC, 1998). Drunken fans were, the media claimed, easily led by hooligans who intended to cause trouble (see Stott & Pearson, 2007, for a critique of the media explanation of the disorder in Marseilles and Charleroi).

The media construction of the nature and cause of football crowd riots—if it does not reflect the reality of the situation—is in and of itself problematic, but even further exacerbated when it is used to inform potential legislative and policing solutions to the problem, which has occurred in the United Kingdom. The overall consensus among both government and police, influenced in no small part by the media portrayal of the 1998 and 2000 disorders, was that tougher action needed to be taken. If the presence of hooligans orchestrating riots amongst drunken England fans was the cause of football crowd disorder, then the obvious solution was to ban those identified as hooligans and reduce the availability of alcohol to the rest of the crowd. Consequently, the French authorities attempted to create an “alcohol-free” zone stretching 70 miles between the Channel ferry ports and the venue for England’s final group-stage game at France 1998, and reduced-strength beer was sold to England fans at the 2000 UEFA European Championships. Across all Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) club and national matches in Europe, the sale of alcohol is now prohibited to those outside corporate hospitality areas.

However, the United Kingdom’s legislative response was even more significant: Banning orders to prevent those convicted of football-related offences were extended following the Marseilles disorder. Further, within a matter of weeks following the events in Charleroi, the U.K. government enacted the Football Disorder Act 2000, which permitted magistrates to ban fans from attending matches domestically and abroad where they believed that (a) they had been involved in previous football violence or disorder and (b) that imposing a ban would be “helpful” in reducing the likelihood of such violence or disorder in the future. These bans, which impose serious restrictions on liberty and on attending matches, can now be imposed without any conviction for a football-related offence (James & Pearson, 2015). Furthermore, this type of media stigmatisation coupled with reactionary legislative action—arguably a “panic law”—is not limited to the United Kingdom. Studies of legislative and administrative responses to football violence across Europe have found a similar trend; legal and policing powers are being extended to a level that threatens both civil and human rights of fans, often in the absence of any proof—to a criminal legal standard—of engagement in violence or disorder (Coenen et al., in press; Tsoukala, 2009).

Considering the importance placed upon incidence of football violence and disorder by the media, and the desire of governments, police authorities, sports bodies and clubs to reduce it, it is vital that we gain a solid evidence-based understanding of the nature and causes of the phenomenon. We must first acknowledge that we cannot hope to gain an understanding of the phenomenon that is based wholly or mainly on media reports of instances of disorder, as these have been shown to be inaccurate, sensationalist (Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1994; Hall, 1978; Weed, 2001) and in some cases, deliberately misleading (Stott & Pearson, 2007). Similarly, we should be highly suspicious of the claims of “self-confessed hooligans,” who may exaggerate or downplay violence—or their engagement in it—for self-serving reasons, simply through mistake or in order to deliver what they believe their audience wishes to hear (Marsh et al., 1978; Pearson, 2012: pp. 9-10). It is, therefore, essential that solutions to football crowd disorder are proposed on the basis of sustained and systematic research which allows both its methodology and findings to be the subject of rigorous peer review and testing.

Such research has been carried out in an increasingly systematic manner through utilisation of ethnographic methods based on observational techniques and immersion in the field of football crowds. Our own research into football crowd behaviour and management began at the 1990 World Cup in Italy and has incorporated all the major European tournaments since, along with British club matches domestically and across Europe from 1995 and a number of other European club fixtures. Combined with a number of other significant ethnographic studies into fan behaviour (most notably, Armstrong, 1998; Giulianotti, 1991, 1995; Rookwood, 2009), as well as similar studies conducted elsewhere in Europe (e.g., Coenen et al., in press; Spaaij, 2006) a number of important lessons can be drawn in terms of the best approach to managing football crowds. These take us far beyond simply looking to introduce structural, technological or legal measures to enhance security in and around football stadiums.

