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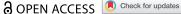
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Securitizing the Greek football? Communication, hooliganism, and lessons learned from the United Kingdom

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws upon the ongoing hooliganism in Greece as the local context and compares it with its international counterpart in the United Kingdom as a successful attempt at communicating and securitizing hooliganism. By comparing through a qualitative content analysis of media texts (i.e. news reports, interviews, and press releases) of the two case studies, the post-Heysel Disaster in England and the post-Kampanos Death in Greece, the paper reveals that successful securitization does not guarantee success in dealing with hooliganism, but it secures the public's attention. Furthermore, it shows that despite the effective representation and acceptance of hooliganism as an existential threat, the UK's success in eradicating hooliganism is debatable, making the implementation of similar measures in the Greek case controversial. As the paper argues that the UK's hooliganism is still alive, perhaps it is not surprising that Greece is still struggling.

KEYWORDS

Alkis Kampanos; football; hooliganism; securitization; United Kingdom

Introduction

The killing of the 19-year-old Alkis Kampanos in the second month of 2022 by a group of hooligans sparked outrage in Greece. The country has been struggling for at least a decade, dealing with extreme violence, mostly related to football clubs and organizations (Evans, 2022; Shangoyan et al., 2023). The Greek government decided that this time, it must deal with hooliganism by imposing some restrictions in the beginning, which did not seem successful until the end of 2023, when two other killings related to hooliganism happened (Gatopoulos, 2023; Kekesi, 2023).

The state, through its governmental representatives (e.g., Prime Minister and Ministers), started to present that hooliganism was threatening society and should be treated as a security threat. In addition, in the media discourse, it was promoted that the UK, focusing on the post-Heysel disaster, is

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a successful example of dealing with the phenomenon, although research has challenged this idea (Campbell, 2023). Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis' administration seemed to argue that similar initiatives like those adopted by the Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, after the post-Heysel disaster, would be implemented (Tzimas, 2023).

The creation of a security threat (or an existential threat) has been examined in different contexts, including the football space. Previous research has explained how even mega-events related to football have been securitized, as well as how aspects of football hooliganism seemed to be presented as an existential threat (Lee Ludvigsen, 2018, 2020; Smolík & Đorđević, 2023). Moreover, it has been underlined that more such research must be conducted to fill the gap and make it easier to understand how hooliganism and football events are perceived and presented as security threats. In that way, there would be a better understanding of the success of anti-hooliganism communication around the world, which sometimes has even been misused under the success of an existential threat to pass urgent and controversial policies aiming to shift the blame instead of dealing with the complexity of hooliganism (Divišová, 2019; Lee Ludvigsen, 2018, 2020; Smolík & Đorđević, 2023).

In the case of Greece, past research has focused on explaining the financial gains and losses of spectator violence, especially the one connected to the most prestigious clubs of Greek football (AEK, Aris, Olympiakos, Panathinaikos, and PAOK), urging for its control (Avgerinou & Giakoumatos, 2012). Furthermore, the socio-political connections with football violence that seemed to be more evident during the financial crisis of 2008 have been analyzed (Zaimakis, 2018). In addition, the neglected aspect that the football fans in Greece have been a target of extreme punishment and systematic oppression of their freedoms has been highlighted (Mastrogiannakis, 2016). These extreme practices seemed to be the norm, and their ineffectiveness led to societal unrest and anger as the three deaths (of Kampanos, Katsouris, and Lyngeridis) in such a short period were considered unprecedented even for Greece, which had been battling hooliganism for a long time.

Until 1980, incidents of violence in Greek stadiums were rare and isolated. Since 1980, there has been a gradual increase linked with the professionalization of Greek football and its financial transformation (Krani, 2022). It is worth mentioning that, according to Tsoukala (2011), p. 598), a comparative analysis of the Greek and the Italian press revealed that from the 1970s and on, "the transforming of football hooliganism into a security threat was to a great extent dissociated from the scale and seriousness of the phenomenon." There is a long list of incidents related to football hooliganism in the country, and in most cases, the victims did not participate actively in the hooligan acts (Krani, 2022). Until the time that the paper is written, between 1983 and 2023, there have been 14 deaths of victims due to Greek hooliganism (Koukoumakas et al., 2024), including the three cases that are part of the current study.

Despite the lethal issue of hooliganism, not much research has been done connecting the communication efforts of the governments for presenting hooliganism as an existential (securitization process) in the public discourse and assessing its effect. In the case of Greece, in the public and media discourse, the UK is always communicated, even by the political elites, as the solution to the current problems (Andrianopoulos, 2023; Papantonopoulou, 2018). This research paper fills that gap by analyzing two case studies (Greece and the UK), including the content analysis of 1,096 media texts. It studies (RQ) how the governmental administration of Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the news media tried to communicate and securitize football hooliganism in the aforementioned cases. Also, it compares the relevant content with the United Kingdom's seeming success in tackling hooliganism.

The coming paper's sections present the recent deadly events related to hooliganism in Greece. They then proceed to the process of securitizing an object based on the ideas of Securitization Theory (ST) and the importance of existential threats. Finally, the last sections discuss the study's methodology, the two case studies (UK and Greece), and outline the article's discussion and conclusions.

Greek hooliganism, the deadly events from 2022-2023, and their media captures

It was a little bit after midnight on the 1st of February 2022 when a young 19year-old Greek, Alkis Kampanos, returned home with a group of friends at Theodorou Gazi Street, Charilaou region of Thessaloniki. All of them together were no more than five individuals. Suddenly, two cars with hooligans from PAOK FC, one of the most influential teams in Thessaloniki, asked Kampanos and his friends what team they supported. Alkis, unaware of the identity of these people, replied that he supported Aris FC, the main rival of PAOK in Thessaloniki, the second most populated city in Greece. The hooligans attacked with knives and other types of weapons, killing Kampanos (Euronews.com, 2023; Evans, 2022).

The government of Prime Minister Mitsotakis announced that hooliganism could not be tolerated and that the state would take further measures to restrict illegal behaviors and restore peace in the country's football scene (Maltezou, 2022). The place of the homicide, Theodorou Gazi Street, was planned to be renamed "Alkis Kampanos" to make everyone understand that the violence of hooliganism cannot be tolerated anymore (Ekathimerini.com, 2023). In addition, the government announced that the 1st of February would be a Remembrance Day named "National Fan's Day" (Mpokas, 2024). Of course, all these actions were performed with an emphasis showing that the government would stop once and for all the threat of hooliganism that was harming and dividing Greek society's existence.

