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Safety and Security Battles:
Unpacking the Players and
Arenas of the Safe Standing
Movement in English Football
(1989–2022)

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Abstract

This article advances recent debates on social movement (relational) fields, outcomes, and successes by suggesting that the analysis of such fields as a whole must be temporal. The relational interpersonal and intersubjective choices made by interdependent actors in social life take place in fields of interaction, but these interactions and their networks of social relations have a history. Hence, the social movement field is characterised by multiple temporal periods through which the actions of activists both shape and are shaped by the long-term socio-political environments in which they are embedded. To develop this analysis, we identify a football supporter-movement in England, 'Safe Standing', revealing the complex interplay of cultural and technological patterns of interaction across the compelling timeframes and orientations of a 30-year movement field. Adopting a theoretical framework which synthesises research on the strategic interactions of movement 'players' and 'arenas', and sport-focused security fields, we identify a series of compound and sub-players across the political, symbolic, mediatised, technological, and legislative arenas which constitute the security field of contention, in what is an under-researched lifeworld in sociology.

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Introduction

Social movements mobilise in environments which, themselves, are always *in* movement. This makes any analysis of social movement emergence, strategic interactions, and movement outcomes temporally sensitive and relational (Crossley, 2011). In sociology, scholars have thus sought to develop the analysis of movement contestation through a focus upon their dynamics, through what are conceptualised as movement (relational) *fields* (Goldstone, 2004). Importantly, then, the theoretical and empirical task for sociologists is to identify the 'precise social movement field' of the specific collective actions being studied (Goldstone, 2015). Doing so requires a sociological (re-)imagination recognising the multiple temporalities in which strategic interactions take place (MT). Hence, the wider social movement field is reshaped through the evolving networks, social relations, and interactions of activists and their targets, which are mutually influencing across different temporal periods (Crossley, 2011).

This article advances recent debates on social movement (relational) fields and outcomes, and successes, by suggesting that the analysis of such fields as a whole must be temporal. As Bourdieu (1984) recognised, the relational interpersonal and intersubjective choices made by interdependent actors in social life take place in fields of interaction, but these interactions and their networks of social relations have a history (Crossley, 2011). Hence, the 'precise' movement field is characterised by a fuzzy temporality in which the actions of activists both shape and are shaped by the long-term socio-political environments in which they are embedded (Gillan, 2020). To develop this analysis, we identify a case in English football, which reveals the complex interplay of cultural and technological patterns of interaction across the compelling timeframes and orientations of a 30-year movement field.

During the 1980s, English football witnessed an intensification of supporter violence, often referred to as 'football hooliganism'. While issues of football-related violence and disorder continue to exist in the present day and powerfully impact legislation and football's securitised nature in the UK and internationally (Pearson and Stott, 2022), it should be highlighted that, throughout the 1980s, 'hooliganism' became a 'cover-all' term often deployed by the media to capture a range of behaviours, thus amplifying its position on the political agenda despite the term's legal and sociological vagueness (Dunning, 2000). 'Hooliganism', consequently, became ingrained within British societal consciousness as a social problem (King, 1998). Consequently, new regulatory reform measures, including mechanisms designed to strengthen crowd control capabilities, echoed the UK government's attempt to move the focus of attention from spectator safety to public order. After the Heysel and Hillsborough terraced stadium disasters in Brussels (1985) and Sheffield (1989), resulting in the deaths of 39 Juventus supporters and 97 Liverpool supporters, the negative reputation ascribed to football supporters, during and after these events, was exploited within popular culture. The emergence of post-Hillsborough regulatory frameworks – including the introduction of all-seated stadia in England – became important mechanisms to bring about extensive changes to the economic, cultural, political, and security structures of English and European football, and its supporters, during the 20th century (King, 1998).

Despite this restructuring of English football's political economy, the imposition of all-seating as an attendance model led, on the contrary, to processes of mobilisation: together, informal supporters' groups and formal supporters' organisations, across the UK and Europe, built a long-term social movement which characterises the struggles of fans against social control in the realms of their everyday lives, discourses, and identities. This movement, 'Safe Standing', represents the hermeneutic struggle among supporters, the legacies of events like Heysel and Hillsborough on their football consumption, and the state's disciplinary power and marketisation of its institutions in football. Here, the long-term socio-political environment of English football, we argue, is sociologically important because the challenges of breaking down the state are revealed through the temporal victories of supporters' organisations, to change the imagery around standing as a leisure practice in football, and the strategic directions and policies of key actors within the safety-security governance nexus of professional football. Consequently, after over three decades of campaigning against the state-imposed 'all-seating (football stadia) legislation', Safe Standing is prefiguring new regulatory reform in football through the successful introduction of 'licensed (safe) standing areas' at selected matches in England and Wales in 2022/2023 (MT and JALL).

