

Female Fans in Global Football Governance: A Call for Change

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Abstract : Over the recent decades, debates about the engagement of fans in football governance have focused on the club level and national level, emphasizing the significance of fans' involvement in increasing the connection of clubs with the community, and in safeguarding the transparency, accountability, and clubs' financial stability. This paper will offer a different conceptual justification for providing fans with access to decision-making processes in football. First, it will suggest that the participation of fans is necessary for addressing discriminatory practices against women in football stadiums. Second, it will argue that fans' involvement in football governance is important not only at the club and national level but also at the global level, relying on the principles of Global Administrative Law. In contemporary men's football, female fans face different forms of discrimination. Iranian women are still prohibited from attending football games at the domestic level; In Saudi Arabia, female fans are only permitted to enter designated family areas; Qatar - the host of the 2022 FIFA world cup - requires women to attend matches wearing modest clothing. Similarly, in Turkey, Lebanon, UAE, and Algeria, women face cultural barriers when attending men's football games. In other countries, female fans suffer from subtle discrimination, including micro-aggressions, misogyny, sexism, and noninstitutionalized exclusion. Despite the vital role of fans in world football and the importance of football for many women's lives, little has been done to address this problem. While FIFA recognizes that these discriminatory practices contradict its statutes, this recognition fails to materialize into meaningful change. This paper will argue that FIFA's omission stems from two interrelated characteristics of world football: (1) the ultra-masculine nature of the game; (2) the insufficient recognition of fans' significance. While fans have been given a voice in various football bodies on the domestic level, FIFA has yet to allow the representation of fans as stakeholders in world football governance. Since fans are a more heterogeneous group than players, the voices of those fans who do not fit the ultra-masculine model are not heard. Thus, by focusing mainly on male players, FIFA reproduces the hegemonic masculinity that feeds back into fan dynamics and marginalizes female fans. To rectify this problem, we will call on FIFA to provide fans and female fans in particular, with voice mechanisms and access to decision-making processes. In addition to its impact on the formation of fans' identities, such a move will allow fans to demand better enforcement of existing anti-discrimination norms and new regulations to address their needs. The literature has yet to address the relationship between fans' gender discrimination and global football governance. Building on Global Administrative Law scholarship and feminist theories, this paper will aim to fill this gap.

Keywords : fans, FIFA, football governance, gender discrimination, global administrative law, human rights

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