A hooligan can be broadly described as "a disorderly and noisy young person who often behaves in a violent and destructive way" (Kerr, 1994, p. 5). When the word soccer or football is attached to hooliganism, it usually refers to public disorders that occur at or around football matches (Kerr, 1994). However, not all hooligans have a team they support, making them football fans. Hooligans are in for the conflict and confrontation with other hooligans for the excitement (Kerr, 1994), and hooliganism is a ritualistic participation in masculinity with their cohort (Dunning et al., 1988; Stott, 2014). Hooliganism's relationship with the sport of football itself remains somewhat ambiguous. Whilst there are acts of violence, both physical and verbal, that are more specifically tied to the matches themselves, such as throwing missiles on the pitch and/or toward opposing fans, or the instadium chanting that is related to the competing teams and/or players (McArdle, 2000), it remains difficult to conclude whether football hooliganism is the bi-product of the sport itself, or if football happens to be the venue of football hooliganism.

Like many times in the past, when the Greek governments announced that they would not tolerate hooliganism and eradicate it, the exact opposite happened. On the 7th of August 2023, there was another killing because of hooliganism in the capital, Athens. Michalis Katsouris, a fan of AEK Athens FC, was stabbed and killed in a joint-attack by the hooligans of Panathinaikos FC and Dinamo Zagreb FC. The incident became an international issue, as the other Balkan countries had informed the Greek government that a convoy of more than 25 cars had started from the capital of Croatia, Zagreb, to come to Athens. The leaked information that the government had been informed by other countries in the press caused outrage in Greek society (Protothema.gr, 2023a; Thenationalherald.com, 2023a).

A few months later, another death happened because of Greek hooliganism in December 2023. The 31-year-old policeman, Georgios Lyngeridis, was injured by a naval flare that an 18-year-old fan of Olympiacos FC used outside of the stadium "Melina Merkouri" during a volleyball game between Olympiacos and Panathinaikos, the two most prominent clubs in Greece. The policeman died due to the injury on the 27th of December, 2023. Greece's Prime Minister announced a three-day mourning, as well as the ban of all the fans from attending any football game for two months, clarifying that when the ban is lifted, the clubs must follow the new strict regulations, such as CCTV in every stadium and appointed personalized seating number system with identification (Gatopoulos, 2023; Thenationalherald.com, 2023b).

Nevertheless, all these initiatives seem to be nothing new, as in the past, several governments have tried to enforce such regulations without success. Meanwhile, according to the anti-government criticism, the government did not seem to be willing to deal with the actual problem, which is connected with the strong clientelism and lack of transparency

that prevail in Greek football, especially related to financial resources (Anagnostopoulos & Senaux, 2011). Apart from these problems, it also seems that the football sector heavily relies on the TV agreement to allocate money to the teams of the first division (Super League) and on betting revenue (Anagnostopoulos & Senaux, 2011). Therefore, it is unsurprising that the Super League has a past of severe accusations, such as match-fixing (Manoli et al., 2019).

The abovementioned practices have been identified in the past, even in studies regarding the control of the media and the manipulation of the public discourse through the concept of "media capture." According to Mungiu-Pippidi (2013, p. 40-41), "media capture" can be defined as

"the interference of influential actors and vested interests in the news media, as individual parties act on their benefit, for private purposes, and to the detriment of the public interest and the democratic functions of journalism."

Other researchers have expressed similar viewpoints, arguing that the media are not essentially autonomous and are forced to play the role of an intermediate entity between governments and other powerful societal actors. The media seem to be used to realize other purposes (Dragomir, 2019; Nevradakis, 2024).

In Greece, we can see regulatory capture, which makes the most prominent regulatory bodies shaped by political appointees who have good relationships with certain business and political interests. Adding to this, we have constant efforts to control public service media, which are perceived as governmental mouthpieces. As these practices seem to be widely recognized, the governments also use state funding as a tool for media control, supporting those media that do not criticize the government (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Karyotakis, 2024, 2025; Nevradakis, 2024; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021). State funding as a tool for media control became even more evident under the government of Kyriakos Mitsotakis during COVID-19, with the "Stay at Home" campaign in 2020 and the distribution of 20 million euros to designated news media. Less than one percent ended up in news media that were critical of the government (Karyotakis, 2024).

Lastly, we have an ownership takeover of the most prominent news media, which are purchased by a few businessmen who tend to support politicians and political parties based on their gains. These four elements are present in the Greek case and seem to have been intensified under the administration of Kyriakos Mitsotakis (Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Karyotakis, 2024, 2025; Nevradakis, 2024; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021). As Nevradakis (2024) points out, many media outlets seem to be unprofitable, meaning that the media might be used as tools for promoting opaque methods and realizing personal ambitions. That is why it is interesting that in Greek football, the owners of the prominent clubs (Olympiacos FC, Panathinaikos FC, PAOK FC)

own several influential news media in the country (Maragoudaki et al., 2024). Furthermore, the new owner of AEK FC, Marios Iliopoulos, seems to be

"following the 'shipping - sports- media' pattern: after recently acquiring AEK Football Club, the shipowner did not rule out (for the first time publicly) the possibility of also acquiring a media outlet." (Maragoudaki et al., 2024)

The phenomena of "media capture" and the interplay between the elites and sports have resurfaced the need for journalism to critically cover sports under the umbrella of a more complex socio-political reality. As we will see, such an argument is connected to the impact of the post-Heysel events, which seemed to support the government's actions uncritically without highlighting various socio-political angles, such as Thatcher's attack on the working class. Despite the fact that from the 90s and on, the tendency to cover sports in a nonpolitical way became the norm. Research goes against it, underlining the serious misconduct and pressures that are taking place by corporations in sports cannot be reported. In sports reporting, there is the dominant view that there must be neutrality, a focus exclusively on the game, and unity without discussion about other socio-political aspects (Broussard, 2020, 2022; Burroughs et al., 2023). Therefore, there must be a critical sports approach within the field to shed light on these issues (Broussard, 2020, 2022; Burroughs et al., 2023) and the construction of security threats related to sports.