To critically unpack this social movement outcome, we draw upon thematically driven empirical snapshots on Safe Standing (MT), and securitisation (JALL), to develop a theoretical framework which synthesises research on the strategic interactions of movement 'players' and 'arenas' (Jasper, 2015), and sport-focused security fields (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010). Hence, we identify a series of compound and sub-players across the political, symbolic, mediatised, technological, and legislative arenas which constitute the security field of contention, in what is an under-researched *lifeworld* in sociology. Bringing these ideas together, we answer the following question: what do new outcomes on Safe Standing reveal about the temporal dynamics of the security field in English football and the strategic interactions between movement players and arenas? To elaborate on this, we outline our theoretical framework and then unpack the players and arenas of Safe Standing, by identifying temporally significant interactions and mobilisations across three temporal periods: 1989–1999, 1999–2009, and 2009–2022.

Players and arenas, temporality, and networked strategic interactions: conceptualising the security field of English football

The dialectic relationship between English football's political economy and supporter-led movements post-1980s remains sociologically illuminating since it reveals the continuation of collective action (Millward, 2012). Among the 1980s' key legacies were, first, a new safety and security regime in English football following Heysel, Hillsborough, and the Taylor Report. Consequently, the implementation of all-seated stadia at major stadiums in England and Wales resulted in a more customer-oriented version of English football geared towards the private sector.

Second, this increasingly controlled variant of English football was paralleled by the free-market demands for the new consumption of football that concretised its

prominence with the establishment of the English Premier League (EPL) (in 1992) and the market-oriented strategies to appeal to new consumers, reflecting the political realities of post-Fordism and Thatcherism in the UK (King, 1998). Further to the roll-out of all-seated stadia starting in 1994, this epoch also saw English football become increasingly securitised. The 1980s and 1990s saw new surveillance and security technologies emerge in stadiums, while the efforts to secure English football and concurrently amplify its commercial appeal demonstrate how English football became a window for understanding security-related policies. However, these social, architectural, and technological changes have, crucially, not been passively accepted by all fans and, occasionally, they have even generated formal opposition and resistance (Giulianotti, 2011). Historically and presently, football's securitisation represents *one* of the powerful '-isation' processes that social movements have coalesced around and contested for four decades. As related to these socio-political changes, we locate the emergence of 'Safe Standing' as one key prism of collective action yet to be analysed to the extent it warrants, especially vis-à-vis the introduction of new, 'licensed (safe) standing' at certain matches in 2022/2023. To decipher this outcome as a recent 'policy-victory', we suggest that there are two conceptual frames that we can re-mobilise, synthesise, and, crucially, add our own empirical analysis to, through a conceptual focus on the 'security (movement) field'.

To guide our temporally focused movement analysis of the sport-focused *security (movement) field*, we synthesise two sociological frameworks: the 'security field' and 'players-and-arenas'. First, we draw upon Giulianotti and Klauser's (2010) sociological concept, the 'security field', originating from the context of security governance at sport mega-events, and mobilised to understand the social contestations occurring between actors within event-related governance. This concept remains inspired by Bourdieu and Wacquant's (1992: 97) work on fields – that is, a 'network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions whereby actors' positions are objectively defined by their 'present' and 'potential' situation in the possession of capital in that particular field. The security field captures a similar social space oriented towards a security-safety nexus. It contains 'objective, game-like relationships that are played out between various "players"' (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010: 57). Within this social space, every player possesses different levels of 'capital' whose distribution, again, structures the field, allowing analyses to capture the importance of player relationships within football's securitisation.

Although the literature affirms the existence, or presence, of a football-related security field, a sociologically important yet unanswered question is how this field can reveal something about mutually influencing and interdependently linked social movement networks, tactics, and mobilisations adapt across different temporal periods. Thus, where we stretch and problematise Bourdieu is to suggest the security field in football is intersubjective; indeed, this relational security field in football constitutes a selection of players possessing different levels of capital to enforce, consult on, contest, and resist security-related practices, technologies, and policies, but which are linked interdependently.

Currently, this field encompasses football's authorities, policing actors, clubs, safety officers, supporters' networks, and journalists, to name some of the most visible players

(Giulianotti, 2011; Pearson and Stott, 2022). However, while some contemporary players may have been present in football's security field in 1989, power relations within the field have likely changed across 1989–2022. Given our focus on Safe Standing as a supporter-coordinated movement, it is imperative to highlight how supporters possess a *dual role* within the field. Fans are considered both 'targets' of and 'vital resources' for football's policing and security procedures (Pearson and Stott, 2022). Importantly, this dual role co-exists within the campaigning for, introduction of, and discourses surrounding the contemporary 'licensing' of safe standing (MT).

Second, in sociology, the concept of a social movement field emerged in response to what were dominant structuralist readings of the wider socio-political environments in which movements were embedded and constrained. Scholars recognised an appreciation for the cultural dimensions of movement structures (Polletta, 2004), through understandings of shared traditions that shape interactions between activists and the nation-state; indeed, historical traditions become collective memories which shape our future understandings of the social world and practices. These interactions occur in arenas which encompass culture, agency, and structure (Goodwin and Jasper, 2004). Building on this, Edwards (2014) suggests such arenas of culture and structure are best understood as 'external relational fields'. Here, social movements are not reduced to interactions between repressed groups, fighting states or political elites. Rather, those interactions need to be situated in a 'dynamic *relational field*' (Goldstone, 2004) in which ongoing movement actions, and the interests of political and cultural actors, and counter-movement protest groups, relationally influence successes or failures of social movements. External relational (movement) fields encompass cultural and material spaces of contention (Crossley, 2011) and discursive practices, like the dominant cultural frames and discourses which movements construct, through their interactions with other players. Together, they produce movement meanings, as they are understood by the wider public.

