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Violence and death in Argentinean soccer in the new Millennium: Who is involved and what is at stake?



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Abstract

This article analyzes episodes of violence and disorder, including deaths, related to soccer in Argentina, as identified in the online written press between 2006 and 2017. The aim is to present a sample of cases in order to reflect the domestic atmosphere of violence around the Argentinean game. Just as Eduardo Archetti and Amílcar Romero presented figures on violence between the 1950s and the 1980s, so our analysis explores a new type of violence, including killings by peers of the same supporter squad. Although the mass media, and public responses, tend to blame groups known as *barras-bravas*, we try to unpack different scenarios and assess the variety of interests and actors involved, which include “arrangements” with police and other authorities, as well as the aggression amongst the protagonists of the game itself. Consequently, we hope to update recent debates by revealing new trends and suggesting hypotheses for new research and public policies.

Keywords

actors, Argentina, deaths, soccer, violence

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Introduction

Understanding the multiple dimensions of violence in relation to soccer (or football) can be a complex task. Up to November 2017, the list of identified serious casualties accumulated in Argentina amounted to 322 cases (<http://salvemosalfutbol.org/>). The victims reported since 1922 resulted in an average of three fatalities *per year*. The period between 1958 and 1983 gave an annual average of five such “tragedies” (Archetti and Romero, 1994). Furthermore, the yearly average of nine fan deaths during the last ten years is higher than the so-called “golden age” of hooliganism in England, where the estimate was six fan deaths a year, from 1974 to 1989 (Hobbs and Robin, 1991: 553). This constitutes one important reason to continue studying this subject at present.

The problem of violence in the world of soccer has been the subject of much research. In Europe, the research goes back several decades as social scientists have sought to interpret hooliganism (Armstrong and Harry, 1991; Braun and Vliegenthart, 2008; Comeron, 2002; Dunning et al., 1986, 1991; Ehremberg, 1991; Giulianotti et al., 1994; Hobbs and Robin, 1991; Ingham, 1978; Marsh, 1978; Mignon, 1998; Murphy et al., 1990; Readhead, 1991; Spaiij, 2006; Taylor, 1971; Walgrave and Limbergen, 1998; Williams et al., 1984; among others).

In Argentina, the work of the sociologist Amílcar Romero (1985, 1986, 1994) has been pioneering in analyzing violence in relation to soccer for the period between 1958 and 1983. Football (*fútbol*) is one of the main components of the national identity of Argentina (Archetti, 1999), moving crowds and attracting political attention since the early 20th century (Duke and Crolley, 2001; Frydemberg, 2012; Levinsky, 2016; Palomino and Scher, 1988). Soccer (the international term) is home to one of the most creative choreographies and supporter cultures in Argentina, but violence and even deaths have, however periodically, impacted the sporting landscape. The anthropologist Archetti, together with Romero (1994: 39), has stressed that the junction of violence and death reflects social processes beyond the limits of soccer. Their analysis, which constituted the basis for ulterior research in the social sciences in Argentina, detailed: “blind” police repression; violence among organized fan groups; the fate of innocent victims; impunity; and relationships with institutional power.

The picture has not changed during the last decades of the 20th century and the beginning of the new Millennium. This situation has led to several social research projects and political measures, which have been intended to address the problem (Garriga, 2013; Godio and Uliana, 2016; Sustas, 2013). On the one hand, the sheer number of studies has proven the role of violence for identity construction and as a resource to negotiate interests (Alabarces, 2013). On the other hand, public responses have narrowly reinforced the paradigm of security (Uliana and Godio, 2013). Nevertheless, institutional diagnoses have largely omitted analysis regarding the precarious conditions occurring in host matches, and the arrangements and confrontations stimulated by the security forces (Aragón, 2017; Sain and Rodríguez, 2014).

Although aggressions can hardly be measured according to the information based only on soccer and we have no exact definition of violence, we need to add here that there is neither an official observatory, nor available information from any entity of the national state related to this problem in Argentina. Official data for 2016 reported that,

on average, seven people were killed *per day* due to crime (Dirección Nacional de Información Operacional y Mapa del Delito (DNIOMD), Censo de crímenes y homicidios, 2016). Therefore, the rate of nine *annual* deaths associated with soccer may represent a comparatively small number. But if we think of this sport as a public spectacle, it would be difficult not to compare these figures negatively with other types of entertainment, whether sportive, musical, or any other leisure activity.

The only (online) information on such incidents comes from efforts made by the non-governmental organization (NGO), *Salvemos al Fútbol* (*Salvemos*), which continued the work of Amílcar Romero. In 2006, this NGO came to life with the objective of denouncing violence, something that had been personally experienced by its founder, Mónica Nizzardo (Nizzardo and Bergés, 2015). In 2004, the headquarters of *Atlanta* (3rd Division) had been visited by one of the leaders of the local *barra*, that is, the club's "radical" organized group of supporters. In his "protocol" visit, the leader asked to see the club president. Not getting the response he wanted, this individual then destroyed computers and smashed windows with an iron rod. The case went to trial and the justice exempted him, arguing that there were no grounds for giving him a sentence. To counter the threats, the founder of *Salvemos* made several media appearances, after which she received calls from relatives of victims, in particular from another woman, Liliana Suárez, founder of FAVIFA (Relatives of Victims of Violence in Argentinean Soccer), and the mother of Daniel, an 18-year-old boy killed in an ambush between *barras* in *The Copa América 1995* (Chapietta, 2015: 55).