The first important step in understanding football fan behaviour is the realisation that the football crowd cannot be understood as a homogeneous group. Fans from a particular country or supporting a particular team are often discussed in terms of a single social category. An alternative description of football crowds is a distinction between hooligans and “ordinary supporters” (Giulianotti, 1999) or - as now dominates policing handbooks and guidance in Europe - “risk” and “non-risk” fans. However, within every single team’s match-going support there are dozens of different identifiable subgroups and subcultures, and within these groups, individuals with very different objectives for their match-day experience and interpretations of the immediate social environment around them. It is simply not the case that entering into a crowd environment makes individuals lose their identity and develop a “mob mentality” (Reicher, 1987). Understanding the expectations of both individuals and subgroups within a crowd and what they consider to be legitimate and illegitimate modes of policing and security interventions, are essential to effective crowd management practices.

The Role of the Hooligan

Connected to this, we maintain that there is a need to put aside the clumsy labels football hooligan and football hooliganism. The latter is virtually meaningless when applied to football as it incorporates a wide range of different behaviours depending on who is applying the label (Pearson, 1998) and in what geographical context (Coenen et al., in press). Behaviour labelled “hooliganism” has included subcriminal antisocial behaviour (e.g., urinating in a street), regulatory criminal offences committed in a football context (e.g., unauthorised sale of tickets), spontaneous interpersonal violence, and serious conspiratorial intergroup violence. These are significantly varying problems with completely different causes and solutions. In contrast, if we choose to adopt a very narrow definition of hooliganism, by including only non-spontaneous gang violence, then we need to be careful not to let our analysis of why wider crowd disturbances occur become hooligan-driven; it is easy to overestimate the power and influence that hooligan gangs (or “firms”) have on the crowd around them by their mere presence. Even when hooligan gangs travel to match events with the intention of engaging in violence, they will not necessarily engage in violence or disorder and even if they do, we should not assume that this will escalate into wider-scale disorder or rioting involving other crowd members.

Research into the both the presence and absence of major crowd disorder at the 1998 FIFA World Cup and the 2000 UEFA European Championships suggested that the existence of so-called hooligan groups was largely incidental. Contrary to the media reports, there is no evidence that these riots were orchestrated by hooligans (Stott & Pearson, 2007). The presence of those labelled hooligans within football crowds does not necessarily lead to widespread crowd disorder. Further, individuals engaging in crowd disorder do not usually possess a prior motivation towards this. This was illustrated in part by the arrest rate among England fans at the 2000 European Championships, where fewer than 3% of the 965 England fans arrested were known or suspected “hooligans”.² A similar pattern could be seen in research from Italia 1990, France 1998, the 2004 European Championships in Portugal and the 2006 World Cup in Germany (Stott & Pearson, 2007). This is not to suggest that individuals attending matches with the intention of engaging in violence do not pose a risk of violence, disorder or criminality, or that they do not require a sophisticated policing response; however, the low number of these individuals generally limits their ability to escalate low-level violence or disorder into wide-scale rioting, if appropriate crowd management approaches are adopted.

The Role of Alcohol

As we have seen, alcohol consumption has been identified by many commentators as a major factor in the development of football crowd disorder.³ A number of European states have made legislative interventions to prevent fans consuming alcohol in stadiums or entering stadiums while drunk (Coenen et al., in press), usually with very limited success. In addition, some clubs and governing bodies have also curtailed access to alcohol in a bid to reduce the risk of disorder. We suggest, however, that the connection between alcohol consumption and

crowd disorder is a much more complex one than has been suggested and the role of alcohol in the development of football crowd disorder has been overstated. First of all, there is no scientifically-proven psychopharmacological “smoking gun” that alcohol consumption leads to individual or collective violence (see Pearson & Sale, 2011, for more on these issues). This is supported by what can be observed in terms of the relationship between football crowds, alcohol and disorder. There are numerous examples of situations in which football crowds who have not been consuming alcohol engage in disorder or violence—usually where alcohol is not available or where particular fan cultures are not reliant upon alcohol consumption. More significantly, there are even more examples of highly drunken football crowds not engaging in disorder even under provocation and some fan cultures have a reputation for heavy drinking but also a reputation for not engaging in disorder (e.g., supporters of Scandinavian national teams, the Irish national team and Scotland’s “Tartan Army”).