Recently, Jasper (2015, 2021; King and Jasper, 2022) has stretched and problematised relational and cultural processes of contention, to conceptualise the external relational field, as an 'arena' in which interactions between specific movement 'players' take place. This perspective recognises that fields and arenas are 'kindred concepts' based on the 'complementarities between the perspectives' (King and Jasper, 2022: 817). *Fields* thus contain clusters of related *arenas* that are linked in various ways and are useful for describing concatenations of specific arenas (for example, an electoral field comprise both electoral and media arenas) (Jasper, 2021). Developing work on the spaces and strategic interactions of these players, they present a 'players-and-arenas' conceptual framework to unpack the strategic complexity of politics, culture, and protest, by paying attention to the particular emotions, leaders, and creativities of such players and their historical interactions and reputations (Jasper, 2015). Jasper (2021) defines 'players' as 'consisting of individuals or groups who have some shared identity, some common goals, and who operate in at least one arena' (p. 244). Players possess different roles and capacities. Their relationships are interactional. While players may be individuals, analyses have predominantly remained more interested in 'compound players' and aggregations of individuals that, while not characterised by a complete unity in their capacities nor goals, are able to act with strategic intentions (King and Jasper, 2022).

Arenas are presented as physical places in which players interact to generate decisions, invest resources, embody cultural meanings, and produce outcomes; here, informal *and* formal rules are formulated through players' interactions which renders arenas non-static and thus also includes online places (e.g. tablets and computers) where players make decisions (King and Jasper, 2022). Where we build on Jasper (2015) is by considering arenas not solely as 'physical (structured) spaces', but symbolic and discursive spaces which embody wider social transformations. The 'field of struggle' (Ibrahim, 2015) therefore constitutes intersubjective understandings of the social world. Here, the meanings of particular rules, decisions, and resources adopted by players are generated through interdependent relations and interactions, often taking place in physical spaces, yet their historical patterns of interactions, their tastes, strategic preferences, and creation of movement frames represent a more social type of structure, embodying discursive and ideological frames of interpretation.

This strategic *and* cultural approach to social movement mobilisations and their environments is informed by a sociological imagination stressing the importance of historical sequences. Thus, we suggest Jasper's framework is *temporal* in nature but make this more explicit in our conceptual adaptation. Furthermore, the framework's analytical sophistication invites a systematic and comprehensive theorisation of players, and arenas, in ways which make the exercise of mapping or listing different types of players and arenas incredibly exhaustive and challenging. While this might be practical for a single episode of contention or short cycle, to unpack the interactive dynamics of protest across a longer-term field would require a data set so extensive and capable of interpreting every goal, meaning, and emotion of all movement players, across different arenas. Hence, we adapt the framework broadly, to capture the temporal ways in which players and arenas build, move, and challenge social movement activities, in ways which are always emerging, changing and recombining (Jasper, 2015).

Returning to our aim, we suggest that synthesising these frameworks allows us to mobilise and map, for the first time, a *security (movement) field* in English football using the prism of Safe Standing and its key players' strategic interactions across more than three decades. These, we argue, are characterised by safety-oriented and social transformations generated partly by English football's restructured political economy.

Mapping Safe Standing's players, arenas, and mobilisations (1989–2022)

The following discussion draws upon thematic analysis of previous empirical research conducted into the networks, tactics, and mobilisations of the UK fan activist scene and building of the Safe Standing movement (MT). The data underpinning this analysis are based on a variety of primary and secondary sources, including the historical archives of the Football Supporters Association (FSA), participant observation at FSA national conferences and networked events, and 26 interviews with players considered influential in the building of the UK fan activist scene from 1985 to 2022. Rather than citing those sources directly (as discussed elsewhere, MT), we unpack key analytical themes in order to critically engage with our security (movement) field framework and consolidate the

key players and arenas of Safe Standing. As a caveat, we must highlight that capturing *all* players across football's securitisation in the 21st century is beyond this article's focus. Instead, by exploring temporally significant mobilisations across English football's different arenas, notably, the political, discursive, mediatised, technological, and legislative arenas which make up the security (movement) field, we identify specific networks, tactics, and resources, which helped break down the state and bring about new Safe Standing reform in English and European football.

To begin, it is important to historicise the growth and professionalisation of supporter activism, and the development of transnational relations between players and their institutional legacies. The social worlds – or rather, the political (economic) arena of English football in late modernity – comprise a diverse network of players possessing different interests, capacities, and connections in the game (Cleland et al., 2018). This is analytically important because it shows the contemporary consumption of football to be complex and contradictory. Hence, different players are dependent upon each other and mutually influencing. What is clear, both from early studies on 'football hooliganism' and contemporary practices and identities of supporters in the global political economy, is that the creative sociability of football fans and their connections are central to the social worlds of football. It thus makes little sense to study individual fans as players in isolation, or the structures of contemporary football, *without* the networks of players which build or resist those structures (King, 2004). The connections between players move beyond the production and consumption of modern football but are themselves significant to the ways in which power and counter-power operate in football. Indeed, such (supporter-networked) players consist of a complex and diverse hierarchy of status groups which coalesce and unify at specific football clubs to develop relational fan cultures (King, 2003).