Salvemos al Fútbol has since provided legal advice to such victims (Murzi and Segura, 2014), and also press releases and reports. These efforts have also stimulated the building of bridges with academics (Murzi et al., 2015). This article focuses on instances of violence since 2006 (the year when the NGO was created), producing eleven years of monitoring incidents in relation to soccer. We propose to analyze two specific aspects here: the frames of death; but, also, the cartography of actors, episodes and places involved. That is to say, we want to take into account the situations that potentially led to such fatalities. In other words, our specific objective is to present a mainly descriptive account of the problem. We expect, therefore, to contribute to the debate within the social sciences around violent behavior in relation to the game in Argentina, and more broadly to the global understanding of violence and fandom. By doing so, we wish to provide tools for analyzing and, hopefully, re-designing public policies. Our research questions for that debate are: what forms have fatal soccer violence taken in Argentina? And which are the key profiles that appear in the current context? But, let us first review the existing studies to place our analysis in a historical context.

The studies of violence, *barras*, and soccer in Argentina

Argentinean soccer is underpinned by the National Football Association (AFA). There are two national divisions, the First League and the Second, called the National B. Below them are two parallel structures: on the one hand, the Metropolitan B, C, and D levels; and the Federal Championships A, B, and C on the other. Below these structures are the official regional leagues.

Argentinean soccer is characterized by the fervor of fans, locally called *hinchas*. Traditionally, there are two main categories of spectators: those who remain seated; and

those who stand collectively in the *ends* (*la popular*) of the stadium. It is in this latter sector that the *hinchadas* are found, that is, militant fans who provide permanent support. *Barras* consist of organized groups that control more than the aesthetic of *hinchadas*, as their profiles have evolved over the last decades. The press has named these groups as *barras bravas* (Conde, 2005), where the term *bravas* indicates, more than anything, that they are dangerous. Their members usually describe themselves as *la Barra* of their club (Garriga, 2006; Taddei, 2016), which is the term we will use.

We are of the opinion that although there is no unanimous definition around these terms, when we speak about *barras* today, we are referring, indeed, to organized groups of active supporters who, through their real and symbolic fervent support and their capacity to deploy violence, lead the activities of the *hinchadas* and at the same time maintain unstable relationships with actors from both the football world and other social and political channels. Nevertheless, *barras* do not comprise homogenous groups, since they are frequently divided into factions which struggle to control space and power. But, are the *barras* the only actors to produce violence related to soccer in Argentina?

Historical scenarios of violence

Skirmishes between fans, and aggression directed towards players and referees in Argentina can be traced to the first decades of the 20th century (Duke and Crolley, 2001; Frydemberg, 2012). Two identified deaths in 1922 are recorded. In 1924, one incident in Montevideo following the South American Cup ended with another death (Barnade and Iglesias, 2006). In 1939, police repression in the stadium of the *Lanús* club ended with two fans being killed. Five years later, the “episode of *Gate 11*” in the stadium of *River Plate* left seven dead by asphyxiation and several more injured. Subsequent casualties due to police repression occurred in 1955 and 1958, and added to those were the collapse of a bleacher at the *Estudiantes* stadium in 1959, when two spectators paid the ultimate price.

Romero (1985) attributed the increase of soccer violence to the political context in Argentina. In 1955 a coup d'état against Juan Domingo Perón took place and the *Peronist* party was banned for many years. It is in this context that the hinterland of soccer became a space for confrontations (Levinsky, 2016). Between 1958 and 1983, the number of injured people reached 4000 and those arrested and detained exceeded 5000 (Romero, 1985: 10). In that respect, Archetti and Romero identified different scenarios for soccer deaths. The first was linked to brutal repression. Alberto Linker (18 years old) lost his life at the stadium of *Velez* in 1958 (Archetti and Romero, 1994: 16). The second involved violence between rival fans in 1967: Héctor Souto (15 years old) suffered the misfortune of defending a friend who celebrated a goal on the “wrong” side, where hard-core *Huracan* fans stood. This episode marked a new era. Spectators stopped circulating inside the stadium (Archetti and Romero, 1994: 26). Parenthetically, the 1968 *Gate 12* tragedy at the *River Plate* club where 71 fans of *Boca Juniors* died after being crushed at an exit, can be viewed in this context. Investigations indicated that supporters had had a previous fight with the police (Alabarces, 2004; Archetti and Romero, 1994).

