


Surveillance technologies in football: an analysis of the datafication processes of Brazilian fanⁱ

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Abstract

Having the sociability related to men's football played in Rio de Janeiro as the central object of analysis, I propose a reflection on the datafication process developed in this environment. It is observed that quantification in football has been rapidly expanding, whether on the field or, especially, through datafication and quantification carried out with fans and by public bodies that operate in the security and justice of football matches. Document analysis, fieldwork with informal dialogues, and interviews were used as methodological resources. A mismatch between the production of data for public and private use was identified, in addition to the duality of data production, both for verifying the effectiveness of public policy actions in the football environment and for controlling and surveying fans present in stadiums.

Keywords: datafication; technology; football; fan rights; public policies.

Tecnologias de vigilância no futebol: uma análise sobre os processos de datificação dos torcedores brasileiros

Resumo

Tendo a sociabilidade relacionada ao futebol masculino praticado no Rio de Janeiro como objeto central de análise, proponho a reflexão acerca do processo de datificação desenvolvido nesse ambiente. Observando que a quantificação no futebol vem se expandindo com celeridade, seja dentro das linhas do campo, mas em especial, a datificação e quantificação realizada com os torcedores e os produzidos pelos órgãos públicos que atuam na segurança e justiça dos jogos de futebol. Foram utilizados como recursos metodológicos a análise documental, trabalho de campo com diálogos informais e entrevistas. Foi verificado o descompasso entre a produção de dados para fins de uso público e privado. Além da dualidade da produção de dados para a verificação da eficácia das ações das políticas públicas no ambiente do futebol e o controle e vigilância dos torcedores presentes nos estádios.

Palavras-chave: datificação; tecnologia; futebol; direitos do torcedor; políticas públicas.

1 Introduction

Football is a sport of international relevance. National and international championships mobilize supporters and their affections in different places around the globe. At the national level, Brazil is, so far, the only five-time world champion and a major producer of internationally recognized players. Factors that mark the importance of this sport, which stands as one of the main symbols of Brazilian culture (Da Matta et al., 1982; Guedes, 1998).

Starting from the fact that football is a sport present in the daily life of many Brazilians and considering that we live in the age of information, in which everything can be datafied (Ferguson, 2017), football is no exception. That is, it is possible to observe datafication and quantification in the sports environment, whether on or off the pitch.

This article aims to discuss the distinctions of the quantification process in football, especially off the pitch and with extensive use of technologies. It will address the limited quantification of data on violence in football by different public bodies, demonstrating how the production of systematized data on the subject would assist in decision-making, in order to guide a public policy of preventive rather than reactive action.

In contrast to the limited quantification and dissemination of data on episodes of violence in football, there is a broad process of datafication of supporters, fostered by the General Sports Law (Law No. 14,597/2023), which provides, in Article 148, “the adoption of facial recognition technology in stadiums; the expansion of the supply of supporters’ data without due understanding of the processing of such information; and the need for analysis on the matter” (Brazil, 2023). This article articulates the production of data arising from football sociability, an initial effort mobilized by the context of concerns experienced in the course of research work on public policies of security and justice in the sports environment.

2 Methodology

In order to produce this article, some methodological resources were used within the spectrum of qualitative studies. Among them, the techniques of documentary analysis (Bardin, 1977; Cardoso; Oliveira; Ghelli, 2021) of current legislation, in particular the General Sports Law (No. 14,597). In addition to the participant observation technique developed in ethnographic fieldwork (Foote Whyte, 2005; Geertz, 2008), semi-structured interviews (Bonj; Quaresma, 2005) and informal dialogues with representatives of public agencies that work in the sector of the production of security justice in Brazilian football, and dialogues with fans to understand how have been the experiences and perceptions about this process of quantification and exposure of data.

The field for this research has two distinct moments: the first occurred in the Specialized Police Battalion in Stadiums (BEPE) of the Military Police of the State of Rio de Janeiro, during 2019. The second moment occurred with other bodies that work on security and justice in sports matches, especially men's football, from 2022, and which is still ongoing. At the time, I followed the discussions of the new Term of Adjustment of Conduct with the organized fans, popularly called TAC, which was an agreement signed between the Public Prosecutor's Office of Rio de Janeiro, together with BEPE, the National Association of Organized Fans (ANATORG) and representatives of the clubs Vasco, Botafogo, and Fluminense as witnesses. In this pact, guidelines were established for an agreement between fans and public agencies¹.