1989–1999: safe terracing, militant players, and the Football Task Force political arena

To understand Hillsborough's initial impact upon the perception of standing terraces and the ritual of watching football, attention must be paid to the ways in which supporters, through their social networks of influence, became key players within the arenas of English (and European) football. These networks, and the interactive dynamics of the protests they coordinated and mobilised, reveal something important about the long-term institutional legacies of the state's disciplinary practices.

To unpack this, we focus on the central mechanisms that produced mobilisations against the increasing criminalisation of supporters persistently standing in all-seated areas, which in turn sought to transform the landscape of fan politics in England through the building of a relational fan activist scene. The following analysis demonstrates how these mechanisms were the product of coordination between three compound players from 1985 to 1999. These players, football fanzines, the national FSA, and Independent Supporters Associations (ISAs), underpinned by a broad commitment to social democracy and what constituted the appropriate consumption of football, addressed themselves to overlapping social democratic policies, practices, and identities. In turn, they

developed loose, informal, and formal shared ways of working together creating networks of players. Together, they agitated a collective sense of social unrest among thousands of sub-players, including journalists, academics, football police officers, and politicians, about their relationship with the game, and by doing so, triggered a wider subjective strain felt across football communities in the wake of the strong state and crisis of the mid-1980s. These mobilisations, at the turn of the 21st century, are historicised by 10-year strategic interactions among supporters, club chairs, local and national football journalists, Members of Parliament (MPs) identified as football fans, local police officers who policed football matches, fanzine editors, and the UK's Football Licensing Authority (FLA).[1]

During the mid-to-late 1990s, a new political movement in Britain emerged, aspiring to renew social democracy through values of mutualism and cooperation, and hence resolve the contradiction inherent within neoliberalism's encouragement of both economic individualism and social conservatism. Traditional social democracy had become too restrictive and paternalistic in the way it inhabited individual liberty and economic entrepreneurship, by overregulating the free market and stifling economic growth (Giddens, 1998). Consequently, it encouraged a too state-dependent social democracy restricting the development of a more active citizenship. However, the economic dynamism of neoliberalism within the context of 'growing social inequalities and social exclusion, would eventually set limits on the further development of a market economy' (Kennedy and Kennedy, 2007: 287). To overcome this, a 'third way' would move beyond a social democratic and neoliberal dichotomy, offering a new synthesis of market and state, public and private, individual and collective, and rights and responsibilities (Giddens, 1998).

In football, this was expressed across a dynamic political area where a desire for football fans to have a greater stake or influence in the organisation and governance of the game became a key focus of supporters' strategic interactions with the state (Brown, 1998). In 1995, while still in opposition to the Conservative government, the Labour Party's shadow Sports Minister, Tom Pendry MP, worked closely with the FSA and the Football Association (FA) to assess the impact of football's commercialisation and the treatment of supporters (Greenfield and Osborn, 1998). This led to the publication of a new political framework by the UK Labour Party titled 'The Charter for Football' (Cunningham and Pendry, 1995), proposing the formation of a 'Football Task Force' (FTF) comprising all key football organisational players, notably, the FSA and National Federation of Football Supporters' Clubs (NFFSC). The FTF reflected a desire for football's political players to investigate whether the industry, during a period of seemingly 'unaccountable' deregulation, had failed to meet its 'social obligations' (Mellor, 2009).

During this political period, key ISA players at Manchester United, Leeds, Southampton, and Newcastle, with a history of trade union activism, and formal and loose affiliations with the left-wing political group – 'Militant' – helped build a Coalition of Football Supporters (CoFS). Drawing upon their prior social networks, resources, and political capital, the CoFS operated as a bridge or switching player in both internal and external arenas. Here, the capacity to generate the solidarity, trust, and situational definitions of football's neoliberal turn across the wider FSA-fanzine-ISA movement field was achieved alongside strategic (political) interactions with the FTF. In doing so, activists

met with Tom Pendry MP, as a key political player, to strengthen supporters' political capital prior to the 1997 UK General Election, and subsequent forming of the New Labour Government. In 1998, these networks developed new mobilisations against all-seating, which included a 'Bring Back Terracing' campaign and 'Stand Up for Football' match-day protest. Together, these protests became the basis of a formal FSA-CoFS-led report into the 'Case for Terracing', which leading supporter-networked players submitted to the FTF.