Existential threats and hooliganism

To reveal how existential threats are constructed, we must pay more attention to the framework of Securitization Theory (ST). ST can allow influential societal actors, such as politicians or the state itself, to construct a threat that must be tackled as soon as possible. If the threat is not eradicated, then there will be severe negative implications for societal prosperity (Buzan et al., 1998). ST was coined as a framework by scholars studying international relations who wanted to explain further how a security (or existential) threat is constructed during conflicts. To create such a threat, an actor known as the securitizer must initiate it with a speech act. A speech act usually takes place through a venue and a channel that can reach a particular audience, mobilize it, and accept the security threat by provoking emotions and implementing the socalled emergency actions that usually do not follow the political norms. Those from the audience who would accept the threat would participate in actions against the group(s) responsible for the threat (Balzacq, 2005).

ST was introduced as a framework by Ole Waever, who wanted to challenge the stereotypical viewpoints of the time, giving the idea of security always a positive connotation. The societal discourse of the time mainly favored the idea that the more security a society has, the better the citizens' lives would be. That was one of the reasons why Waever thought that security and the creation of a security threat are linked with societal objects that often are overlooked by conventional approaches (Lipschutz, 1995). Many academic papers have focused on improving the methodological and theoretical aspects of the ST, calling for more empirical research (Baele & Jalea, 2023). Therefore, the current paper also enhances the relevant academic literature.

For the successful securitization process (creation of an existential threat) after the initiation of it through a speech act, there must also be actions aiming to deal with that particular threat. In the end, the audience must accept that there is a security threat to have a successful securitization process, which must be addressed as soon as possible to protect them from an existential crisis (Buzan et al., 1998). Furthermore, there can be multiple securitization processes even for the same object, as the securitizers aim to promote a different logic connected with other ideological aspects, such as the securitization processes linked to the refugee crisis and the alternative approaches that the political parties implement (Stivas, 2023a). However, it is worth highlighting that the securitization process can have different audiences. For instance, a national matter can be securitized at a country level and not considered a threat to the international community. A skillful securitizer can use various communication tools to securitize different topics targeting a particular audience. Thus, there is an ongoing debate about identifying the audience and how the securitization process targets the audience (Balzacq, 2008; Buzan et al., 1998; Stivas, 2023b).

A striking case successfully securitized and promoted as a solution to football hooliganism with controversial impact was the anti-hooliganism laws in France, which are debatable as to whether they were successful in dealing with the problem. Such laws usually support the narrative of evil hooligans that they are a threat to the country's security and might even be connected to terrorism (Divišová, 2019). Moreover, in Brazil, protesters seemed to be portrayed as hooligans to justify the brutality against them and the restriction of their right to demonstrate (Porto, 1998).

Adding to the debate about hooliganism and the relevant laws, the cases mentioned as successful in the public discourse in Greece are those of the United Kingdom and the government of Margaret Thatcher. The media played an essential role in the fight against hooliganism that Thatcher's government unleashed. They supported the narrative that hooliganism should be tackled, as it damaged UK society, arguments that have been underlined often in Greece. To support such a narrative, they did not focus so much on the events but speculated about why hooliganism has become so impactful (Campbell, 2023).

The so-called "Taylor Report" and the adjustments that it brought, despite being promoted in the Greek public discourse as successful, research has challenged that perception, showing that the government, media, and police demonized the football space and intensified targeted laws against the working class (Campbell, 2023). In other words, the securitization process did not offer such great success in the long run, as it did not stop football hooliganism. Therefore, the current research enhances the literature on existential threats and the ST by comparing two case studies (Greece and the UK), which are explained in the following section, presenting how securitization was communicated. One of its significant contributions is that presenting hooliganism as an existential threat through the securitization process does not mean successfully tackling the phenomenon.

Comparing the content of the post-Heysel disaster in England and the post-Kampanos death in Greece

A case study in social sciences as an approach can help further understand a theoretical aspect or concept that has not been extensively studied and even involves going "beyond countable aspects and trends" (Mabry, 2008, p. 215). As a case study aims to provide a deep understanding of a phenomenon, the comparative approach also involves comparing different case studies to identify common patterns and wrongdoings. The case studies can either stand alone as individual studies or be a part of a larger group (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2017; Gustafsson, 2017). As the comparative research has been successful in revealing important elements of a phenomenon and has been used in different fields, the current paper uses the two qualitative cases of football hooliganism, the post-Kampanos' events in Greece and the post-Heysel disaster based on the analyzed media content, to identify problems in the sociopolitical implementations of the securitization process and to see if the securitization of hooliganism can lead to its tackling.

The Greek case of the post-Kampanos Death discourse, as has already been mentioned, is associated with the long-standing and deadly phenomenon of football hooliganism in the country that has become more intense in the years 2022-2023. In the Greek discourse, as England is presented as the best practice for eradicating hooliganism and there is a controversy regarding its success, it was considered important to study its media content and securitization as the second case study of the paper, and draw valuable insights from their comparison. For many, Thatcher's approach in England through Lord Taylor's work is occasionally presented as the textbook for tackling hooliganism, although the academic research, as the following sections show, does not necessarily align with this viewpoint. Thus, the current comparative research wants to provide insights into the following research question (RQ):

RQ: How did the governmental administration of Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the news media try to communicate and securitize football hooliganism?

To provide a deeper understanding of the research question, we investigated the related content of the two case studies regarding the



Table 1. The study's data.

