

CEVRO UNIVERZITA

Title: Football & Politics (KOMBI)

Instructor: Jakub Wondreys (jakub.wondreys@cevro.cz)

Date & Time: Mon 17:00-18:20

Room: d223



Brazil captain Sócrates at the 1986 World Cup with a headband “Yes to Love, No to Terror,” a response to the recent US bombing of Libya. Photograph: Bongarts/Getty Images

Course introduction & Objectives

“I just happened to be good at football, which gave me entrance to a very different and privileged environment...If people do not have the power to say things, then I will say it for them. While I was a footballer, my legs amplified my voice.”

– Sócrates Brasileiro Sampaio de Souza Vieira de Oliveira

Football is the most popular and widely played sport in the world, and its social, cultural, and political relevance is unparalleled. Politics and sport have always been closely intertwined, and given football’s central role in many societies, this connection is particularly pronounced. Political actors routinely use football for symbolic, diplomatic, or strategic purposes, while football itself shapes political identities, national narratives, and even political conflicts. Understanding these dynamics is essential for grasping the broader political significance of sport. This course provides an introduction to the key intersections between football and politics from a comparative and historical perspective. Students will explore how football influences political processes, how political systems engage with and instrumentalize football, and how issues such as nationalism, identity, social movements, globalization, and soft power manifest through the game.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Explain how political actors use football domestically and internationally;
- Identify the political dimensions, implications, and consequences of football at local, national, and global levels;
- Apply core political science concepts, such as authoritarianism, nationalism, democracy, and political communication, to the study of football;
- Analyze contemporary and historical cases where football and politics intersect, including mega-events, protest movements, international diplomacy, and regime legitimation;
- Demonstrate a more comprehensive understanding of politics through the lens of sport.

The course will combine lectures, discussions, case studies, and media analysis. No prior knowledge of football is required; students of all backgrounds are welcome.

Readings and other resources

You are expected to complete all required readings and to listen to or watch the audio and video materials listed in the syllabus (according to the course schedule below). The only exceptions are materials explicitly marked as “optional.” These optional resources are intended to help you better understand the required readings, deepen your knowledge of specific topics, and potentially inspire ideas for your final paper. Failure to complete the mandatory materials prior to class will be evident in limited participation during class discussions. You should engage with the assigned materials in the order in which they appear in the course schedule.

There are two required readings that you are expected to buy or borrow (either in physical or online form):

Kuper, S (2020). *Soccer against the Enemy: How the World’s Most Popular Sport Starts and Fuels Revolutions and Keeps Dictators in Power*. New York: Bold Type Books, 3rd edition

Montague, J (2021). *1312: Among the Ultras: A journey with the world’s most extreme fans*. London: Ebury Press

All other **required** texts and additional resources will be **shared** with you and accessible either directly through the syllabus or **via the shared drive**. The shared drive also includes materials that can be a **valuable resource for improving your academic writing skills**, and you are encouraged to consult these when working on your written assignments.

Classroom Attendance and Activity

This class will only meet twice this semester. The attendance of the first class on 20.2.2026 is not mandatory, however, **it is strongly encouraged**. Students learn much more when they come to class and participate in the class discussions. Moreover, participation is part of your final grade and will be based *primarily* on your in-class performance (see below).

You are required to attend the second class on 27.3.2026 to fulfill your presentation assignment (see below). Absences are only excused in cases of a documented acute medical issue or another relevant, valid reason (in these cases, we will find an adequate replacement date solution).

Course Evaluation

Participation (15%)

This course will require a great deal of discussion and active listening. **Simply showing up to class does not constitute participation.** Your participation grade will be evaluated based on your ability to draw upon insights from the readings, the depth of the thoughtfulness of your questions/comments, and your activeness in class. **If you do not attend, you cannot participate.**

Presentation (35%)

Each student is required to give **one short in-class presentation** during the **second course meeting (27.3.2026)**. You will choose a **topic and case study (or cases)** that relates to the core focus of the course. Your presentation topic should also serve as the **basis for your final essay** (see below).