Despite this, the collective sentiments expressed were largely ignored by key players responsible for football's governance and regulation. Here, the FTF, despite collective fan pressure across the UK at regional FTF-meetings, refused to examine any case for newly constructed terracing nearly 10 years after Hillsborough. One key player within English football's safety-security nexus, John De Quidt, the Chief Executive Officer of the FLA, became a significant counter-player against the Safe Terracing movement. Claiming that 'standing would never be as safe as seating' and that 'all-seating must be seen within the broader context of appropriate and effective crowd control measures', De Quid's position was supported by the UK Sports Minister and the head of the FTF, Tony Banks MP, who reiterated that 'there was no political support for standing in the UK Parliament', and that 'there would never be a return to terracing' within the EPL and First Division (Radio 4, 1998). Hence, concerning the players-and-arenas framework, the 1989–1999 period revealed the emergence of key interactions between players in newly created arenas that were set up with both specific (standing) and broader political outcomes (countering commercialisation and criminalisation) as the goals.

1999–2009: rail seating, transnational players and the symbolic, discursive arena

At the turn of the 21st century, the CoFS helped strengthen the network ties between the FSA and NFFSC as compound players, to become one unified social movement organisation (SMO) in 2002, under the name of the Football Supporters Federation (FSF). The FSF became part of an expanding social movement industry in English and European football alongside Supporters Direct (SD), Supporters' Trusts, and Football Supporters International (FSI), connected by the expanding New Labour political landscape. This became a mechanism to develop a stronger 'insider' influence within the decision-making structures and governance of professional football. In doing so, new political opportunities and strategic interactions emerged. Below, we unpack both the macro-level symbolic and discursive arenas where these strategic interactions took place, and the complex overlaps between personal and organisational social networks, which themselves helped coordinate coalition-based relational collective action across 1999–2009.

By the 20th century's end, the CoFS network had agitated a wider sense of dissatisfaction with the all-seating legislation, demonstrating how the emerging case for 'Safe Terracing' and 'Standing Up for Football' demonstrated the legacy of the strong state and criminalisation of football fans and the neoliberal consumption of football during the 1990s (King, 1998). At this period's beginning, leading players within this network with support of influential ISAs – notably at Manchester United and Newcastle – played an

important role in helping a Manchester City–based standing campaign, 'Standing Areas for Eastlands [and later England]' (SAFE), to identify other professional club-players who were looking to either re-develop or build new stadia. The unsuccessful attempt to place 'Safe Terracing' on the FTF agenda meant that SAFE had to be framed differently. To achieve this, SAFE-networked players through the working practices, resources, and tactical experiences of the CoFS and FSA sought to innovate and challenge the state by breaking down its sub-players into specific legislative parts; here, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport' (DCMS) Secretary of State, Sports Minister, the FLA, the EPL, Football League, and the FA constituted a movement field in which political, safety, security, and cultural arenas were interdependently linked, but vulnerable to sudden ruptures within professional football's wider safety–security nexus.

One significant political rupture emerged in 2000, after central players within the CoFS and SAFE, who held transnational ties with supporter-networked players in Spain and Germany, learned of a specific type of convertible standing/seating technology used in some German Bundesliga football stadia. European supporter federations, as *transnational* networked players, formed in parallel to the formation of national fan associations in England and provided a repository of resources, capital, and experienced activist players to network at the transnational level and coordinate in ways that helped develop further national networks (Cleland et al., 2018). These included the development of transnational fan projects in Holland, Italy, and Germany, where leading activists, together, programmed the international FSI network. Importantly, here we see the legacies of the historical activist scene connect with the contemporary landscape through coordination mechanisms which reflect wider changes in the new European political economy (King, 2003).

Writing to the UK Sports Minister, Kate Hoey MP, to ask if the convertible standing/seating areas could be built into English and Welsh stadiums, supporter-networked players were given inaccurate information by Hoey, who had been advised by the FLA that it was being phased out in Germany in preparation for their bid to host the 2006 (all-seated) football World Cup. Notwithstanding, leading transnational networked players at Hamburg, Schalke 04 and Werder Bremen worked with CoFS and SAFE players on an FSA-funded project to learn more about convertible standing/seating which was being incorporated into German football stadia as part of the World Cup bid. Indeed, in July 2000, Germany won the World Cup hosting rights with nine of the 10 stadia having modern convertible seating/standing areas to comply with the German FA (standing permitted) and UEFA (all-seating) regulations.

Upon receiving a formal FSA report which was sent to Kate Hoey, Chris Smith (Secretary of State at the DCMS), Tony Blair (UK Prime Minister), John De Quidt (FLA's CEO), the FA, the EPL, and the Football League, Hoey recommended the FLA visit Germany to investigate. However, after they initially refused, she instructed them to go. Perceived as being sympathetic to the FSA's German football-focused campaign, Hoey's views placed her at direct odds with Government policy and Smith thus distanced himself from any standing campaign, stating, 'the Government's view remains what it has consistently been; public safety is paramount and the Taylor Report had the last word on this issue – at all costs, we must ensure that Hillsborough cannot happen again' (BBC, 2000).

Subsequently, in February 2001, Hoey informed SAFEs players that while the FLA had returned from Germany, Smith had intervened and demanded their report be sent to him. Having seen a copy, Hoey and SAFEs players wrote a press release condemning Smith's decision to dismiss the Hamburg design and demanded the issue be investigated further (Standing Areas for Eastlands, 2001). To avoid suspicion at the DCMS, Hoey advised SAFEs players to use a local Internet cafe to send the press release to various media players which generated much publicity and several interview requests. Thus, following Jasper (2015), we see evidence of how players sometimes overlap with each other: SAFEs players and the Minister for Sport formed a type of 'misbehavior' player-network. Some forms of protest are, therefore, hidden from view and occur outside more formal SMOs (Edwards, 2014).

