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Alcohol and violent behavior among football spectators: An empirical assessment of Brazilian's criminalization

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between alcohol and the violent behavior, expressed as branches of hooliganism, is receiving considerable theoretical attention in social and psychological literature along the past decades while empirical researches on that matter are taken for granted. The falling in appreciate such empirical approach relies on the difficult it requires to compare of two different realities; one with alcohol intake and another without it, in order to evaluate whether it might drive sport spectators into a violent behavior, holding everything else constant. This work provides such robust statistical assessment taking into consideration a Brazilian state law 13748 of April 2009, which prohibited the sale of alcoholic beverages in Pernambuco's football stadiums. We consider the effectiveness of alcohol intervention on hooligan behavior by means of non-parametric test and a autoregressive moving average series, resorting to over ten years of data (before and during the criminalization) with regard aggression and unruly conduct committed by fans before in football matches within 3 miles from the stadium. Our results bring support to the decision of Pernambuco State Legislature to abolish in January 2016 the law in favor of the legalization of alcoholic beverages sales.

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1. Introduction

Violent behavior among sports spectators, commonly referred as hooliganism, has presented itself as a worldwide problem of weak boundaries and harsh compression to society, still struggling for efficient sanctions that might inhibit the unruly behavior. This social concern is not a privilege of some; it affects security policies and public resources from underdeveloped countries to the most well-founded nations in the world. See for instance the case of hardcore football fans in Greece described by [Astrinakis \(2002\)](#), the violent confrontations as manifestations of football hooliganism presented by [Spaaij \(2008, 2014\)](#) in The Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom, by [Marivoet \(2002\)](#) in Portugal, by [Mignon \(2002\)](#) in France and [Dunning \(1999\)](#) with regard North America's and Britain English football riots and aggressive behavior. All these

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works points to a common argument that the pursue of a pleasurable excitement sensation by young people is a crucial determinant for football-related violence. Many studies argue that alcohol has a strict relation to this kind of violent behavior, for many social or psychological reasons (see for instance the works of [Bormann and Stone, 2001](#); [Lewis, 2007](#); [Rees and Schnepel, 2009](#); [Sage and Eitzen, 2013](#); [Young, 2012](#)). Following the seek for boredom minimization argument, alcohol intake would suit the context for its property to increase powerful feelings in which might motivate the thrill quest for excitement ([Ostrowsky, 2014](#); [Wells et al., 2011](#)) and also reduces one's concerns for public sanctions and sense of danger ([Graham et al., 2000](#)).

In this case, alcohol is considered as an indirect stimulus to the violent behavior on excitement-seeker fans, which finds support in the work of [Homel et al. \(1992\)](#), who found substation link between public drinking locations and the violent behavior. The stadium stirring atmosphere, the environment influence of drinking fans (contagion effect), the social reputation, among other situational and contextual factors, would lead the individual to a predisposition of low tolerance for moderate alcohol consumption ([Vaillant and Milofsky, 1982](#)) and hence, to the violent behavior as consequence of the alcohol ability to provoke an increasing desire to demonstrate personal power ([Graham et al., 2000](#)). In addition, alcohol might contribute to reduce the concern for law sanctions and the evaluation of risk ([Bushman and Cooper, 1990](#); [Wells et al., 2011](#)), increase the susceptibility to feel fearless and invincible ([Reagan and Fromme, 2007](#); [Rosenbloom et al., 2010](#)), and lead to reckless and unruly behavior by supporters among those who strongly believes that alcohol contribute to generate violence ([Dermen and George, 1989](#); [Leonard et al., 2003](#); [Barnwell et al., 2006](#)).