You may draw inspiration from the assigned readings listed in the syllabus, but you are also free to choose another relevant topic, as long as it fits the course's thematic scope. The goal of the presentation is not to cover everything, but to **identify and explain the key dynamics** of your chosen case(s) in a clear and structured way—and to help you develop a strong foundation for your final paper.

Time structure (20 minutes total):

- **10–15 minutes** presentation
- **5–10 minutes** feedback and discussion

Final Essay (50%)

In the final essay (**2,500–3,000 words**), you will use a **case study (or multiple cases)** to respond to **some (not necessarily all)** of the key questions of the course. Unlike the presentation, the essay should go beyond description and develop a **clear, well-supported argument**.

Possible (interrelated) research questions include:

- How does politics affect football, and vice versa?
- What forms do these interactions usually take?
- Is football a useful tool for politicians to advance their agenda—and is this good or bad?
- Should footballers (as public figures) and clubs/governing bodies (as influential institutions) be politically active?
- Is the political activism of these actors good or bad for democracy?

You are expected to support your claims with evidence, using **reliable academic and other credible sources**, all cited properly. You should use the **compulsory readings** for context and comparison, and you are encouraged to draw on the **optional/additional readings** as inspiration and as a starting point for further research. In addition, using relevant outside sources (e.g., academic books/articles, reputable reports) is expected.

You are encouraged to **consult your topic choice with the instructor in advance**. If you are unsure what to focus on, I am happy to suggest possible topics/cases.

Late submissions will be penalized (1% of the overall course grade per day late).

Grading:

A.	90 – 100 points	D.	60 – 69 points
B.	80 – 89 points	E.	50 – 59 points
C.	70 – 79 points	F.	less than 50 points

Specific Course Rules

ChatGPT / AI Tools

You may use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT) to develop ideas, get started on a project, or improve your language and writing. However, you are **fully responsible** for any AI-generated material you incorporate into your course assignments. If you include AI-generated content, you must **cite it like any other source**. All information used in assignments must be **verified**, ideas must be properly attributed, and factual claims must be accurate.

You may NOT use AI to write your assignment for you. Submitting an assignment that is wholly or substantially AI-generated constitutes academic misconduct and will result in **FAILING the course.**

Disclaimer

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course; deviations announced to the class by the instructor may be necessary.

Course Schedule and Assignments

1. Introduction

Listening and Watching:

Kupper, S. (2021). Football and Politics (RADIKAL podcast). Available at: <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1134467/9589770>

DW Kick off (2023). WHAT Argentina tells us about the power of football. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Yfm3ems1ow>

2. Football & Politics: Three Discourses

Readings:

Grix, J., James, M. The politicisation of sport and the principle of political neutrality: a contradiction in terms?. *Int Sports Law J* 24, 68–77 (2024).

Orwell, G. (1945) The Sporting Spirit. *Tribune*, December. <https://www.orwellfoundation.com/the-orwell-foundation/orwell/essays-and-other-works/the-sporting-spirit/>

Bar-On, T. (2017) Three Soccer Discourses. *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 188-203.

OPTIONAL

Luckhurst, T. (2019). Honduras v El Salvador: The football match that kicked off a war June 27. *BBC News* <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-48673853>

ABC News (2001). Game of Soccer Gets Nobel Peace Nomination'. January 23 <https://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=81640&page=1>

Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. London: Lawrence and Wishart.

Tuathail, G. (2003). Thinking Critically about Geopolitics. In Tuathail G., Dalby, S., and Routledge P. *The Geopolitics Reader*. London: Taylor and Francis, 1-12.

3. Democracy, Civil Society & Football

Readings:

Lago, I., Lago-Peñas, C. & Lago-Peñas, S. (2016) Democracy and Football. *Social Science Quarterly*, 97: 1282-1294. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12281>

Butterworth, M.L. (2007) The Politics of the Pitch: Claiming and Contesting Democracy Through the Iraqi National Soccer Team, *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4:2, 184-203, DOI: [10.1080/14791420701296554](https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420701296554)

Mudde, C. (2025) Soccer as Civil Society. In Bowman, K. & Boyd, J.B. (eds.). *Soccer, Globalization, and Innovation: The Beautiful Game in the 21st Century*. London: Routledge, 23-37.