The FSF's emergence, upon the unification of the FSA and NFFSC in 2002, provided an avenue through which more formalised movement activities and conventions, including adopting SAFE (standing) as a formal policy area, could be channelled and mobilised. Seeking the cooperation of other players, notably, FSI, England Supporters' Groups, and club-specific networks, including West Ham's 'Stand Up Sit Down' campaign, the FSF's national annual, and regional, conferences helped them share common goals and resources to develop counter-repertoires of contention against the all-seating legislation, and subsequently, penetrate the safety–security nexus and legislative arenas of English football. Consequently, new movement networks (players), tactics, and mechanisms to change the imagery around standing became the focus of strategic interactions among supporters, the state, and individual football clubs.

The reprogramming of SAFE, to become Safe Standing, was shaped by cultural meanings in historical contexts. Supporter-networked players sought new political opportunities by abandoning any discussion of 'terracing' as a 'rhetoric of reaction', in favour of convertible standing/seating technology as a 'rhetoric of change' (Hirschman, 1991). Indeed, by recognising that 'terracing' and 'Hillsborough' had become inseparable in the minds of political, and wider public, players, convertible standing/seating was used as a form of 'counter-power' so that Hillsborough – as a public discourse – became less dominant in opposition. Social movement 'names' are deeply political (Gillan, 2020). Thus, in the case of Safe Standing, we observe the fuzzy temporalities of movement players and arenas, through which multiple temporal periods carry different – yet relational – meanings, strategic preferences, and tactics.

The small, loosely organised protests coordinated by the CoFS during 1989–1999 *moved against* the criminalisation of supporters and assault on 'traditional' supporter rituals, and therefore *moved for* greater supporter democracy and rights to retain aspects of standing (terraced) culture. Across 1999–2009, a more professionally organised movement for Safe Standing *moved against* the politicisation of fans post-Hillsborough and the securitisation of persistent standing in all-seated stadia, and in doing so, *moved for* alternative, technical solutions, which would create the perception that standing, as a modern cultural, and indeed commercial practice, could be 'safer'. Consequently, they successfully reprogrammed convertible standing/seating – referenced publicly as 'Rail Seating[2]' –as *the* Safe Standing master frame. This, subsequently, widened the strategic interactions beyond the state, to club chairmen, independent supporters' groups, local safety officers, and police associations.

By analysing the connections between players and arenas across the wider temporal movement field, we observe how framing mechanisms like 'safety' become significant within the strategic interactions of those players and arenas, evidencing the ways in which activist players are often embedded within dominant social discourses and employ categories or ideas that they provide (Steinberg, 1999).

2009–2022: licensing (safe) standing behaviour, diplomatic players, and the regulatory arena

Thirty-seven years after the FSA[3] emerged in Liverpool as a compound player to 'reclaim the game' and transform the landscape of fan politics in England, it is now, broadly, a highly professionalised and effective SMO with some influence inside professional football's decision-making structures and governance. Unpacking the players and arenas of the UK fan activist scene across three decades reveals the long-term power of supporters' networks to bring dominant social discourses into both national and transnational spaces and, in turn, become effective political actors. Over the past decade, expressions of discontent have also become more sophisticated and professionalised. Political bodies like the UK government and UEFA are consulting supporters' groups on future reform and regulation mechanisms, including the Fan-Led Review of Football Governance in 2021, and the DCMS' Select Committee Inquiry into Safety at Sports Events Inquiry in 2022 (Turner and Ludvigsen, 2023). The new political economy of English and European football reflects a regulatory regime where the sociocultural and symbolic aspects of the game, including governance, security measures, supporters' match-day experience and stadium atmosphere, are producing new policy-based outcomes.

The FSA's long-term transformation represents a legacy of 'third way' politics evidenced by contemporary fan projects that are shaped by actors hailing from the creative class with higher levels of formal education. Between 2009 and 2022, while new networked players have played an important role in building corporate partnerships and commercial revenue streams, which helped enhance the creativity and marketing of the Safe Standing (Rail Seat) movement, the core movement players continue to be recruited, coordinated, and mobilised by long-term players involved in building the UK fan activist scene, notably, the legacy players of the CoFS, leading independent supporters' groups, and (digital) football e-zine producers (Millward, 2012). These networks and mobilisations demonstrate movement *action* as being produced in ways which are temporally patterned by past events and activities which, in turn, shape the contemporary players and arenas of Safe Standing and professional football in England and across wider Europe. Central here is the conscious attempt by the long-term FSA players to build diplomacy with key figures within the political, regulatory, and legislative arenas. However, while these macro-level strategic interactions played an important role in ensuring Safe Standing penetrated the governance structures of English and European football, this was also achieved by micro-level interactions and mobilisations between local players within, and around, individual professional clubs during a wider changing political landscape on Hillsborough.[4]