The third profile of cases was linked to political persecution. In a game in *La Plata* in 1976, the police shot *Huracan* supporters, who were considered leftist extremists (Romero, 1986: 74). The fourth scenario was the result of a planned confrontation

between *Boca Junior's* organized fans and those of *Quilmes*, which ended with two deaths in 1983 (Archetti and Romero, 1994: 33). These analyses constituted the first systematic attempts to understand the increasing number of violent episodes. During the following decades, social scientists in Argentina, many of them inspired by Archetti and Romero, continued to propose approaches for analyzing such events.

Aesthetics of violence: Between carnival and dispositions for struggles

Some academics have stressed the symbolic meanings of confrontations during the 1990s. This, in the native jargon, came under the banner of possessing “*aguante*”—a form of “standing before one’s enemies” (Alabarces, 2004). In an analogy to early interpretations of *aggro* and hooliganism as ritualized aggression (Marsh, 1978), this involved organized groups walking into rival neighborhoods when travelling to a stadium, singing and displaying their body capital. Similar to the old soccer “firms” in England (Dunning et al., 1986; Hobbs and Robin, 1991; Readhead, 1991), a series of studies have proved how past soccer battles can provide prestige for able performers (Aragón, 2007; Garriga, 2006).

The thefts of “trophies”—flags, drums, and standards—have remained part of this folklore for many years (Moreira, 2005). The construction of male identities has reproduced such practices (Cabrera, 2013; Czesli, 2013; Gaffney 2009; Gil, 2007) and the “carnival” climate of Argentinean soccer (Archetti, 1992) was often imitated in other countries (Carrión, 2014; Castro, 2013; Hollanda, 2017; Segura-Trejo, 2013). This can be explained by fan fervor and their capacity to produce multiple chants—*cantitos* (Gandara, 1997; Parrish and Nauright, 2013)—using musical instruments and colorful decorations. However, deadly threats have also been made explicit in many chants: “I want the *Libertadores* [Cup] and [to] kill a *hen*,” is usually sung by *Boca Juniors* fans when referring to their peers at *River Plate*, who reply that they will happily kill rival “*bosteros*.”

Battles against police have been a source of the most “positive” fan reputations in this micro-cosmos (Aragón, 2007). These confrontations have nourished reciprocal codes, to a point where the police are perceived, by many fans, as a third-enemy (Galvani and Palma, 2005). As regards the state’s response, several laws and norms have reinforced repressive measures (Godio and Uliana, 2016; Sustas, 2013), but no substantial preventive alternatives have been implemented (Segura and Murzi, 2015). The statistics gathered by *Salvemos* have detailed that 22% of the fan deaths between 1966 and 2012 were due to police repression (Murzi et al., 2015). Security perimeter fences were conceived of as part of military operations to separate rival fans (Taddei, 2016; Uliana and Godio, 2013). Nevertheless, prominent groups and individuals belonging to *barras* learned to reach agreements with the local police in order to negotiate relationships (Bergés, 2015). When negotiations have failed, the balance has been broken by one of the parties, a way of “passing the bill” on to the other (Garriga et al., 2017).

Internal disputes in the new Millennium

Existing studies have proved how officials have nourished relationships with groups of *barras*, either for support when running for the club presidency or for intimidation of

adversaries (Duke and Crolley, 2001; Moreira, 2012; Sain and Rodríguez, 2014). But not everything has remained at the level of masculine ritual. Organized groups act now as complex networks (Bundio, 2013), with a range of connections (Bergés, 2015; D'Angelo, 2012) and endowed with survivalist instincts. A new issue has made a breakthrough during the decade of 2000–2010: killings *within* the same stand of the fan group. From the list of soccer deaths, it can be observed that between 2000 and 2012, out of the 77 cases, 36% were caused by internal fan struggles (Segura-Trejo, 2013: 33). One of the main reasons can be attributed to disputes over power (Murzi, 2011) and the individualistic interests of leaders, in harmony with neoliberal trends which have permeated fan cultures, from the general levels of corruption in the country's political and civic spheres to the world of soccer (Aragón, 2017). The quarrels can be interpreted then, in Bourdieu's terms (1981), as struggles for the "field." In effect, each *barra* is at an apex of tensile equality which may be disrupted every time one faction wants to relegate the other(s). This occurs in huge clubs such as *Boca Juniors*, *River Plate*, *Racing*, *San Lorenzo*, or *Independiente*, in mid-range clubs, but also in clubs of lower rank.

The press constitutes another crucial actor since, although it *claims* to talk about "the facts," "violence" is also used as a commodity in media reports (Szlifman, 2010). The hegemonic media tend to stress that *barras-bravas* represent the core of the problem. Nonetheless, social scientists have suggested a broader interpretation of the prevailing atmosphere of violence (Sodo, 2013). It is in this direction that our contribution focuses; more specifically, in the years between 2006 and 2017 we have investigated actors involved in violent incidents, and both the place and nature of such disputes. How can we interpret these episodes? Here, we risk general hypotheses. Far from being contained, new frames of death and disorder have marked a different direction for Argentinean soccer culture during the last decades. Four specific hypotheses are proposed.