T: (Type of Media		N 1 6	0
Timeframe	Texts	How they were collected	Number of texts	Description
Discourse of the 01/02/2022-23/	post-Kampanos I Published press	Death in Greece Website of the Hellenic	29 (press releases)	The Ministry of Civil
04/2024	releases, including interviews	Ministry of Citizen Protection	& 29 (interviews)	Protection was responsible for stopping hooliganism
01/02/2022–23/ 04/2024	New reports Leading News Media (examples): In.gr, Kathimerini Lifo.gr, Newsit.gr Proto Thema, Skai.gr	Google Search with keyword "Άλκης Καμπανός" (Alkis Kampanos), "Μιχάλης Κατσούρης" (Michalis Katsouris), & "Γιώργος Λυγγερίδης" (Georgios Lyngeridis)	298 (Alkis Kampanos), 260 (Michalis Katsouris), & 152 (Georgios Lyngeridis)	The sample had diverse news outlets, including several of the most influential Greek news media
Discourse of the	post-Heysel Disa	ster in England		
01/02/2022–23/ 04/2024	New reports Leading News Media (examples): BBC, Channel 4, Daily Mail, Sky News The Independent, The Times, The Telegraph	Google Search with the keywords "Heysel Disaster," & "Hillsborough Disaster"	35 (Heysel Disaster), & 293 (Hillsborough Disaster)	The sample had diverse news outlets, including several of the most influential UK news media

securitization process via the analysis of the related literature review and the cases' context through texts, such as news reports, published interviews, and press releases (Table 1, for a full list of the analyzed news media and articles, see Tables A1 and A2 in the Appendix), following existing research on securitization (Kuvaja & Olsson, 2021; Müller & Gebauer, 2021; Rubin & Baekkeskov, 2020; Stivas, 2023b). As a qualitative approach is used, the study presents only the best examples (exemplars) to justify its findings and arguments. The exemplars were selected after thoroughly reading all the collected articles, as the most representative cases that could reveal what was happening in the examined discourse.

The articles were collected manually and included all the related news articles provided by the Google Search engine within the examined timeframe (01/02/2022-23/04/2024), even if they did not belong to known news organizations. Under the umbrella of inductive qualitative content analysis, the articles were categorized based on the topics and themes they described, focusing on identifying the elements of ST theory (i.e., audience, emergency actions, existential threats, and the referent object).



"Qualitative content analysis goes beyond merely counting words to examining language intensely for the purpose of classifying large amounts of text into an efficient number of categories that represent similar meanings." (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p. 1278)

Therefore, as a research method, it can focus on a subjective interpretation of the content, revealing shared themes and patterns, which was considered suitable to reveal the main ideas disseminated by the examined media texts (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Mayring, 2021; Schreier, 2012) and how they could be connected with the securitization process.

Case study of England: securitization of hooliganism post-Heysel disaster

The securitizing actor/agent – the government and the media

The Heysel Disaster marked a key turning point in England's relationship with football hooliganism. Upon the 39 deaths caused by the collapse of the concrete terracing in the Heysel Stadium, which was partially caused by the confrontation between Liverpool and Juventus fans, English clubs were banned from European club competitions for five years (bbc.com, 2000). With hooliganism widely seen then as the "English disease" (Dunning et al., 1990; Lowerson, 2022, p. 73), the Thatcher administration demonstrated a strong stance to wage war on hooliganism (Dunning et al., 1988; Lowerson, 2022; Tsoukala, 2009), with a series of football-related legislations followed to curb the public disorder caused by or related to hooligans (Hopkins & Hamilton-Smith, 2014; Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000). Through the aforementioned framework, England's effort to securitize hooliganism will be analyzed through the lens of ST, identifying the audience, emergency actions, existential threat, securitizing actor/agent, and the referent object.

With the Heysel Disaster, or more specifically the post-Heysel Disaster reaction, as the main catalyst, the Thatcher administration was quick to denounce those involved in the Heysel Disaster as "thugs" (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 87), framing hooligans as "unruly football spectators who caused a blot on the UK reputation that must be eradicated" (Lowerson, 2022, p. 73). The stance taken by the government is in line with what ST defines as a securitizer, as the rhetoric employed portrayed hooliganism as an existential threat that must be securitized at all costs (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000; Tsoukala, 2009).

The media can also be seen as part of the securitizing actors in this scenario. The English media's coverage of "hooligan activities" has seen a gradual shift in its tone and choice of words, where news outlets, up until as late as the 1960s, stated that they would prefer "hooliganism rather than indifference" (Dunning et al., 1988, p. 144), and often describing the hooligans in question as much more gentlemanly than most



would think (Dunning et al., 1988, 1990). However, toward the back half of the 1960s, the media's paradigm gradually shifted toward a "war on hooliganism" mentality, where titles like "Soccer Marches to War!," "Soccer Thugs on the Warpath" (Dunning et al., 1988) being more and more prevalent, and demeaning and dehumanizing words being used more frequently to describe hooligans, including the likes of "thugs," "yobs," "stupid," and "moronic minority" (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 87). The media's portrayal of hooligans and hooliganism effectively acts as an amplifier of public perception (Kerr, 1994), which often creates an echo chamber between itself and the then government's iron fist stance on tackling hooliganism (Lowerson, 2022). It is also fair to categorize the media as a securitizing agent.

Hooliganism was defined as an existential threat by the government and the media leading up to and after the Heysel Disaster. Hooliganism was portrayed as having both tangible (deaths, injuries, arrests, destruction of estates) and intangible (damaging to English football and England's image) consequences. It is worth noting that, despite the emphasis placed on securitizing football hooliganism, the phrase has never been properly defined as far as English legislation was concerned (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000), with the Parliament and the Court avoiding this discussion whilst frequently naming the accused hooligans (McArdle, 2000).

Damages caused by hooligans were often not only limited to the stadium, but also to the nearby pubs, shops, households, and even transit infrastructure that the fans travel on (Dunning et al., 1990). However, Dunning et al. (1990) revealed that football hooligans often have a certain honor among themselves, which draws them to identify and seek confrontations with opposing groups of hooligans instead of picking fights indiscriminately with any opposing fans. Football hooligans also have the habit of fighting at designated stands in the stadium in close proximity to opposing groups of hooligans, implying that they have no intention to purposefully drag normal football fans into their fights (Dunning et al., 1988). These phenomena are also supported by Kerr's (1994) interpretation of hooliganism, an act with the primary purpose of seeking thrill and excitement under a controlled level of violence, which can only be achieved in fights with other groups of hooligans to form a fair playing field.

Given how the English government and media have demonstrated their tendency to wish to tackle the existence of hooliganism as a whole, rather than the specific incidents of public disorders the hooligans may have caused (Lowerson, 2022), one could argue that it is the perception of public order that the securitization effort is trying to securitize, rather than the actual public disorders themselves. From the sensationalistic approach of how the media portrayed hooliganism, to the stigmatization of hooligans by the government (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000; Tsoukala, 2009), to the blaming of hooligans for destroying the image of English football, particularly as TV broadcast of



football games is popularized and as England were chasing after the hosting rights of EURO 1996 (Gibbons, 2016). There is a strong case for arguing that perception matters more than the subject.