Locating the eventful protests of players within a wider temporal landscape shows how legacy operates as a multifaceted concept of *power* and *time*. Eventful protests and political mobilisations against all-seating produce institutional legacies, in our case, through new memories and mechanisms which shape regulatory reform in football and serve to legitimise the social value of supporters and their rights. Embedding the safety–security nexus of English football within a wider conceptualisation of the 'external relational field' enables us to capture how political, symbolic, mediatised, technological, and legislative arenas are not static, but instead in a constant state of flux, characterised by evolving strategic interactions between the players of the 'security field' who contest specific safety policies and wider social control mechanisms. In 2011, the core Safe Standing players, influenced by new networks at Newcastle and Sunderland in North-East England, formed new relationships with the Sports Grounds Safety Authority (formerly FLA) because of a strategic willingness to do so and since key personnel at that organisation had changed. The appointment of Ruth Shaw, replacing De Quidt, was perceived to improve dialogue. Consequently, strategic interactions on Safe Standing became increasingly cooperative and evidence-based.

It is important to situate the evolving interactive dynamics of Safe Standing protests within a wider social and political transformative context. Indeed, this temporal period's beginning is characterised by heightened political interest in football in terms of examining issues of governance and sustainability. Consequently, in 2010, the DCMS' Select Committee commissioned an inquiry where leading FSA players, who had been active for over 10 years, gave oral evidence. This led to the production of a formal DCMS report in July 2011, recommending the introduction of a formal licensing model to underpin the self-regulation measures introduced by the EPL and Football League, and various other initiatives seeking to protect the future of Supporters Trusts and SD and address issues of funding and legislation. These strategic interactions strengthened the position of leading FSA players within the political networks of the DCMS, the EPL, the FA, and the Football League. Here, former Militant and CoFS players were appointed to the DCMS' new Expert Working Group on *Football Supporter Ownership and Engagement.*

The switching of networks, tactics, and mobilisations on Safe Standing across these arenas during the wider politicisation of the governance and sustainability of professional football helped build a critical mass of independent club-specific players with political, cultural, digital, and entrepreneurial capital. These networked players produce coalitions seeking to challenge the neoliberal logics of modern football. Yet, the digital platforms in which they are embedded both consume and produce late modern football culture. The contemporary mobilisations on Rail Seating reflect the wider social and political transformations of Safe Standing's players and arenas. The FSA, as an SMO-player advocating more sustainable forms of governance and community-based enterprises, has moved beyond mobilising around ideas of tradition and collective consciousness. Indeed, Rail Seating emerged as a tactic to break down the state and its sub-players by presenting a 'business case' for achieving greater (supporter) stakeholder choice, as opposed to stronger supporter ownership of clubs.

Via this lens, Rail Seating operated within the parameters of the all-seating legislation through innovation, by making the case for standing as a customer-care-focused issue in

seeking to overcome the problems of persistent standing in seated spaces. Despite this, disagreements between influential supporter-networked players emerged over whether 'safety' or 'choice' should remain the leading movement frame, evidencing the ways in which collective identity is not always an achievable feature of movements which involve connections between diverse players with overlapping, but also competing vested interests (Edwards, 2014).

Since 2018, the adoption of Rail Seating as a movement for greater supporter (customer) care has successfully made the case against current conventional seating, but not against the wider neoliberal political economy of English football. Although it is merely 15 years ago that the EPL, Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA), and DCMS were publicly opposed to any legislation change, the issue has become high on the political agenda, following a 2018 UK government review. This review considered whether new developments in stadium safety and spectator accommodation might justify changing the all-seating legislation to permit Safe Standing. By reconfiguring, or converting, current all-seating spaces to operate as standing areas, Safe Standing represents the first, legitimate, opportunity for fans to stand at matches in the EPL and Championship arenas in England since 1994. From this review, the SGSA commissioned independent research into the 'safe management of the persistent standing of fans in all-seated areas', and the impact of newly configured standing areas using 'barrier' or Rail Seating technology, to reduce the potential for conflict and associated risks with this practice. After an early adopter trial in January 2022 at six clubs in English football, the UK Government confirmed that any club wishing to introduce Safe Standing would be permitted to do so from the start of the 2022/2023 season, subject to particularised surveillance conditions (SGSA, 2021). Overall, the three periods (1989–2022) reveal the critical temporal element that is embedded in players' strategic engagement and, subsequently, the movement outcomes. Here, we see existing challenges associated with breaking down state policies over three decades and how the imagery surrounding the practice of standing is reconfigured through the emergence and coalitions of players creating new arenas. Hence, networks and mobilisations that are temporally produced shape the players/arenas of Safe Standing protests.

Conclusion

Bringing the analytical insights of this article together, we suggest that Safe Standing represents an important case in sociology, which reveals the power and counter-power of movement players and their arenas across different temporal periods which constitute the long-term, neoliberal economy of British society. By synthesising the players-arenas and security field frameworks and applying them to key networks, tactics, and mobilisations against all-seating, we map, for the first time, a 'security (movement) field' in English football. We suggest the movement field thus comprises multiple arenas which shape memories of historical and contemporary events; movement players create, adapt, reinforce, and contest these arenas. The security field in English football constitutes the political, discursive, cultural, mediatised, technological, and legislative arenas where fans, politicians, leagues, clubs, governing bodies, police, and safety authorities have shaped, and contested, meanings of 'traditional' and 'modern' football, and standing.