1. There has been an increase in the economic sources of disputes among members of *barras*.
2. Public policies aimed at prohibiting visiting fans have contributed to exacerbating internal conflicts.
3. Contrary to earlier decades when problems happened inside or around the stadium, a growing number of episodes are taking place far from soccer's venues.
4. Collective incidents, involving actors other than *barras*, often occur due to disagreements about results, adding more negative ingredients to the atmosphere, especially in lower leagues and youth-leagues.

We suggest these hypotheses are up for debate by providing below a sample of representative scenarios of incidents around the Argentinean game.

A note on methodology

The second and third authors are directly related to *Salvemos*, and the first author is an academic collaborator with no formal position. When the *National Direction of Security in Sport Events* approached *Salvemos* in the beginning of 2016, the fact that they asked for statistics about violence in soccer confirmed that there was no official data collected

by the national state. The authors of this article realized the need to construct information to inform public policies and, more widely, to update the research reviewed above.

Salvemos has continued the listing of soccer-related incidents and deaths in Argentina initiated by Romero (1986). For this specific piece of research, an important part of the material gathered comes from the follow-up accounts of violent events reported by the press, complemented by the reports from the NGO. After much collaboration, the authors decided during the first months of 2016 to make a database to classify these files and to produce a more systematic approach to monitoring and collating data.

However, we had to define, firstly, what was understood by “violence” and, secondly, how it should be treated. As there was no official available data, we decided to record examples of obvious physical aggression and also serious threats to integrity and property. Our single source for the constructed database comes from the online press.¹ This constitutes a serious limitation, one that we will comment more on in the discussion section.

We need to state here that our conception of violence does not cover the whole spectrum of soccer-related incidents. Political, institutional, economic, and cultural expressions are also part of the phenomenon. But physical harm can be the direct consequence of other forms of behavior. For instance, during a South American club semi-final, the authors observed a father, with his baby in his arms, aggressively singing about how the *barra* of his team had embarrassed and outraged their biggest rivals. But we could not consider here, for methodological reasons, *verbal* violence in fan chants.

To complete our database, between August 2006 and July 2017, we proceeded to a more systematic Internet search by using keywords such as *violencia—fútbol—violencia en el fútbol*, to discern specific incidents. We are able to present, then, some representative accounts and summary statistics as regards: *yearly trends; episodes related (or unrelated) to matches; characteristics of the actors involved; and consequences for clubs and leagues*. In order to test the hypotheses proposed above, we considered incidents at soccer championships under the aegis of the AFA from official divisions, but also those at senior youth-leagues.

The picture of violence

The Internet search revealed a total of $n = 651$ episodes, that is, where physical aggression or serious actions aimed at injuring was identified, between August 2006 and July 2017. Deaths occurred in 98 of these incidents, which represent 15% of our sample and an average of nine deaths *per year*.

An important finding shows that 153 cases of violent aggression were aimed at soccer players, coaches, officials or referees during this period (27% of the total sample). However, if one examines the data in Table 1 it is also possible to observe the growth of violent struggles amongst groups from the *same* club, reaching 24% of all aggressions. Moreover, these internal fan conflicts are confirmed as being the leading cause of soccer-related deaths (51%).

Violence between *rival* fans, which could have been expected in previous decades and which in most European countries continues to be the most relevant problem (Dunning et al., 1986; Spaij, 2006; Tsoukala, 2009), now appears on the secondary stage in

Table 1. Trends of reported violent episodes in soccer, 2006–2017.

Categories	Years 2006–2009	Years 2010–2013	Years 2014–2017	Percentage episodes (100%)	Deaths and %
Aggression and violence among fans of same team	38	56	59	$n = 153$ (24%)	$n = 50$ 51%
Aggression and violence aimed at players, coaches, referees and officials	16	44	116	$n = 175$ (27%)	$n = 1$ 1%
Aggression and violence between rival fan groups	39	45	42	$n = 126$ (19%)	$n = 32$ 32%
Incidents between police and fans	15	29	47	$n = 91$ (14%)	$n = 6$ 6%
Instances of serious material damage	8	20	21	$n = 49$ (7%)	–
Incidents of collective aggression between soccer players and staff	4	12	25	$n = 41$ (6%)	$n = 2$ 2%
“Tragic” accidents	–	3	12	$n = 15$ (2%)	$n = 6$ 6%
Total	$n = 120$	$n = 209$	$n = 322$	$n = 651$	$n = 98$

Source: Compiled by the authors.

Argentina, accounting for 19% of violent incidents, but 32% of all fan deaths. Confrontations between supporters and police account for 14% of violent incidents found in the press, as reported in Table 1. Other types of categories, with lower representation, include: serious material destruction (i.e., cars, shops or club facilities damaged as the result of violent acts); aggression between protagonists of the game, where soccer players or/and staff are the ones involved in battles; and finally, “tragic” accidents, where fans may have fallen from the stands, or from a train or bus.