Fieldwork has also been undertaken to analyze institutional actions in the production of the Special Court of the Fan and Major Events in Rio de Janeiro. The Special Court of the Fan and Major Events is a provision of the Justice System established in the stadium that acts especially in crimes of lesser offensive potential (Law nº 9.099/95) and with the General Sports Law (nº. 14.597/23). It encompasses the entire process, from the report filed with the Civil Police to the decision of the Court of Justice, with participation from the Public Defender's Office and the Public Prosecutor's Office, during the match time, as well as the general analysis of the public policies (Souza, 2006) of security adopted within Brazilian football, particularly through the legislation in force.

¹ For more information regarding the TAC of the organized supporters' groups of Rio de Janeiro: SOUSA, 2023.

3 Public safety policies in football

Concerning the public policies that address security in stadiums and in Brazilian football, there are studies that highlight the long period without due institutional attention. Prior to the creation of the Supporters' Protection Statute, there was Decree-Law No. 3,199 of 1941, during the Estado Novo period, when Vargas was in power and created several sports confederations, such as the Brazilian Basketball Confederation, the Brazilian Boxing Confederation, the Brazilian Chess Confederation, among others. Including the Brazilian Sports Confederation (CBD), which would later be changed to the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF). This decree (Brazil, 1941) also established the creation of state sports federations, a model that continues to this day. After nearly fifty years, in the 1988 Constitution, there is a section that addresses sports in a very general manner in Article 217, whose main clause states: "It is the duty of the State to foster formal and informal sports practices, as a right of each individual [...]" (Brazil, 1988), and includes four subsections and three paragraphs, some of which address the existence of sports justice, which has administrative competencies only; that is, in the case of crimes, it has jurisdiction to act only in relation to the federation, confederation, or championship (Brazil, 1988).

Reis (2017) points out that, although football is a popular sport, one of the first more systematized efforts to implement a public policy in this field emerged from discussions in 2002, during the Fernando Henrique Cardoso administration, which led to the establishment of the Supporters' Protection Statute (Law No. 10,671/03) in 2003, during the first Lula administration. That is, for more than sixty years, sports in Brazil, especially football, received no public attention regarding systematization, legislation, or the development of their cultural and social sporting character.

Subsequently, there were other initiatives surrounding this theme, such as the creation of the National Commission for the Prevention of Violence and Safety in Sporting Events (Consegue) in 2004, popularly known as the

“Peace in Sport Commission” (Lopes; Reis, 2017). In addition to the productions of this Commission, a study was prepared which resulted in the report “Preserving the Spectacle, Guaranteeing Safety and the Right to Citizenship” in 2005/2006 (Reis; Lopes; Martins, 2014).

It is important to highlight that, for the production of this legislation and its related materials during this period, there was no participation of those most directly affected by these policies—namely, the supporters. This differs from the experiences of other countries, including Latin American ones, such as Colombia (Colombia, 2014), where there is an incentive for citizen participation by supporters in various public policies developed in the area.

Subsequently, as indicated by the literature (Lopes; Reis, 2017; Reis, 2017) and by the interlocutors, during the Workers’ Party administrations—especially when Dilma Rousseff was President of Brazil—due to the major sporting events (the 2014 World Cup and the 2016 Olympic Games) that Brazil hosted, there was an effort to approach Brazilian supporters, especially the organized supporters’ groups. In interviews with former presidents of organized supporters’ groups who worked during this period in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, they highlighted the organization of national seminars of organized supporters, promoted by the federal Ministry.

When Brazil won the right to host the [20]14 World Cup, there was a mobilization by the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Sport, to surround the ‘creatures’. What were we going to do with the World Cup here and the organized supporters’ groups? [...] the Ministry of Sport, wanting to approach the supporters and wanting to deepen, to understand, and—rumor has it—‘catalogue everyone’, created the first national seminar of organized supporters in Brazil, inviting almost 200 organized supporters’ groups to the meeting in São Paulo (Interview 1 with a former president of an Organized Supporters’ Group who worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, author’s translation)².

In the interviews, they also noted that they worked as employees of the Ministry of Sport and were responsible for conducting technical visits to observe the relationships between organized supporters and security institutions in different Brazilian states.