The strategic interactions between supporters and the state, we argue, are thus characterised by safety-orientated and social transformations generated partly by English football's restructured political economy (King, 1998). As a long-term social movement, the players and arenas of Safe Standing raise important questions around the historical views on football fans as deviant. Moreover, the supporters' bodies persistently standing in all-seated spaces at football consciously produce their own patterns of conduct that transgress behaviour codes established through the all-seating hegemony (Giulianotti, 2011).

To answer our research question, the new introduction of licence (safe) standing in English and European football represents a discursive victory for the long-term legacy players of the UK fan activist scene, who coordinated relational collective action against all-seating across three decades. Despite this, the normalisation of licence (safe) standing constitutes a new 'Safe Standing' hegemony and, in turn, prefigures a new regulatory regime, one in which the enhanced use of CCTV and introduction of a spectator 'code of conduct', as 'strict conditions' to be met (SGSA, 2022), extend the regulatory arena and surveillance of fans within the wider social and corporate *lifeworld* (MT and JALL). This regulatory arena continues to reflect the long-term hermeneutic struggle between supporter-networked players and the state on supporters' rights, rituals, commercial, and cultural practices. We see evidence of this in two specific ways.

First, the UK National Police Chiefs' Council Football Policing Lead, Mark Roberts, recently claimed that new licence [safe] standing areas make it easier for fans to 'throw missiles, engage in hate chanting, racism, take cocaine, and sneak alcohol inside [the stadium]' (BBC, 2022). Second, Liverpool season-ticket holders in Anfield's 'the Kop' stand were recently informed in writing about the club's intention to extend Rail Seating capacity in line with an agreed fan engagement framework after a recent successful trial. However, this correspondence maintains that Rail Seating is 'not a Safe Standing area' and that the move to expand the integration of safety rails behind seats remains compatible with the current all-seating regulatory framework, stipulating fans should only stand at 'key moments' during the game.

The conflation of standing with 'criminal' or 'anti-social' spectator behaviours continues to characterise the contentious nature of the social movement field across a 30-year post-Hillsborough temporal landscape. Hence, we reveal that the long-term political milieu of English football presents a prism for understanding social movement fields and outcomes given the apparent challenges in breaking down state power over three decades. This elucidates our contention that analyses of movements must be temporally sensitive. Outcomes are thus relational to long-term patterns of interaction across multiple arenas, but which create a dominant frame(s); Safe Standing regulatory frameworks must inevitably speak to all the constituencies within the safety–security nexus to maintain momentum or 'successes'.

As a limitation, we acknowledge that this article's approach and singular focus on activism surrounding the 'Safe Standing' case in football prevents us from providing a totalised representation of fans' wider struggles against commercialisation processes in sport, which the under-examined efforts to create 'controlled', 'ordered', and commercially appealing stadium spaces solely represent *one* example of. Indeed, securing such standing space within stadia was a political field that was much wider than the safety-security field we unpack here. The wider shifts in position around how standing could be

'reintroduced' are compatible with the economic imperative of modern football. Despite this, we add to the existing literature on the multifaceted impacts, outcomes, and trade-offs of social movements (Gillan, 2020). It also drives forward extant theoretical insights on 'security fields' (Giulianotti and Klauser, 2010) and 'players-and-arenas' (Jasper, 2015). This remains sociologically important because 'Safe Standing' clearly illustrates the importance of temporality, cultural, and technological patterns of interaction across several decades within dynamic protests in the 20th and 21st century. Concurrently, however, future social movement focused studies may advance the theoretical relations of this article further by cross-pollinating these with existing insights capturing the tactics and strategies used by individuals or groups in spaces (De Certeau, 1988) and how actors' social worlds are constantly *evolving* and becoming (Latour, 2005).

Funding

Notes

1. The Football Licensing Authority (FLA) (now: Sports Grounds Safety Authority (SGSA) is a public body funded by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and was set up by the Football Spectators Act (1989) to secure the conditions for safe and enjoyable experiences for spectators at English and Welsh sports grounds.
2. 'Rail Seating' or 'seats incorporating barriers' is a type of convertible standing/seating refers to custom-designed spaces which use barriers or rails to prevent fans falling forward, allowing the locking of seats into position to enable fans to stand at games where permitted, and then unlocked, or folded down, for games/sporting events operating all-seating regulatory frameworks.
3. In 2018, the Football Supporters Federation (FSF) was again renamed the Football Supporters Association (FSA) after a unification with Supporters Direct.
4. Following an application on 19 December 2012 by the Attorney General, the High Court quashed the verdicts of the original Hillsborough inquests and ordered fresh ones to be held. On 26 April 2016, the jury returned a verdict which found that the fans who died at Hillsborough were unlawfully killed and that a catalogue of failings by police and the ambulance services contributed to their deaths.

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