Barras-bravas were held accountable by the press as *the* actors to blame in these incidents in 63% of the cases, either because of fights between rival fans, or against the police, or among supporters’ factions. This means that, although *barras* do indeed constitute relevant participants, in 37% of all episodes, other actors were found to be culpable, including fans with no evident relation to *barras*. Additionally, sitting spectators (usually assumed to be non-violent actors) appeared culpable in one-in-12 (8%) of all incidents.

There were situations where the leading groups could not be easily identified by media reports, but it was possible to identify violence produced by groups of supporters. Thus, 66% of the episodes are attributable to disputes in relation to the staging of the “soccer-show”: that is, inside the security perimeter of stadium, or on the way to it, whilst 34% happened in scenarios with no obvious links to matches, sometimes on days when there were no games played at all.

But what types of serious incidents are we discussing here and who is, in fact, involved? For representative purposes, we have focused on different (but typical) scenarios.

Intra-group struggles between peers from the same stand

The case of the *barra* of River Plate, nominated as *The Drunks of the Stands* (*Los Borrachos*) may be illustrative of the growing internal struggles in Argentinean fan culture. During the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) 2006 World Cup, the leaders of the *Borrachos* were seen on television (TV) encouraging the national team. (Since the 1980s, several leaders of the *barras* had the tradition of travelling to the World Cup finals, similar to the patterns of their English rivals (Williams et al., 1984).) A year later, in 2007, a prominent member of the *River Plate's barra*, Gonzalo Acro, was murdered while he was leaving his gym far from the stadium.

After his death, competition for the command of the *barra* began to occur as an expanded pattern of interventions. These positions represent a valued source of contacts, revenue from transactions and services, as well as becoming businesses in their own right. Among the first-named, for example, are useful connections for formal and informal jobs, in unions and the municipalities (Garriga, 2006; Moreira, 2012), and for roles as drivers, bodyguards, and security personnel at demonstrations and shows. Among the last-named are the control of parking lots adjacent to match venues, food sales, the commercialization of narcotic sales outside, and sometimes inside, the stands together with the informal “agreements” made with the local police about “soccer business” (Garriga et al., 2017).

These cases showed that *barra* leaders were not always marginal figures. Acro also belonged to a group of regular club members who frequented the club, swimming pools, gymnasiums, volleyball pitches, and restaurants. In addition, he boasted a certain level of style and etiquette, as Hobbs and Robin (1991) have described being common among renowned leaders of hooligan firms in England in the late 1980s. The possible “causes” of the murder pointed to disputes between factions including, possibly, those over percentage “fees” allegedly owed for the transfers of soccer players (Murzi, 2011). Aggression continued after the death of Acro in different scenarios. In 2008, two factions of the *River Plate's barra* clashed in the stadium of the *Velez* club, resulting in many injured. In 2010, another *River Plate* fan, Jonathan Waldmeier, died after a shooting on his way to the stadium.

In fact, the response of the clubs and the forces of order tended to officially recognize factions capable of imposing their presence, either by the victory over competitors, or by negotiating agreements. Primary access to the stadium for the winning group—called the official *Barra*—reduced the other(s) to a double status of marginal(s). This situation has been the subject of multiple disputes where groups seek to preserve, or otherwise reconquer, space. As an example, the cafeteria of *River Plate* was taken in an assault by one dissident faction in 2014, with the intention of “teaching a lesson” to the official leaders.

The distribution of benefits, as well as the prestige of occupying a central place in the stadium, correlated with the upsurge of internal disputes: two deaths linked to factions of *Huracán* in 2009, when the team failed to become national champions, may serve as another example. Inner struggles for control left 10 fans dead in 2010. *Pimpi* Caminos, the leader of the stand in *Newell's* club, was murdered due to disputes over territories (Del Frade, 2008). One militant journalist, Nicolas Pacheco, was found dead in the swimming-pool of the *Racing Club* in January 2013. A couple of members of one faction

aspiring to control the *barra* were present at the scene. This inventory also includes a huge battle between factions of *Boca Juniors* near the stadium of *San Lorenzo* in July 2013; the consequences were two individuals shot to death.

The height of these intra-group factional confrontations and the general *ethos* of violence (Archetti, 1992), was illustrated in May 2015 in a game for the *Copa Libertadores* between *Boca Juniors* and *River Plate*. Despite the fact there were no visiting fans allowed, dissident fan groups united to harm those in power and attacked the players of *River Plate* with pepper spray. After that, ordinary spectators threw bottles of water to the *River Plate* players, who refused to continue playing.

In smaller clubs with more suburban characteristics, clandestine economics, political ties and tensions in the neighborhoods can explain a great deal about clashes. Images on TV captured a tremendous battle in 2013 between factions—with different political links—in the stadium of *Quilmes*, and the fatal shooting of an *Almirante Brown* supporter, killed by his peers in 2014. This list goes on—such as in *Nueva Chicago*, and those clubs between the 3rd and 4th Divisions, such as *Ituzaingó*, *Berazategui*, or the followers of *Antonio Guarani Franco*, from the northern province of Misiones, among many other examples.