The audience – the Parliament and the voters (or citizens)

During the post-Heysel days under the Thatcher administration, the Conservatives strongly advocated stricter social control (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000). The heavy clampdown on football hooligans was seen as a social symbol that the government was willing to go tough on all sources of public disorder, establishing an image of law and order above all else (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000). The families of the Hillsborough victims have challenged this view by proposing important changes that include even legal matters, to which the government has not agreed (Exemplar 1).

Exemplar 1: However the government rejects the families' proposals for a "Hillsborough law," that would enforce a duty of candour as a legal responsibility, and provide bereaved families with equal funding to public authorities for legal representation at inquests. (Conn & Davies, 2024)

This rhetoric was later proven by how the subsequent legislation from the government was primarily draconian measures to criminalize hooligans and restrict their access to football games, oftentimes with a disregard for the legislation's feasibility, their effectiveness in combating hooliganism, or sometimes both (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000). The most notorious example of all was the National Membership Scheme under the Football Spectators Act 1989 (1989), which was criticized for having no apparent impact on combating hooliganism (Hillsborough Stadium, Disaster Taylor Report, 1990), whilst establishing a level of control to match-goers that is borderline suppression to the public and served very little purpose other than furthering the government's political agenda (Lowerson, 2022; McArdle, 2000). As legislation was the primary vehicle of securitization, the Parliament of the United Kingdom, and by extension the voters who vote in the Parliament, would be the audience under ST, which was convinced to accept the need to tackle hooliganism with emergency actions.

Case study of Greece: securitization of hooliganism post-Kampanos' death

The securitizing actor/agent – the government and the media

The death of Alkis Kampanos shocked the Greek public, as it was alarming the way that the hooligans could attack and kill young Greeks without receiving any monitoring by the police forces, which made the government initiate a securitization process. After the killing of Alkis Kampanos on the 1st of



February 2022, the then Minister of Citizen Protection of Greece, Takis Theodorikakos, contacted an influential TV journalist, Kampourakis, and made clear that "no form of violence is tolerated. The rule of law protects all citizens. The Greek Police is doing its job" (Minocp. gov.gr, 2022a). In addition, the next day of the event, it was highlighted that there was a discussion with the Prime Minister, Kyriakos Mitsotakis, to be informed that the Greek police forces completed their duty by arresting the suspect for the killing of Kampanos, adding that there would be arrests and the legal procedures will be followed (Exemplar 2).

Exemplar 2: I want to express with all my heart my deepest condolences to the family of Alkis, who passed away so unfairly and prematurely. I know this does not ease the pain of his loved ones. At least justice will be served. (Minocp.gov.gr, 2022b)

In the coming days, Theodorikakos and other governmental politicians, including the Prime Minister, would make clear through statements, press releases, and appearances on TV news shows that there will be an end to the destructive violence that is threatening citizens' lives (Minocp.gov.gr, 2022c). The interesting fact was that despite these claims that the government would stop hooliganism and the recognition that hooliganism is a complex phenomenon associated with other illegal activities, such as drug trafficking, there was no concrete agenda on how this would happen (Minocp.gov.gr, 2022d). The not-so-harsh rhetoric changed in the coming days, with the relevant officials and the Minister of Civil Protection actively engaging with the media and announcing that the illegal activities would stop through the more aggressive monitoring of the police, especially on the football fan clubs that are connected with the violence and the teams must finally become accountable. The government's main goal was to stop hooliganism and encourage the return of families to the stadiums (Minocp.gov.gr, 2022, 2022e) (Exemplar 3).

Exemplar 3: Greek Police intensify their checks daily and close down illegal fan clubs. This reveals crimes such as drug dealing, gun possession, and more that have occurred in these clubs and brings all offenders to justice. (Minocp.gov.gr, 2022f)

Meanwhile, the news media started to depict hooliganism as a phenomenon that has become extremely dangerous in Greece through the construction of hatred between the rival teams that are putting lives in danger, supporting the idea of stricter regulations and monitoring of football fans (Psomiadis, 2022; Zisiadis, 2022). Moreover, the news media started releasing news articles urging to follow Thatcher's government and Taylor's approach after the Heysel disaster, pointing out that the UK is experiencing a healthy football culture. The articles urged for a stronger government and restrictions that might violate freedoms but would successfully stop hooliganism (Bakouli, 2022; Papageorgiou, 2022). As a result, the Mitsotakis administration announced on the 21st of February 2022 new initiatives to stop hooliganism

(emergency actions). The initiatives involved the closure of the fan clubs until July, the improvement of the CCTV in basketball and football stadiums for monitoring and identifying suspects, new training for the police forces, a closer monitoring of related activities, and a harsh criminal code (Iefimerida.gr, 2022).

Despite the efforts of the government and the media to support the idea that the existential threat of hooliganism must be tackled with emergency actions, the death of Michalis Katsouris on the 7th of August 2023, shook the perception regarding the government's efforts to eradicate hooliganism. As the police forces seemed to have allowed the Croatian hooligans to reach Greece's capital without supervision and kill the fan of AEK Athens FC, the reaction was more critical toward the government compared to the Kampanos death. Katsouris' death led the news media to focus once again on hooliganism and the need to be tackled, promoting even sensationalized news articles that included public rage not only toward the government but also regarding hooliganism (Kekesi, 2023). This time, criticism was harsher, underlying that there were no decisive actions against the hooligans, leaving once again hints for more aggressive and restrictive policies (Bilalis, 2023). News websites, including those of the public service broadcaster (ERT), repeatedly disseminated the need for an approach like Thatcher's government (Exemplar 4).

Exemplar 4: In less than a year, the Thatcher government managed to eradicate hooliganism without counting the political cost. Despite the belief of having a borderline dislike of football, the Iron Lady changed the mood in British stadiums. "Now there are no bars, fans don't enter the pitch, they don't clap, they don't even spit," says Mr. Stellas. (Tsakiri, 2023)

The Mitsotakis administration adopted more aggressive emergency actions and rhetoric when the 31-year-old policeman, Georgios Lyngeridis, was injured by a naval flare from an Olympiacos FC fan and eventually died at the end of December 2023. On the day of the death, the Minister of Civil Protection, with a public statement, called for a stop to the violence, leaving hints for a more effective agenda toward the dealing of hooliganism. Also, he pointed out that all those who participated in the lethal injury will be held accountable (Exemplar 5).