² Research interview conducted on April 16, 2025, in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

[...] in the Ministry of Sport, there is the Ministry and several secretariats. We worked in a secretariat that was the Secretariat for Supporter Rights and Protection. Within this secretariat there were several meetings, and it became evident in these meetings that a closer dialogue with the supporters across the country was necessary. And that is where, [sic.] we came up with, ‘ah man, it would be necessary for us to carry out visits with these supporters, to understand their needs’, especially because it is of no use to establish a federal rule from Brasília when the particularities of each state, and at times municipalities and regions, are different (Interview 2 with a president of an Organized Supporters’ Group who worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, author’s translation)³.

These accounts given in interviews align with what is indicated in the literature. They also demonstrate that, after the impeachment of the President, many of these initiatives were discontinued.

[...] the seminar lasted until [...] that transition period of Dilma, of Temer [...]. When Dilma was impeached, Temer—because at that point the Ministry of Sport still existed, but the dialogue decreased significantly—and then Bolsonaro took office, he eliminated the ministry, eliminated everything (Interview 1 with a former president of an Organized Supporters’ Group who worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Sport, author’s translation).

Despite this attempt to include supporters in the construction of public debate during that period, when considering public security policies in Brazil, it is possible to observe a concentration of actions in the hands of the police forces and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security.

It is a limited view focused on concentrating the actions for violence reduction in football exclusively within police institutions, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, and at times with actions from the Public Prosecutor’s Office and the Court of Justice. As in the case of the federal government program established in 2023, called “Safe Stadium,” it provides for the use of facial recognition technology for three specific purposes: I) to recapture individuals with arrest warrants or restrictive penal measures; II) to assist in the recovery of stolen or robbed vehicles; and III) to prevent the sale of tickets

³ Research interview granted on April 28, 2025, conducted remotely.

using data from deceased individuals, combating ticket scalping (ANPD, 2023), with fragile justifications and concentrated actions in bodies such as the Ministry of Justice and Public Security and the CBF. However, this agreement was established without the presence of the responsible state institution—the Ministry of Sport—which signed only as a witness.

This factor contributes to reinforcing the logic of stigmatization (Goffman, 1988) of supporters and the media violence they suffer, which is often not classified as violent episodes, since the focus concentrates exclusively on models of interpersonal and/or intergroup violence. Supporters—especially organized supporters—are commonly portrayed by the media through the metaphor of war, a narrative that presents violence as a geometric progression in which there is an increase in violence and a consequent emptying of stadiums (Lopes; Reis, 2016). The authors also indicate that there is a social construction in which supporters supposedly practice violence gratuitously, whereas public action—especially by security forces—is presented as rational and humanitarian; when episodes of violence occur, the justification is that the action was inevitable (Lopes; Reis, 2016).

In Brazil there are few public policies for safety in football, and the few actions aimed at producing a safer environment do not include the civic participation of supporters, and do not adopt a comprehensive perspective of the category of safety. Instead, they restrict themselves to the actions of security and justice institutions, focusing on punitive and repressive measures that do not solve the problem, that is,

Thus, when we speak of State domination over the supporter, we draw attention to the fact that the former has continuously exercised power abusively against the latter, who currently has few means to alter this situation (Reis; Lopes; Martins, 2014, p. 126, author's translation).

Football is subject to a veritable panopticon (Giulianotti, 2002; Lopes; Perina, 2018; Reis; Lopes; Martins, 2014) in which there is an increasingly intense process of datafication, quantification, and consequently, extensive surveillance.

4 Process of Datafication and Quantification on the Pitch

As previously discussed, football is undergoing an extensive process of datafication. When this development is examined within the four lines of the pitch, the match becomes quantified through performance indicators, with numerical records for nearly every action on the field, such as the number of goals, corner kicks, accurate passes, yellow and red cards, among other metrics. The quantification of a sport serves both game analysis and other purposes. This phenomenon may diminish the emotional and cultural character of football, particularly given the growing distrust among supporters regarding players' associations with sports-betting schemes.

The phenomenon of match quantification has become even more widespread with the expansion of on-line sports-betting platforms, a matter that even became the subject of a Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI), starting in March 2024 in the Brazilian Senate, which resulted in preventive arrests following allegations of money laundering. The issue of sports-betting websites requires discussion and investigation; however, this is only one aspect of the quantification of Brazilian football and is not the central focus of this article. Nevertheless, the process of datafication and quantification in sporting events does not end within the matches or within the sporting practice itself. Currently, even supporters are being datafied and quantified.