It is also worth noticing that non-football businesses, like the market *la Salada*, make commitments to different fan groups (some of them identified with *Boca Juniors*, *Los Andes*, *Lanús*, *Temperley*, and *River Plate*) in connection with political authorities. These elements can give the impression that violent disputes are produced only between the famous *barras* groups. Illustrating other sources of conflict, in April 2017, Emmanuel Balbo, a young amateur from *Belgrano de Córdoba*, was brutally beaten in the stadium. Balbo had had an argument with another fan because of conflicts related to his family. The latter began to (falsely) accuse Balbo of being a fan of *Talleres de Córdoba*. Balbo was thrown into the empty space below a sector without the involvement of the *barra*. He died later in hospital. But despite deaths among peers, conflicts between rival fans in Argentina have not remained latent.

Confrontations among rival fans

The death of Marcelo Cejas, a fan of *Tigre* who was hit by a stone after an attack by *Nueva Chicago*'s supporters, constitutes an illustration of the hate and intolerance which is often expressed towards rival clubs' fans. The game was the defining moment before the promotion in 2007 of one team (*Tigre*) to the First League or the survival of the other (*Chicago*) in the top division. This episode marked the commencement of prohibition of visitors for games in the National B league.

Territorial confrontations in local derbies were frequent in several provinces during this period, such as in Tucumán, Salta, Mendoza, Córdoba, and Santa Fe. In 2008, the First League saw the deaths of Rodrigo Silvera, a supporter of *Huracan* shot by the *barra* of *San Lorenzo*, and Emanuel Alvarez, a supporter of *Velez*, also shot on his way to the stadium. The practice of confronting rival fans based on notions of honor and reputation (Aragón, 2007; Garriga, 2006; Moreira, 2005) has been present in different scenarios, with a high percentage of deaths, as shown in Table 1. The *barras* of *Racing* and *Gimnasia de la Plata*, former allies, had a clash near a train station in December 2010. A young

man, Maximiliano Goñi, was shot. As the reader may notice by now, organized fan groups have adopted the habit of moving to the stadiums with firearms—almost unheard of in the European context where honor is about non-fatal domination, usually by fists. In that sense, the segregation of the visiting public is a means of avoiding the urban displacements of rivals in Argentina.

Beginning in 2013, supporters from different clubs were not allowed to meet anymore in the stadium, but fierce episodes were intensifying in local neighborhoods. The city of Rosario witnessed repeated clashes of supporters of *Newell's* and *Rosario Central*. In December 2013, a group of supporters of *Newell's* was leaving the stadium in a van and an argument broke out with two individuals on a motorcycle, one of whom was wearing a T-shirt of *Rosario Central*. Inevitably, it seems, the van was attacked a few blocks away. Two fans, Leonardo Boladian and Walter Palacio were killed, and a woman and her seven-year old daughter were severely wounded. The NGO *Salvemos*, through its president Mariano Bergés, provided legal advice to the victims. One offender was condemned in 2017 to 30 years in jail. In November 2014, two fans of *San Telmo* (4th Division) were fatally shot by neighbors from *Dock Sud* in peripheral streets because of mutual provocation.

An attempt to allow fans of the visiting team in the stadium again took place at the beginning of 2017. But the year started badly, with a supporter of *Lanús* already dead. Leonardo Yanis fell when his bus was attacked with stones thrown from a neighborhood street on his way to the stadium of *La Plata*. Moreover, scenes of high tension were noted, weeks after, between local police and the fans of *River Plate* on their arrival at *Lanús*.

Confrontations with police

Clashes of fans with police have been a historical fact of Argentinean football (Archetti and Romero, 1994) and the source of a constant number of deaths (Murzi et al., 2015). Police forces have regularly provoked confrontations (Alabarces, 2004; Galvani and Palma, 2005; Taddei, 2016). In this climate, high-risk games involve the payment of hefty police overtime and more police personnel being hired, along with the development of more sophisticated police operations (Uliana and Godio, 2013). But the *Barra* may still have the privilege of access due to arrangements made with the local police district (Garriga et al., 2017). However, away games are more complicated, where the distant venues are guarded by rivals and by hostile forces of law and order.

After the death of Ramón Aramayo, an ordinary *San Lorenzo* supporter, during a security check before a match in the *Velez* stadium in 2012, the police force found itself in the eye of the storm. In addition, the fierce police repression of *Lanús*' fans in La Plata in June 2013 caused the death of Martín Jerez. This episode led the provincial authorities to ban visitors, with the expectation that this might reduce violence. This measure did not take into account, however, the increased occurrence of confrontations among factions of the same fan squads. It can be difficult to clarify the facts when excesses are committed by agents of the state, but the opposite scenario has also occurred.

For example, in the stadium of *Laferrere* (4th Division) in March 2015, the police were assaulted when they tried to prevent 200 militant fans entering the stadium by

force. Two police officers were severely injured, including one who required transport to hospital by a rescue helicopter. The clashes continued the following day, as police returned to a neighborhood to recover a stolen rifle—actions all worthy perhaps of urban guerrilla warfare. As shown in Table 1, confrontations with the police are a definite factor when analyzing fan violence in the soccer setting. And, there is another, additional, scenario of violence to consider: aggression towards and between participants of the matches.