Exemplar 5: Let there be no one to support and silence the violence, morally, ideologically, or practically. The investigation into Georgios' murder will continue until we get to those who organized, coordinated, and armed everyone involved in the criminal attack that led to his death. (Minocp.gov.gr, 2023c)

The Prime Minister made similar aggressive statements, arguing that there was no turning back this time. Mitsotakis said that "he will go all the way and eradicate hooliganism from the stadiums, stressing that this is a commitment he made after the murder of the policeman Lyngeridis" (Amna.gr, 2024).



The audience - the citizens

Throughout a careful investigation of the citizens' reaction regarding the three cases of death due to hooliganism in Greece, it seems that the Greek citizens have accepted hooliganism as a threat after Alkis Kampanos' death, demanding a solution to the issue. It is worth mentioning that after Alkis' death, several protests were organized and initiatives were taken to keep his memory alive and turn the Aris fan into a symbol of injustice. Throughout the first demonstrations, on the online and offline media content, there was a demand to put the perpetrators in jail and for the state to take action to stop similar cases in the future. The main slogan connected with Alkis Kampanos was "Never Again," meaning there should be no more victims of hooliganism (Figure 1).

The media outlets paid attention to the citizens' and football fans' initiatives to make sure that Alkis and other victims of hooliganism would be remembered and not forgotten by covering these initiatives and disseminating articles that asked for actions to be taken urgently. Similar reactions and demands were made after Katsouris death. However, the citizens were more critical of the government, as the death of the AEK FC fan was an outcome of the Greek police's mismanagement. The period's discourse focused on the rage and cries for a solution and justice. In such an article, there was a focus on Katsouris' brother, who expressed intense dissatisfaction with how the case was handled: "We are completely disappointed with the turn of events. My mother has gone crazy with what she sees and hears. We did not expect this development at all" (Protothema.gr, 2023b).

Finally, the policeman's death continued to keep alive the idea that there must be an end to hooliganism, but the public seemed not to have such a strong belief in the governmental capabilities of tackling hooliganism and the violence in Greek football once and for all. Nevertheless, civil initiatives urged for harsher approaches to stop hooliganism, proving that the Greek public has accepted the existential threat that hooliganism poses to society but seems to have lost trust in governmental efficiency and will.

Discussion and conclusions

The current paper investigated the media content presenting hooliganism as an existential (securitization process) in the public discourse and assessed its effect through the study of the cases of the post-Heysel Disaster in England and the post-Kampanos Death in Greece. It proved that a successful securitization process does not mean an ideal tackling of the referent object designated as an existential threat. More specifically, as aforementioned, England/UK is often seen as the pinnacle of dealing with hooliganism. Not only is this sentiment echoed by the Greek media but also by the European



Figure 1. The front page of Thessaloniki's sports newspaper shows the protest for the one-year commemoration of Alkis Kampanos' death. The newspaper highlights the slogan "never again" ("ΠΟΤΕ ΞΑΝΑ" in Greek).

footballing community, such as legendary footballer Marco van Basten, in the face of the chaos caused by Ajax-associated hooligans in September 2023 (Walker & Young, 2023). However, despite the reputation of success and fulfilling all categories under ST, this does not mean that it has been successfully resolved.

Regarding the study's research question, the issue is that hooliganism is still very much alive in England/UK. The most common metrics used to verify the decline in hooliganism are football-related arrests and football banning orders, which the United Kingdom Home Office publishes (Green & Simmons, 2015; Lowerson, 2022). However, the Home Office's statistics have been criticized as vague and inconsistent, with the data collected and presented often being incomplete, as well as the arrest numbers having no direct correlation to the number of convictions, thus having very little implication on the criminality of those who were arrested (Lowerson, 2022). Whilst a loose relationship

between the decline in arrest numbers since the introduction of football banning orders is found (Green & Simmons, 2015), the decrease in arrest numbers may also be a result of the more widespread distribution of CCTV and the subsequent changes in policing styles (Cashmore & Dixon, 2024; Hopkins & Hamilton-Smith, 2014). As such, the claim that hooliganism in England is on the decline based on available numbers is shaky, showing a tendency that governments, like in the Greek case, pay more attention to building and communicating an ideal image of themselves and their actions than a more realistic one.

Moreover, there is a strong claim that hooliganism in England was never tackled, but merely displaced. Whilst massive public disorder related to football at the highest level of club competition in England has not been seen in recent years, at least not to the level of the tragedies in Heysel and Hillsborough (Cashmore & Dixon, 2024), the issue may simply have been gentrified by the skyrocketing prices of Premier League games, the highest level of professional club football in England. The observation of increased football banning orders issued in relation to lower league English games (Lowerson, 2022) and statistical analysis demonstrate that hooliganism incidents are displaced down the football pyramid (Green & Simmons, 2015).

Although the waters in the higher club-level competition in England have been calm compared to Greece, the same cannot be said about the national side of the competition. Reviews of the Euro 2020 final, which was held in Wembley Stadium, London, have revealed that the fan disorder caused by ticketless England fans almost led to deaths (MacInnes, 2021). In the UK, like the Greek case, we see that there are consistent violent events connected to hooliganism despite the restrictions and aggressive policies. Adding to these problems, the public discourse fails to provide a complete picture of the controversies regarding football. For instance, in the Greek case, despite the known political clientelism, the controversial activities of the owners' football clubs, the financial dependency of the football teams on TV and betting companies, and the accusations of illegal activities, including match-fixing (Anagnostopoulos & Senaux, 2011; Manoli et al., 2019), there is a lack of such a public discussion focusing on these issues.

Also, the media coverage does not focus on presenting a more complex picture of hooliganism. Therefore, it is unsurprising that Greece, like other countries, struggles to deal with hooliganism. Hooliganism, even in the UK, is alive, but it seems that it has passed as successful in the public discourse without necessarily being true, sparking debates within academia (Cashmore & Dixon, 2024; Grodecki et al., 2024).