5 Process of datafication and quantification of supporters

The attempt to control football supporters, at a global level, is not a recent development. Bennett and Haggerty (2011) argue that international events, in particular promoted by FIFA, are used as tests for the adoption of new surveillance technologies.

⁴ The Parliamentary Inquiry Commission (CPI) on sports betting, requested by Senator Romário Faria (PL-RJ), addresses suspicions of match-fixing in football involving companies in the sports-betting sector, players, and football executives. Available at: <https://www.cnnbrasil.com.br/politica/senado-tera-cpi-sobre-violencia-domestica-e-manipulacao-de-jogos-de-futebol/>. Accessed on: 08 Sept. 2024.

⁵ The investigation that took place in preventive detention to influencer Deolane Bezerra, known as Dr. Deolane, as a result of money laundering of illegal games, presents that Darwin Henrique da Silva Filho, CEO of Esportes da Sorte, digitized his father's business, arising from a misdemeanor. Available at: https://oglobo.globo.com/brasil/noticia/2024/09/06/dono-da-esportes-da-sorte-herdou-do-pai-imperio-da-contravencao-no-recife-e-digitalizou-negocios-da-familia.ghtml?utm_source=Instagram&utm_medium=Social&utm_campaign=The%20Globo. Accessed on: 10 Sept. 2024.

The enactment of the Lei Geral do Esporte (Law no. 14.597/2023), in its Article 148, establishes the mandatory adoption of biometric control for spectators.

Art. 148. The control and supervision of public access to sports arenas with a capacity exceeding 20,000 (twenty thousand) people shall entail image-monitoring systems at turnstiles and biometric identification of spectators. There shall also be a technical information center, with sufficient infrastructure to enable image monitoring of the audience present and the biometric registration of spectators (Brasil, 2023, author's translation).

In this excerpt, one can observe the mandatory use of facial recognition and the transformation of supporters' information into data that can be easily quantified and potentially commercialized. Although facial-recognition technology for supporters has been adopted as a public policy measure to promote safety, it has, in practice, exposed socially vulnerable supporters to an additional layer of insecurity. This occurs due to the high error rates of such technology when identifying women, Black individuals, and trans people (Boulamwini & Gebru, 2018; Nunes, 2022), in comparison with the error rates for white men. Consequently, supporters may face potential embarrassment and technological misidentification, as in the case of João Antônio, a supporter of Confiança, in Sergipe⁶.

Below (Table 1) is the list of stadiums equipped with facial-recognition technology in Brazil up to August 2024, according to the report "Esporte, Dados e Direitos: o uso do reconhecimento facial nos estádios brasileiros" (Sousa et al., 2024). His table shows one stadium where the technology was adopted prior to the establishment of Brazilian legislation; it also reveals the existence of stadiums that do not meet the minimum capacity requirement for implementation (20,000 people) and yet have adopted this technology.

⁶ Available at: < <https://oglobo.globo.com/esportes/noticia/2024/04/15/torcedor-do-confianca-relata-ter-sido-conduzido-pela-pm-por-erro-de-reconhecimento-facial-veja-video.ghtml> >. Accessed on: July 25, 2024.

Table 1 – Brazilian stadiums with facial recognition technology

State	Municipality:	Stadium	Stadium capacity	Status	Year of start up
GO	Goiânia	Hailé Pinheiro Stadium	14,525	In use	2022
AL	Maceió	Rei Pelé Stadium	19.105	In use	2023
RJ	Rio de Janeiro	Maracanã	78,838	In use	2023
RJ	Rio de Janeiro	São Januário	21,880	In use	2023
CE	Fortaleza	Arena Castelão	63,903	Under investigation	2023
SP	São Paulo	Allianz Parque	43,713	In use	2023
BA	Salvador	Fonte Nova Arena	48,902	In use	2023
PE	Recife	Ilha do Retiro	26.418	Undergoing tests	2023
PR	Curitiba	Ligga Arena	42.372	In use	2023
RS	Porto Alegre	Arena do Grêmio	55.662	In use	2023
RN	Natal	Arena das Dunas	31.375	In use	2023
MG	Belo Horizonte	Arena MRV	44.892	In use	2023
RJ	Rio de Janeiro	Nilton Santos Stadium	44.661	In use	2024
PE	Recife	Barros Carvalho Stadium	22.856	In use	2024
MG	Belo Horizonte	Arena Independência	23.018	Under investigation	2024
SP	Campinas	Brinco de Ouro da Princesa Stadium	29.130	In use	2024
MT	Cuiabá	Arena Pantanal	44.097	Undergoing tests	2024
SE	Aracaju	Arena Batistão	15.575	In use	2024
PA	Belém	Mangueirão	53.635	In use	2024
SP	Santos	Vila Belmiro	30.700	Undergoing tests	2024
PR	Curitiba	Couto Pereira Stadium	40.502	In use	2024
RS	Porto Alegre	Beira Rio Stadium	50.842	In use	2024

Fonte: Panóptico / CESeC, 2024 (Sousa *et al.*, 2024, p. 10).