Aggression involving protagonists, officials, and battles on the field

Aggression towards players and referees was a frequent fact at Argentinean soccer in the early 20th century (Frydemberg, 2012). The question is: who executes such aggression today? And the answer is: we are faced with a number of actors and situations. In 2011, members of the official *barra* of *River Plate* entered into the field in a relegation match, intimidating their own players. One week later, members of the same group tried to attack the referee, when their club was, inevitably, falling into the 2nd Division. For better sporting results, greater resources are at stake and vice versa (Murzi, 2011). In fact, several soccer players and referees were attacked during these years of study and the list includes more than 30 clubs where this has happened. In 2013, in the regional league of La Rioja, Franco Nieto, a local player, was hit by a stone and died.

As part of the consequences of the factional struggles described here, any threat to acquired privileges can lead to aggression towards club officials. Javier Cantero, president of *Independiente de Avellanada* (2011–2014) who openly challenged the interests of the *Barra*, was constantly threatened. In October 2013, the (female) president of *Yupanqui* (5th Division), Lilian Machado, had to hide in an office and wait for the police when a group of fans tried to attack her. The president of *Temperley* (1st Division), Hernan Lewin, resigned in 2016 because of deadly threats. Such threats have also affected other officials, coaches and players.

Nonetheless, as we have been emphasizing, *barras* are not the only actors to produce such violence. A *Lanús* player, Matías Fritzier, was attacked by an ordinary supporter when talking to the press after a defeat in 2015. Seated spectators threw objects at players and referees on repeated occasions in different stadiums, including at *San Lorenzo*, *Velez*, *Rosario Central*, *Boca Juniors*, and *Douglas Haig*, among others. In 2015, the coach of *Quilmes* was threatened by one supporter who dared to insult him. Several scenarios of “spontaneous violence” (Walgrave and Limbergen, 1988) were also registered in regional leagues (5th–8th Divisions). The facts were mostly similar: a sending off, a penalty or a defeat unleashed violence between rival fans (organized and ordinary) and/or players. The capacities of the police forces have not been sufficient to contain such incidents, but they often do participate in the action.

Collective fights in the field have occurred periodically, as was the case of *Gimnasia* and *Estudiantes* during the summer of 2016. In youth tournaments, violence among players, staff and even relatives have taken on a larger scale. Emiliano Monti, a goalkeeper in a regional league, lost his life in November 2013 after a beating by his opponents in July of that year. In September 2015, Matias Minanfra, a young player (16 years old) of the lower division club of *All Boys* was beaten with a stone as a consequence of a mass

pitch fight with players of *Chacarita*, and their relatives and friends. In March 2017, Fernando Pereiras, a coach of indoor-soccer, died in a hospital after being beaten by the uncle of a player.

Battles in indoor-soccer have been frequent among soccer participants and spectators at the same scene. There are also situations where members of *barras* have appeared, either accompanying their children or to be involved in quarrels against opponents (players or supporters). As we can infer from these scenarios, serious (sometimes fatal) violence at different levels of soccer in Argentina is not exclusive to one particular group or club.

Discussion and some conclusions

First, we reflect on the general climate of violence that surrounds Argentinean soccer. Besides the spectacular atmosphere, aesthetics, chants and support of fans, masculine aggressiveness (Dunning et al., 1986) permanently sets the stage for violence, both outside and inside the field.

From those early frameworks identified by Archetti and Romero, when the hard core *barras* and the systemic logics of violence first took root, subsequent studies have identified different features. Although *barras* can be marginalized, their new capacity has made their older members socially integrated into clubs, unions, and political parties (D'Angelo, 2012; Garriga, 2006; Moreira, 2012; Murzi, 2011). Some leaders have even established contacts within higher political spheres (Bergés, 2015), showing that the focus by the press and authorities on individuals may not bring solutions.

In relation to the data presented here, the fact we had to interpret the view of the press has demanded some subjective analysis. Today, the sole national sports newspaper in Argentina, *Olé*, has a fixed section dedicated to violence. These data do not always constitute incidents, but just the daily activity of a *barrabrava*, demonstrating that for part of the press, there is an automatic metonymy between *barras-bravas* and violence. The mass media has collapsed “violence and soccer” into a regularly featured news item, and there is even a radio program dedicated to talk about *barras* on a weekly basis.

The compilation of episodes of violence is also a complex task, due to the large number of games that take place in Argentina, and the fact that not all of them have press coverage. Therefore, the compilation here only involved those events that attracted media attention, which a priori generates an over-representation of most important matches and teams. Despite the fact that our investigations attempted to identify a comprehensive set of data, another unavoidable limitation came from the scarce news we get from regional, amateur or little leagues, where protagonists can be severely injured in confrontations.

We can infer, however, that the use of violence suggests that physical assaults and intimidation, some of which result in deaths, are socially enacted. In relation to the proposed hypotheses, the growing intra-factional conflicts result in a number of violent incidents and deaths. The biggest enemy—the “other”—is no longer, and always, in the opposite stand; he may be trying to occupy positions in the same *end*. In that sense, we are faced with planned internal battles.