The Greek media seems to act as a tool for personal ambitions rather than investigating corruption and the socio-political issues related to football. In addition, the Greek media system has created mechanisms for capturing the media that do not allow journalists to report events and take a stance. Under



the Mitsotakis administration, the governmental role in maintaining such a problematic industry seems to have worsened, intensifying the already powerful relationships amongst the state representatives and businessmen keen on owning media outlets and football clubs (Karyotakis, 2024, 2025; Nevradakis, 2024; Papathanassopoulos et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the new norm promoted by sports organizations and businesses that dictates a nonpolitical coverage of sports has pressured journalists not to report misconduct and shady behaviors. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt a more critical socio-political approach to what is happening in the field (Broussard, 2020, 2022; Burroughs et al., 2023).

Regarding the securitization measures themselves, the legislation, in some cases, the Public General Acts themselves, missed the mark when tackling hooliganism. One example was the Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985 (Sporting Events (Control of Alcohol etc.) Act 1985, 1985), which restricted alcohol consumption in football stadiums, later materializing into alcohol being banned from the seats and stands of stadiums. This was pushed through despite having no empirical evidence between hooliganism and alcohol consumption, and this does very little to limit fans from drinking en route to the stadium (McArdle, 2000). Furthermore, information about suspected individuals was also shared internationally with foreign jurisdictions in times of international competition (Tsoukala, 2009).

These measures can be seen as highly concerning. The conception of the football banning order itself is directly at odds with the notion of innocent until proven guilty. Whilst being prosecuted over an arrest is one thing, imposing restrictions and punishments on an individual for a crime that may or may not have happened is a heavy infringement on one's civil liberty (Tsoukala, 2009). The infringement is worsened when an international tournament is involved, partly because the sharing of information of suspected individuals with foreign authorities is legally ambiguous at best, and partly because the restriction placed on the individual, preventing them from leaving their home country or visiting the country where the tournament is held, is not only disproportionately harsh, but also went beyond the scope of "football" or "hooliganism" (Tsoukala, 2009).

The governments seemed to securitize hooliganism and present it as an urgent matter that must be tackled without considering the issue's complexity. As it has been pointed out, the Greek government focused more on banning participation and imposing restrictions that are less effective than they are being presented in the public discourse. Thus, the study shows that despite the successful securitization, the threat is being used for restricting freedoms and human rights rather than actually dealing with the violence in football, which has been pointed out by similar research in the past (Divišová, 2019; Lee Ludvigsen, 2018, 2020; Smolík & Đorđević, 2023). In the examined cases,



successful securitization does not guarantee success in dealing with the phenomenon but secures the public's attention.

The most alarming aspect of England's securitization of hooliganism, which was also followed in the Greek case, is not the measures themselves but the mentality that hooliganism has effectively become a heavily stigmatizing phrase that was thrown around by the media, the government officials, and the court alike (McArdle, 2000). The "h-word" effectively becomes a dehumanizing tool that allows for the public and policymakers alike to treat hooligans as a plague that should be contained at all costs, bypassing the understanding of the complex sociological roots of hooliganism (Dunning et al., 1990), the realization that local and regional political and religious conflicts often play into the confrontation between hooligan groups (Dunning et al., 2002; Finn & Giulianotti, 1998; Giulianotti, 1999), or any attempts of recognizing that each hooligan is different, just as each individual is different (Kerr, 1994). Portraying someone or a social group as a hooligan(s) seems to have such a negative connotation that justifies severe rights restrictions and dismissive behavior (Harris et al., 1996; Lowerson, 2022; Porto, 1998; Tsoukala, 2009).

Regarding the paper's limitation, the qualitative approach and focus were based on the case studies of the UK and Greece, as in the latter's media content, the UK is constantly presented as the best example of dealing with hooliganism. Researching other case studies around the globe would provide more relevant insights. Also, other methodological approaches, such as interviews, focus groups, and surveys, would be able to shed light on the public's and experts' perceptions regarding the success or not of tackling hooliganism.

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Appendix



Table A1. The study's news media and articles for the Greek case.

Name of News Outlet	Number of Articles (Kampanos)	Number of Articles (Katsouris)	Number of Articles (Lyngeridis)
aegeanews.gr	0	0	1
Aftodioikisi.gr	3	3	1
agriniopress.gr	0	1	1
Alfavita.gr	2	1	0
alphanews.live	0	3	1
antenna.gr	1	0	0
argolikeseidhseis.gr	0	1	0
athensmagazine.gr	0	15	1
athensvoice.gr	4	2	0
attica24.gr	0	2	0
avgi.gr	2	3	0
palla.com.cy	0	0	1
bigpost.gr	0	0	1
oloko.gr	0	0	1
Cityportal.gr	1	0	0
CNN.gr	6	4	1
creta24.gr	2	0	0
cretapost.gr	1	0	0
cyprustimes.com	0	1	0
debater.gr	0	1	0
diaforetiko.gr	0	0	1
dikastiko.gr	0	0	1
dikastikoreportaz.gr	0	1	1
dimokratia.gr	0	1	1
Onews	6	4	0
Documento	3	2	1
efsyn.gr	0	0	1
egnomi.gr	0	1	0
eidisis 247.gr	0	1	0
ekirikas.gr	0	1	0
eleftherostypos.gr	4	1	3
e-maistros.gr	0	1	0
emakedonia.gr	0	1	0
Enikos.gr	7	2	8
enwsi.gr	0	9	0
epirusonline.gr	1	0	0
epoli.gr	0	0	1
ertnews.gr	6	3	0
espressonews.gr	1	3 4	1
	1	0	0
esquire.com.gr			
ethnos.gr	6	2	1
lash.gr	0	0	1
lynews.gr	0	0	1
osonline.gr	1	0	0
Gazzetta.gr	3	5	1
gnomip.gr	1	0	0
yrtimes.gr	1	2	1
iellasjournal.gr	0	1	1
nellasultra.gr	0	1	0
nuffingtonpost.gr	1	1	0
apopsi.gr	0	0	1
efimerida.gr	21	15	4
eidiseis.gr	5	0	2
merisia.gr	1	0	1
n.gr	6	9	7
ndicator.gr	0	2	0
ntronews.gr	0	1	0

(Continued)



Table A1. (Continued).