Knijnik, J. (2014) Playing for freedom: Sócrates, *futebol-arte* and democratic struggle in Brazil, *Soccer & Society*, 15:5, 635-654, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2014.912014](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.912014)

OPTIONAL

Simón, J.A. & García-Martí, C. (2022) ‘Gold slaves’: unionism and football in Spain during the democratic transition, *Sport in Society*, 25:11, 2268-2283, DOI: [10.1080/17430437.2021.1932821](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2021.1932821)

Diamond, L. (1990) Three paradoxes of democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 1(3), 48-60.

Schmitter, P.C., & Karl, T.L. (1991). What Democracy Is. . . and Is Not. *Journal of Democracy* 2(3), 75-88. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.1991.0033>.

Morlino, L. (2004) What is a 'good' democracy?. *Democratization*, 11(5), 10-32, DOI: [10.1080/13510340412331304589](https://doi.org/10.1080/13510340412331304589)

4. Authoritarianism, Totalitarianism, Sportwashing & Football

Watch:

DW Kick off! (2022). WHY football is complicit in Putin's war.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2dXvvZU77Ao&list=PLeEtWQYUQ8QdZLq0TTICq95sETSog_4IW&index=17

Is Trump giving the FIFA World Cup a MAGA makeover? | BBC Americast.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y8keOLTGAZA> (alternatively listen on: <https://www.bbc.com/audio/play/w3ct8byt>)

Readings:

Adam, R. (2020) Football and authoritarianism in twentieth century Romania: between propaganda and subversion, *Soccer & Society*, 21:6, 657-666, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2020.1775043](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2020.1775043)

Bromberger, C. (2020) Football and the authoritarian regime in Iran, *Soccer & Society*, 21:6, 692-698, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2020.1775046](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2020.1775046)

Ganji, S. K. (2022). How Qatar Became a World Leader in Sportswashing, *Journal of Democracy*, November. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/how-qatar-became-a-world-leader-in-sportswashing/>

OPTIONAL

Irak, D. (2020) Football in Turkey during the Erdoğan regime, *Soccer & Society*, 21:6, 680-691, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2020.1775045](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2020.1775045)

Bar-On, T (2018) Reflections on soccer, sovereignty and the state of exception. *Soccer & Society*, 19:4, 534-559, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2016.1221824](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2016.1221824)

Necsutu, M (2021). Football as Tool of Soft Power in Hungary's Hands. *Balkan Insight*. September 27 <https://balkaninsight.com/2021/09/27/football-as-tool-of-soft-power-in-hungarys-hands/>

Zidan, K. (2017). [Return of football to Aleppo highlights regime's political theatrics | openDemocracy](https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/return-of-football-to-aleppo-highlights-regime-s-political-theatrics/)

Glasius, M. (2018) What authoritarianism is ... and is not: a practice perspective, *International Affairs*, 94 (3), 515–533, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iyy060>

Lipset, S. M. (1959). Democracy and Working-Class Authoritarianism. *American Sociological Review*, 24(4), 482–501. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2089536>

Levitsky, S., & Way, L. A. (2002). The rise of competitive authoritarianism. *Journal of Democracy*, 13(2), 51-65.

Watch:

DW Kick off! (2024a). HOW Germany's Nazis hijacked football.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlmPyCchrXM>

DW Kick off! (2024b). WHY did Newcastle fans welcome Saudi Arabia?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CtNX1QSztYc>

5. Nationalism, Identity, & Football

Readings:

Duerr, G.M.E. (2017) Civic integration or ethnic segregation? Models of ethnic and civic nationalism in club football/soccer, *Soccer & Society*, 18:2-3, 204-217, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2016.1166767](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2016.1166767)

Hassan, D. & Ferguson, K. (2019) Still as divided as ever? Northern Ireland, football and identity 20 years after the Good Friday Agreement, *Soccer & Society*, 20:7-8, 1071-1083, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2019.1680504](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2019.1680504)

Palmer, C. (2009) Soccer and the politics of identity for young Muslim refugee women in South Australia, *Soccer & Society*, 10:1, 27-38

Molnar, G., & Whigham, S. (2021). Radical right populist politics in Hungary: Reinventing the Magyars through sport. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 56(1), 133-148.