As regards the second hypothesis, the banning of visiting fans in the stadium adds motives for disputing power with peers of the same stand. Furthermore, as different

studies have shown (Alabarces, 2004; Aragón, 2007; Galvani and Palma, 2005; Garriga et al., 2017; Sain and Rodríguez, 2014; Uliana and Godio, 2013), the transformation of the way in which the forces of law and order deal with soccer is one of the facets that needs to be reconsidered. As Taddei (2016) asserts, there is a general state of neurosis between police and fans. Nonetheless, the press may not register episodes when law enforcement officers commit “minor” excesses, and the police tend not to bring them to light. This explains the relatively small number of incidents with the police shown in Table 1.

Despite a significant number of episodes identified far from the venues, we cannot sustain the third hypothesis categorically. Several brutal confrontations between fans from the same stand have been settled inside the stadium, as happened in 2009 in *Colon* of Santa Fe or near its perimeter, or at *Quilmes*, *River Plate*, *Boca Juniors*, *Newell's*, *Nueva Chicago*, *Almirante Brown*, and *Huracan*, among others. In addition, some “executions” clearly exceed the soccer setting. In October of 2010, for example, a demonstrator, Mariano Ferreyra, was killed in a railroad union protest. The assassin was a member of the *barra* of *Defensa y Justicia* and was presumably hired by heads of the railroad service.

Equally worrying, collective violence involving other actors is often unleashed due to disagreements about decisions and sporting results. These episodes infer that the sport-performance factor should not be abandoned as one of the explanations for violence. We need to distinguish two main features in this vein: when supporters physically attack, intimidate or throw objects at their own players, or any figure of authority, on the one hand; and other scenarios involving players and their relatives in youth leagues and indoor-soccer, on the other. In these acts of contempt for “the other,” aggression may also lead to deaths.

In short, and contrary to hegemonic mass media interpretations, which consider *barras-bravas* as the “cancer” to be extirpated, one of the conclusions of this research is that soccer violence is also committed by other actors. Although it is difficult to prove, there is no such a thing as a violent sector per se on one side and a non-violent society, with puritan actors, on the other. Consequently, victims and the context of their lives, is another dimension that requires more attention. Of course, in this investigation we have dealt with only part of the problem. We have tried to find different frames using the suggested hypotheses and through the data gathered, but we recognize a need to propose other hypotheses and identify scenarios with complex combinations of elements, some of which have been described separately. Other identifiable patterns may emerge with more sustained research.

Soccer is part of the history of Argentina and has constituted a ‘micro-society’ that reproduces wider problems. Violence is not a homogeneous phenomenon, since a variety of situations and different modus operandi are clearly at work. According to Aragón (2017), the micro-cosmos of *barras-bravas* reflects bigger neoliberal logics that have existed over many decades in the country. In a context where survival is a challenge based on individual and unethical merits, the competition which has exacerbated problems among groups and leaders *on the same side* may be only a reproduction of wider features of economic, political, and social life. When FIFA’s scandals exploded in 2015, several individuals and companies involved were operating in connection with Argentina.

Therein, there are other problems that deserve attention, such as the possible links between corporate corruption and the upsurge of factional disputes.

Finally, studies have pointed, without much success, to the need for stronger mechanisms for violence prevention and to the imperative to celebrate passion but reject violence. Despite the neurotic media attention on incidents involving fans, especially *barras-bravas*, rhetorical discourses and official announcements to “eradicate violence” have proved ineffective. It is time, perhaps, to give voice to ordinary fans. After all, they may propose useful alternatives.

New civil associations are forming, including a national coordination of fans (*Coordinadora de Hinchas*). Beginning in 2009, *Salvemos* launched a proposal (never implemented by the authorities): instead of separating and banning fans, the idea is to create mixed spaces for fans of different clubs, a way to demonstrate that supporters are not violent per se and can interact peacefully with each other. This would only be a starting point to transform understanding and meanings. Through this research, we hope to present a stimulus for further discussions, for academic studies, but also for crucial public policy debate.

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Note

1. Online sources consulted: <http://www.lanacion.com.ar/>; <http://www.ole.com.ar/>; <http://www.clarin.com/>; <http://www.tiempoar.com.ar/>; <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/>; <http://www.telam.com.ar/>; <http://www.cronica.com.ar/>; <http://442.perfil.com/>; <http://www.minutouno.com/>; <http://www.infobae.com/america/>; In order to report incidents from the inferior divisions, the specialized website <http://www.soloascenso.com.ar/> was periodically accessed. Furthermore, to reduce the unavoidable over-representation skewed to the economic and social concentration around Buenos Aires and surroundings, sites from other cities and provinces were consulted, among them: <http://www.eldia.com/>; <http://www.lacapital.com.ar/>; www.rosarioplus.com; <http://www.lagaceta.com.ar/>; <http://www.lavoz.com.ar/>; www.jujuyaldia.com.ar

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