On the other hand, many empirical evidences and theoretical discussions provide counter arguments to the alcohol-hooligan positive association (e.g. [Dunning, 1999](#); [Giulianotti, 1991](#); [Guschwan, 2007](#); [Maniglio, 2007](#); [Peitersen, 2009](#)). Studies that follow the theory of behaviorism consider the stress, anxiety and tension reduction as a prominent issue in the explanation of individual behavior into alcohol consumption ([Horton, 1943](#); [Levenson et al., 2007](#); [Pihl and Spiers, 1978](#)), which is appropriated in social contexts of work distress, school problems or a troubled family environment to mitigate conflicts instead of potentialize disarrays. Behaviorists also find support in neuroscience. The anger arousal present in football riots, crowd disturbance and supporter fights with the police and with rivalry club's fans, it is positively associated to the experience of approach rather than withdrawal motivation from the stimulus in the anterior asymmetry of cerebral hemispheres ([Harmon-Jones and Allen, 1998](#)), and negative valence tendencies such as the sense of sadness, tension and stress implies behavioral inhibition, especially in heavy drinking fans who tends to develop a protective control mechanism due the difficulty to regulate alcohol intake ([Korucuoglu et al., 2016](#)). Thus, from both behaviorism and neuroscience arguments, it seems difficult to accept that the tension reduction induced by alcohol intake would be a crucial determinant for collective aggression by fans. Even considering problematic soccer matches, negative score results, fan's offenses and controversial arbitration that increase anxiety and level stress, the alcohol consumption is likely to be stabilized in the organism as a behavioral conditioning to soothe those negative states.

According to [Becker \(1968\)](#) theory of rational choice, individuals become criminals not because they have different incentives from others, but because they evaluate the same incentives differently, choosing between legal or illegal activities which provide a greater expected payoff ([Cornish and Clarke, 1987](#); [Mehlhop and Graeff, 2010](#)). The theory seeks to explain the determinants of crime as a perpetrator's subjective evaluation of the incentives structure between costs and benefits. When the expected cost to suit the labor market in terms of investment in education, professional training, or acquisition of specific skills, weighted by the lack of opportunities, surpass the expected cost of being sentenced to prison, then it is advantageous to choose illegal activity ([Voss and Abraham, 2000](#)). Studies such as those of [Hesselbrock et al. \(1985\)](#) and [Holden \(1985\)](#), which attempts to explain the violent behavior based on young people rational choice, advocated the assumption that a considerable proportion of young people and adults develop a profile composed by anti-social characteristics long before they started drinking, essentially created in disadvantaged communities or risk areas of social interest. Insubordination, impulsiveness, defiance and non-law-abiding would be among these characteristics, suggesting a good fit of alcohol consumption to the unconventional lifestyle of these young people, rather than alcohol being the cause of such behavioral phenomena ([Jones, 1981](#); [Tarter et al., 1985](#); [Vaillant and Milofsky, 1982](#)).

As it is evident from the discussion highlighted above, the alcohol contribution to create a violent behavior is at least a complex and controversial issue. [dos Reis et al. \(2015\)](#) states that while the authors who advocate against the alcohol-hooligan association brings considerable analytical limitations, the role of alcohol as a facilitator of violence among sport fans would be undeniable, and they suggest to be essential to consider a broader explanatory framework that regards the violence in football and a model of aggressive masculinity, combining pain and adversity abiding, excess alcohol consumption and verbal and physical fighting as characteristic of a hyper-masculine environment ([Sønderlund et al., 2014](#)). Further, most controversies on the issue whether alcohol is determinant for the violent behavior is due the impossibility to perform a robust comparison on long term data with respect two different groups, one in which alcohol is present, and another in which it is not. This sort of long term intervention data are difficult to pursuit since most public policies in this regard are punctual, enforced for a short period of time in different regions for a specific purpose, such as the recent calling for alcohol ban imposed by the French government for a few 2016 Euro cup matches.

Pernambuco, however, one of the most important Brazilian states, hosted an important public intervention regarding the sale of alcoholic beverages in its province stadiums for over six years, with the only exception related to the 2014 world cup games, when alcohol intake during the international matches were allowed for a short period of time, and for this reason it serves as an important case study for robust statistical inferences with regard alcohol and the violent behavior of football spectators. Moreover, despite its relevance and recurrence in the country's political agenda, just a few studies have been

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