OPTIONAL

Özvatan, Ö. (2019). [Radical-right backlash against Games of Belonging: the case of Mesut Özil | openDemocracy](#)

Krasnoff, L. S. (2017). Devolution of *Les Bleus* as a Symbol of a Multicultural French History. *Soccer & Society*, 18(2-3), 311-319.

Anderson, B. (1991) *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso.

Mylonas, H. & Tudor, M. (2023). *Varieties of Nationalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

6. Xenophobia, (Anti-)Racism & Football

Watch:

DW Kick off! (2024). WHY we see black and white footballers differently.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3RyBrRKqL0c>

Readings:

Branek, D. (2019). Far-Right Extremism Divides Germany's Most Notorious Soccer Derby. *The Nation*. November 10 <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/berlin-wall-germany-soccer/>

Mashigo, P., van Sterkenburg, J., De la Hera, T., & Ferreira Goncalves, J. F. (2025). One rotten apple or a rotten tree: football leaders' perceptions of racism in European football. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 48(5), 1087–1109.

Horvath, K. & Rosenberg, J. (2010). EUROSCHOOLS 2008: The Difficult Relationship of Culture, Nation and Anti-Racism in UEFA's Campaign Work. *Soccer & Society*, 11(6), 829-842.

Dixon, K., Lowe, J., and Gibbons, T. (2016) Show Racism The Red Card: potential barriers to the effective implementation of the anti-racist message, *Soccer & Society*, 17:1, 140-154, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2014.919280](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.919280)

OPTIONAL

Tamir, I. & Bernstein, A. (2015) Do they even know the national anthem? Minorities in service of the flag – Israeli Arabs in the national football team, *Soccer & Society*, 16:5-6, 745-764, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2014.963316](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2014.963316)

Kassimeris, C. (2011) Fascism, separatism and the ultras: discrimination in Italian football, *Soccer & Society*, 12:5, 677-688, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2011.599586](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2011.599586)

Kassimeris, C., Lawrence, S. & Pipini, M (2022). Racism in Football. *Soccer & Society*, 23(8), 824-833.

Moran, R (2000). Racism in Football: A Victim's Perspective. *Soccer & Society*, 1(1), 190-200.

Gender, Sexuality, & Football

Readings:

Caudwell, J. (2011) Gender, feminism and football studies, *Soccer & Society*, 12:3, 330-344, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2011.568099](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2011.568099)

Azad, C. (2024) Instagram as a tool of 'social navigation': women's soccer in the Islamic Republic of Iran - between censorship and (r)evolution, *Soccer & Society*, 25:2, 240-255, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2023.2265198](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2023.2265198)

Bertho, B., Grange-Omokaro, F., Douna, I. M., & Malatesta, D. (2024) Playing football in Cameroon as a girl: a match for equality, *Soccer & Society*, 25:2, 225-239, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2023.2265197](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2023.2265197)

Cashmore, E. and Cleland, J. (2012), Fans, homophobia and masculinities in association football: evidence of a more inclusive environment. *The British Journal of Sociology*, 63: 370-387.

OPTIONAL

Cashmore E., Dixon, K. & Cleland, J. (2023) Why are There STILL No Gay Professional Association Football Players in Men's Major Leagues? Revisiting the Views of Football Fans in the United Kingdom, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 70:8, 1653-1673, DOI: [10.1080/00918369.2022.2040927](https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2022.2040927)

Dixon, K., Cleland, J., & Cashmore E. (2023) Banter and the rise of LGBTQ+ awareness in football cultures: a bourdieusian approach, *Soccer & Society*, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2023.2288835](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2023.2288835)

Fossard, B. (2024) Women footballers in Indochina: a place in the stadium?, *Soccer & Society*, 25:2, 161-173, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2023.2265199](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2023.2265199)

Eskandari, Z.T., (2022) 'We support football in our heart': female football fandom in Iran, *Soccer & Society*, 23:3, 258-270, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2022.2037208](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2022.2037208)

Magrath, R. (2021). Gay Male Football Fans' Experiences: Authenticity, Belonging and Conditional Acceptance. *Sociology*, 55(5), 978-994.