However, the persistence in isolating alcohol consumption as a cause of football crowd violence has led to some unintended consequences that have increased the risk of disorder. Given that match-going fan culture is based upon heavy social consumption of alcohol, attempts to restrict access to alcohol are likely to be resisted (Pearson, 2012; Pearson & Sale, 2011) whereby the risk of confrontation and disorder is increased. For example, denying the opportunity to drink alcohol in sight of a football pitch—a criminal offence in Britain—leads to congestion in stadium concourses around bars, which in turn can lead to instances of disorder in narrow confines that are difficult for the police to manage. Similarly, restrictions on the sale of alcohol in stadiums can lead to fans binge drinking in bars and pubs prior to matches meaning they are likely to arrive later and more heavily intoxicated. This, in turn, can lead to congestion at turnstiles and stairwells and public order/safety problems. Finally, restrictions on the sale of alcohol in city centres or on public transport, can push fan groups who wish to consume alcohol out of sight of the police, which makes them more difficult to manage (Pearson & Sale, 2011; Stott, Hoggett, & Pearson, 2012).

The Role of Policing

Having challenged the dominant largely-flawed accounts for large-scale football crowd riots, how can we explain why crowds on occasion engage in disorder? The increasing body of data gathered from numerous studies of football crowd behaviour and management indicates that while individuals and subgroups within crowds may at the beginning of a football event have varying interpretations, understandings and motivations, under certain circumstances shared social identities within crowds can change and develop depending on the experiences of individuals within it (Stott, Adang, Livingstone, & Schreiber, 2007; Stott et al., 2001; Stott & Reicher, 1998). In practical terms, this means that a football crowd, constituted by various subcultures, that is subjected to disproportionate and indiscriminate policing or other security measures or unprovoked attacks from opposition fans may cease to be a loose gathering of individuals and groups and become united psychologically in opposition to their treatment.. Such psychological unity creates empowerment, enabling many of the participants to

confront other groups of fans. It is when this dynamic of intergroup interaction occurs that disorder can escalate from small incidents of confrontation or antisocial behaviour into a large-scale collective disorder involving hundreds of fans.

Research into crowd behaviour at a number of European-hosted international tournaments has identified numerous examples of how crowds developed a shared oppositional identity through coming under attack from local fans (Stott & Pearson, 2007) or through heavy-handed and indiscriminate policing. Importantly, such a theoretical account indicates how some football crowd riots have developed, and can also provide an explanation for arrest statistics and police statements regarding crowd disorder, indicating that the majority of those involved were not known to the police as suspected “risk supporters” (Stott & Pearson, 2007). In other words, the conflict is less about predisposition than it is about the social psychological dynamics of the situations in which disorder and violence occur—dynamics of which the security measures are often a major contributory factor.

From this, we can see that preventing collective disorder in the football context is far from straightforward and not just a matter of monitoring, controlling and banning hooligans. Further, it is also not a matter of restricting access to alcohol or improving physical security measures. Our research suggests reducing the number and severity of incidents requires creating a complex and nuanced security approach that might actually involve reducing the level of riot control police tactics and instead focusing on the facilitation of human rights. If the problem is perceived illegitimacy of police intervention, then the solution is to increase police legitimacy amongst the crowd (or the legitimacy of other security interventions). Our research has shown that this can be achieved through increased communication, interaction and engagement between police officers—or, where appropriate, security personnel—and crowd members before any instances of criminality or disorder occur. The early introduction of small numbers of “dialogue” officers into a football crowd has been shown to enable the police to be seen in a more positive light. Dialogue officers have as their aim the facilitation of meaningful two-way communication between crowd members and the police. Sometimes referred to as Police Liaison Officers, they can act as a buffer between the crowd and public order police, passing information both ways and working towards negotiated solutions where tensions arise. This tactic also allows tolerance levels to be established which in turn reduces the risk of incidents occurring that require forceful police intervention. It also means that senior officers or other crowd management officials maintain an accurate and dynamic understanding of the actual risk posed by those within the crowd as the event progresses. The intended outcome of this liaison-based strategy is that incidents of unacceptable behaviour—by police standards—will be reduced, and that where they do occur the police will be able to manage them without being seen as illegitimate and without the need for mass riot control interventions that, in our experience, exacerbate rather than quell crowd disturbances.

