

Controlling without confronting- policing and hooliganism

Research Summary

English football fans exploded into the headlines at the 2004 UEFA European Championships in Albufiera, a small resort town in Portugal's Algarve, when over 50 English people were arrested following violent confrontations with the police. Less well known, however, is that disorder at match venues during the competition was virtually non-existent – the result of a 'low profile' approach to policing recommended by an ESRC-funded researcher, and now being adopted by police in the UK and across Europe.



Impact

Research by Dr Clifford Stott confirmed that by keeping a low profile but intervening before disorder breaks out, police can encourage fans to deal with potential conflict themselves and so marginalise those looking for trouble. By contrast, heavy-handed policing can both entrench hooligans and undermine the critically important self-policing efforts of genuine fans in the longer term.

As well as being the subject of numerous presentations at important football policing conferences and police training colleges in the UK and abroad, findings from the research have informed policy development amongst the European Council Police Co-operation Working Party and the European Union Football Experts Group. Findings have also been included in a European Union handbook on controlling violence at international football matches. Dr Stott is now helping to set up a pan-European police training programme on match safety.

Subsequent to the completion of the project, Dr Stott was commissioned to conduct similar work in the UK by the Association of Chief Police Officers in order to examine the impact of public order policing strategies in the context of domestic football, with a view to using the findings in training and operational practice. This work is now being used to inform the Inquiry into Public Order Policing by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary following the G20 protest in London in 2009.



Until recently, hooliganism at football matches has been commonly understood as a working class expression of masculinity, and as an opportunity for hooligans to make trouble. It was thought that besides banning known hooligans from football or controlling them with 'heavy' policing, there was little that could be done.

However, research on crowd psychology conducted in the 1990s by Dr Clifford Stott, showed that attempts to *control* crowd disorder can actually *create* it, and that particular types of police intervention – those seen by fans as unfair and indiscriminate - increase the likelihood of fans seeing conflict with police as acceptable.

The project Crowd Dynamics, Policing and Hooliganism built on earlier findings in analysing the impact of policing strategies and tactics upon levels of football hooliganism, with a view to developing best policing practice for international tournaments.



Further Information

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Crowd Dynamics, Policing and Hooliganism at Euro 2004

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Key findings

- Low profile policing differentiated between troublemakers and those who just happen to be in the vicinity. The little interaction that took place between police and fans was overwhelmingly positive, with very few incidents.
- Known trouble makers were prevented from travelling to Portugal.
- Potential incidents did not escalate but were responded to quickly and within limits of acceptable behaviour set by police.
- Non-violent behaviour became the norm, and fans opposing violence identified with police rather than troublemakers, with several examples of 'self-policing' amongst fans.
- By contrast, incidents did occur where police tactics differed in Albufiera.
- Situations escalated and perceptions of heavy-handed policing saw fans identify with troublemakers rather than police.

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