Name of News Outlet	Number of Articles (Kampanos)	Number of Articles (Katsouris)	Number of Articles (Lyngeridis)
nVeria.gr	1	0	0
irafina.gr	0	2	0
jenny.gr	0	2	0
karvasaras.gr	0	1	0
Kathimerini.gr	4	3	0
kefaloniamagazine.gr	0	0	1
kerkidasport.gr	1	0	0
klik.gr	0	0	1
korinthostv.gr	0	0	1
koutipandoras.gr	0	2	0
amiareport.gr	Ō	1	0
aosnews.gr	2	0	0
Larissanet.gr	3	0	1
lawandorde.gr	0	0	4
liberal.gr	0	1	1
3	0	4	0
libre.gr			
Lifo.gr	21	13	4
ykavitos.gr	0	2	0
madata.gr	0	1	0
marieclaire.gr	0	1	0
megatv.com	2	0	0
MissBloom.gr	1	0	0
mixanitouxronou.gr	1	1	0
mononews.gr	1	0	3
Naftemporiki	1	1	5
neakriti.gr	1	0	1
neolaia.gr	0	1	0
newmoney.gr	1	1	0
newpost.gr	0	2	5
News247.gr	17	2	2
newsbeast.gr	0	4	3
Newsbomb.gr	9	15	3
newsbreak.gr	1	1	2
Newsit.gr	24	7	6
nomisma.com.cy	1	0	0
notopress.gr	0	1	0
Oneman.gr	1	0	0
onprevezanews.gr	1	0	0
	1	2	
Onsports.gr			1
pagenews.gr	0	0	1
Parallaximag.gr	2	0	0
Parapolitika.gr	2	1	4
paraskhnio.gr	0	6	0
Patris.gr	1	0	0
patrisnews.com	1	2	1
Pavlosmelas.gr	3	0	0
pelop.gr	0	1	2
philenews.com	0	1	0
politic.gr	0	1	0
pontonews.gr	1	0	0
powergame.gr	0	0	1
prasinoforos.gr	0	1	0
pronews.gr	Ō	2	1
proson.gr	1	0	0
protagon.gr	0	0	1
protagon.gr protathlima.cyprustimes.	0	1	0
com	V	ı	U
Proto Thema	25	19	17
		4	0
Reader.gr reporter.com.cy	6 1	4 0	0
	ı	U	U

(Continued)



Table A1. (Continued).

Name of News Outlet	Number of Articles (Kampanos)	Number of Articles (Katsouris)	Number of Articles (Lyngeridis)
seleo.gr	0	2	0
sinidisi.gr	0	0	1
Skai.gr	8	2	8
slpress.gr	0	1	0
Sport24	3	0	4
Sportal.gr	2	1	0
sportday.gr	2	0	0
sport-fm.com.cy	0	0	1
sport-fm.gr	0	2	0
Sportime.gr	2	0	0
Star.gr	4	1	1
super-fm.gr	1	0	0
tanea.gr	5	0	0
tempo24.news	0	0	1
thebest.gr	1	0	0
thepressproject.gr	1	0	0
thestival.gr	1	0	1
thetoc.gr	15	9	3
thriassio.gr	0	1	0
tinealarissa.gr	0	0	1
tlife.gr	0	0	1
topontiki.gr	1	5	2
tovima.gr	4	7	1
tvxs.gr	0	1	0
typosthes.gr	0	3	1
usay.gr	0	1	0
Verianet.gr	1	0	0
Vice.com	1	0	0
vimaorthodoxias.gr	0	0	1
Voria.gr	8	0	1
Zappit.gr	2	2	1
zarpanews.gr	1	0	0
znews.gr	0	0	1
zougla.gr	0	2	1



Table A2. The study's news media and articles for the UK case.

Name of News Outlet	Number of Articles (Hillsborough)	Number of Articles (Heysel)
Al Jazeera	1	0
Anadolu Ajansi	0	1
AP News	1	0
BBC	34	3
Belfast News Letter	1	0
BreakingNews.ie	1	0
Byline Times	1	0
Canadiandimension.com	1	0
Channel 4	2	0
China.org	1	0
Church Times	2	0
Civil Service World	1	0
CnbC	1	0
CNN	1	0
College of Policing	1	0
Counterfire.org	1	0
Crown Prosecution Service (CPS)	1	1
Daily Cannon	2	0
Daily Express	3	0
Daily Mail	22	4
ESPN	2	0
Financial Times	1	0
Football Italia	0	3
Football365	1	0
FotMob	1	0
Goal.com	3	2
Gov.uk	5	0
Guernsey Press	8	1
Hankyoreh	1	0
in-cyprus.philenews.com	0	1
Irish Examiner	1	0
ITV.com	15	0
Jersey Evening Post	2	0
Juvefc.com	0	2
Juventus.com	0	1
Lbc.co.uk	5	0
Le Monde	1	0
LeftLion	1	0
Libertyhumanrights.org.uk	1	0
Liverpool Echo	9	3
Liverpool Express	2	0
Liverpool FC	10	3
Liverpool World	1	0
London Evening Standard	1	0
Luton Town	1	0
Manchester Evening News	1	0
Manutd.com	1	0
MerseyNewsLive	1	0
Metro.co.uk National Health Executive	5	1
	1	0
National Police Chief's Council Ndtv.com	1	0
	1	0
Nottingham World Police Professional	1 1	0 0
Premier League	1	0
Pune Times Mirror	1	0
Reuters	1	1
Screen Daily	0	1
Sky News	7	0
Sky Sports	4	0
Socialist Party	1	0
SportsJOE.ie	1	0
эрогаловле	ı	U

(Continued)



Table A2. (Continued).

Name of News Outlet	Number of Articles (Hillsborough)	Number of Articles (Heysel)
Sportstar	1	0
Sunday World	1	1
TalkSPORT	3	0
The Anfield Wrap	1	0
The Brussels Times	0	1
The Celtic Star	1	0
The conversation	2	0
The Guardian	20	0
The Guide Liverpool	3	0
The Herald ZW	1	0
The i Paper	1	0
The Independent	12	0
The Indian Express	1	0
The Mirror	5	0
The New York Times	18	2
The Star	8	0
The Sun	2	0
The Telegraph	2	0
The Times	5	2
theScore.com	1	0
This is Anfield	17	1
Times of India	1	0
TRE.ie	1	0
Tribunemag	1	0
Tribunemag.co.uk	1	0
World Soccer Talk	2	0
WRAL.com	1	0
Yahoo News UK	2	0