Soccer against the Enemy

Readings:

Kuper, S. *Soccer against the Enemy*. **Chapters: 1 to 21**

OPTIONAL

Kuper, S. *Soccer against the Enemy*. Postscript

Fans: Political Activism & Protest

Readings:

Montague, J. *1312*: [Introduction, Chapters 8, 9, 11, 12](#)

Gilbert, A. (2018) *Tri vjere, jedna nacija, država Tuzla!* Football fans, political protest and the right to the city in postsocialist Bosnia–Herzegovina, *Soccer & Society*, 19:3, 373-399, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2017.1335487](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2017.1335487)

Watch

COPA90 (2020). Ultras, Billionaires, and Protests: What English football must learn from Germany. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D5BqHiLFW00>

OPTIONAL

Montague, J. *1312*: Chapters 10, 13, 14

Irak, D. (2018) 'Shoot some pepper gas at me!' football fans vs. Erdoğan: organized politicization or reactive politics?, *Soccer & Society*, 19:3, 400-417, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2017.1333675](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2017.1333675)

Tuastad, D. (2014) From football riot to revolution. The political role of football in the Arab world, *Soccer & Society*, 15:3, 376-388, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2012.753541](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2012.753541)

Benkwitz, A, and Molnar, G. (2012) Interpreting and exploring football fan rivalries: an overview, *Soccer & Society*, 13:4, 479-494, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2012.677224](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2012.677224)

Kennedy, D. and Kennedy, P. (2013) Introduction: reflections on the context of 'Left Wing' fan cultures, *Soccer & Society*, 14:2, 117-131, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2013.77646](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2013.77646)

Merkel, U. (2012) Football fans and clubs in Germany: conflicts, crises and compromises, *Soccer & Society*, 13:3, 359-376, DOI: [10.1080/14660970.2012.655505](https://doi.org/10.1080/14660970.2012.655505)

Watch

DW Kick off! (2020). HOW German fans want to transform football. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d23RAPGXr8>

Fans: Hooligans & Ultras

Readings:

Montague, J. *1312*: Chapters 2, 4, 5

Spaaij, R., & Testa, A. (2016). Football Hooliganism. In Hughson J., Moore K., Spaaij R. & Maguire, J. (eds.) *Routledge Handbook of Football Studies*. London: Routledge, pp. 364-374.

Testa, A. (2009). The ultraS: an emerging social movement?. *Review of European Studies*, 1(2), 54-63.

Watch

DW Kick off! (2019). Policing Football in Germany: Are fans mistreated?. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K80aYtIAsXA>

OPTIONAL

Montague, J. *1312*: Chapters 1, 3, 6, 7

Barrie, T. (2020). 'The far right has always been interested in football as a way to recruit': James Montague on going Among The Ultras. *GQ*. March 13 <https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/sport/article/james-montague-interview-football-ultras>

Pankowski, R., Witkowski, P. (2023). "Death to enemies of the fatherland": Violent Right-Wing Extremism infiltration of the milieu of Polish football hooligans. In Kuczyński, P. (ed.) *The Virus of Radicalization*. Warsaw: Collegium Civitas. 159-187. Available at <https://civitas.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VoR-Pankowski-Witkowski-Violent-Right-Wing-Extremism-infiltration-07.pdf>

Spaaij, R., and Viñas, C. (2005). Passion, politics and violence: A socio-historical analysis of Spanish ultras, *Soccer & Society*, 6:1, 79-96, DOI: [10.1080/146609705200033703](https://doi.org/10.1080/146609705200033703)

Testa, A. (2022). Waves of Extremism: An Applied Ethnographic Analysis of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Football Terraces. *Frontiers in Sports and Active Living* 4. <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fspor.2022.770441>

Listening & Watching:

Montague, J. (2020). Ultras (RADIKAAL podcast). Available at <https://www.buzzsprout.com/1134467/4006796>

COPA90 (2021). And We Tell You: The Origins of Italian Ultras. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EOsxCWAbxA>

HOOLIGANS: Foreign Fields EP 3/3 | BBC Documentary <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E-txeBksiDk&rco=1>

Donal MacIntyre: Infiltrating The Chelsea Headhunters | BBC Documentary | 10/11/1999 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I-TrNXmjQB0>