Such liaison-based approaches to football policing have been successfully trialled, developed and rolled out in domestic football in the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden in particular, and also at international tournaments such as the 2004 European Championships in Portugal, the 2006 World Cup in Germany and the European Championships in Poland/Ukraine in 2012. It is also specifically identified as good practice in the 2010 edition of the *European Union Handbook* on ‘Policing football matches with an international dimension’. In the United Kingdom, the development of police liaison teams in football follows the successful roll out of these tactics to manage political and environmental protests engaged in by groups previously considered high risk, such as the “Black Bloc” and the “English Defence League.” Such approaches also improve police capacity to adhere to obligations created by the European Convention on Human Rights (e.g., the rights of Freedom of Assembly and Association and Freedom of Expression). Such rights almost certainly also apply to football crowds throughout Europe (Coenen et al., in press; James & Pearson, 2015), in addition to domestic civil rights and liberties that football fans should be able to rely on. The marriage of best practice between policing strategies designed to reduce the risk of football crowd disorder and those that protect human and civil rights of fans is no coincidence, but instead arises from the central role that police legitimacy plays in the behaviour of football crowds.

Conversely, more traditional and reactionary “show-of-force” styles of policing continue to result in disorder around the world and also raise serious concerns about the extent to which fans’ human rights are protected. In much of Eastern Europe, Africa and South America, the management of football crowds remains couched in terms of “hooligan threat,” “crowd control” and security. Furthermore, high regulation, “zero tolerance” and deterrence are likely to be the key tenets of the crowd management operations at the 2016 European Championships in France and the 2018 World Cup in Russia, irrespective of the lack of evidence-base for these approaches and their failure at previous football mega events.

Conclusion

The move towards more progressive and evidence-based policing and management of football crowds entails more than a simple move away from discredited theories of football crowd behaviour and counterproductive policing strategies and regulatory interventions. It also requires the involvement of the police themselves with crowd scientists and academics in an ongoing and long-term co-production of research and knowledge exchange on football crowd and fan behaviour, and the development of crowd management techniques that work in both the immediate and long term.

The start for such a process is the engagement of police, football clubs, governing bodies/event organisers and fan groups with peer-reviewed academic research and the move towards using this research to inform major policing and security decisions. Only with the implementation of genuine evidence-based policing and an institutional reliance upon this, over more traditional ideas of police knowledge and “know-how,” can strategies that have

been long discredited in academic circles be completely discounted. However, this should not be a one-way process, and police and other stakeholders in football crowd security have a role to play in terms of testing and developing more progressive and effective models of crowd and spectator management and in turn adding to their own evidence base. Our contention is that this process also needs to entail the building of both methodological and theoretical expertise into the training and pedagogical development of public order police, internationally embedding evidence-based policing within forces, and ensuring that football crowds are both understood and managed in a way fit for the 21st century.

Suggestions for Further Reading

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Endnotes

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²These statistics were also unbalanced by a number of mass and indiscriminate arrests of fans who did not engage in any kind of disorder or criminality.

³Increasingly, the use of drugs, in particular cocaine, has also been identified as a factor behind football crowd disorder. There is little doubt that in the United Kingdom at least, drugs such as cocaine and mephedrone are being taken by some fans (particularly risk supporters) and may in some cases also have connection with the development of violence or anti-social behaviour (see Ayres & Treadwell, 2012). However, in at least Northern Europe, drug use does not yet have the cultural significance for wider football support that alcohol consumption possesses (Pearson, 2012) and—in contrast to alcohol—has not yet been the target for football-specific legal or regulatory intervention.

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