Another point of concern relates to the datafication of children and adolescents. The Lei Geral do Esporte states in Article 158 that supporters over the age of 16 must be registered (Brasil, 2023, p. 42). However, the legislation makes no reference to the Lei Geral de Proteção de Dados (Law no. 13.709/18) nor to the Estatuto da Criança e do Adolescente (Law no. 8.069/90). Despite these provisions, clubs have been registering supporters below the minimum age established. Goiás Esporte Clube, for instance, reported that 14.3% of its supporters registered through facial recognition are between 2 and 14 years old, who enter the stadium through turnstiles designated for children (Sousa et al., 2024).

Beyond exposing a wide range of supporters—including minors—to insecurity, this process of quantification is not accompanied by any system of regulation or transparency regarding the use of such data. That is, there are no laws establishing limits or models for the adoption of facial-recognition technology in Brazil, whether in public spaces or in sports settings, nor is there any transparency policy regarding how these data are used.

6 Mismatch in the Quantification Process

Just as there is no transparency regarding how the data are being used, there is also no transparency concerning who the actors are that have access to supporters' data. The study “Esporte, Dados e Direitos: o uso do reconhecimento facial nos estádios brasileiros” revealed that, at Maracanã Stadium, three companies hold supporters' data. One company, Bypass, is responsible for registering supporters' facial images; the second, ImPLY, provides the tickets and therefore manages the relationship between ticket numbers and registered faces; and the third, Tixx, is responsible for controlling which supporters have already entered, in which sector, and how many have yet to enter the stadium (Sousa et al., 2024, p. 10).

In this exchange of information among different companies, there is a “[...] consequent exposure of sensitive data without the necessary regulation, leaving these individuals vulnerable to the use of their information for commercial purposes, such as targeted advertising” (Sousa et al., 2024, p. 19–20). This quantification of supporters

facilitates and enables “fan engagement” (Huettermann et al., 2019; Yoshida et al., 2014), through the offer of coupons and the valorization of the available consumer market in which the supporter ceases to be understood as a member of fan culture and is instead perceived through the logic of the consumption possibilities they can generate.

While there is significant investment in the private datafication of supporters, and in the consequent exposure and increased risk of data leaks and commercial use. There is comparatively little investment in data production by entities responsible for sports, particularly public actors, for security purposes.

In 2023, efforts were made to establish a cooperation agreement between the Brazilian Football Confederation (CBF) and the Ministry of Justice and Public Security for the use of supporters’ data to identify those with outstanding arrest warrants⁷. The project, called “Estádio Seguro”, does not include participation from the Ministry of Sport, a factor that underscores the surveillance-oriented nature of the initiative, with no concern for public transparency regarding the quantitative data involved in the agreement.

There is little public investment in generating data within sports environments aimed at creating a more democratic space and supporting preventive public policies. During fieldwork, a civil police chief highlighted the investigative difficulties caused by the fragmentation of data on violence in Brazilian football and emphasized how quantification and systematization of these data would aid public policy design.

Conversely, there is substantial investment in (flawed) technologies for producing personal data, with broad potential for commercial use (without supporters’ knowledge), justified in the name of security. Given the informational void surrounding the use, regulation, and impact assessments of this process of datafication of supporters, one possible alternative is to demand public disclosure of data related to the use of facial-recognition technology in football stadiums. “[...] quantifiable activity metrics compel those responsible to make efforts to avoid the embarrassment of poor results.”

⁷ The agreement is not yet in force; in a request, via LAI, they informed that it will start when all stadiums have the technological resources. However, when asking about how many stadiums are already using facial recognition, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security reported not having these data (Sousa et al., 2024, , author’s translation).

(Camargo; Daniel, 2021, p. 60). In the absence of transparency, there is no civil-society oversight over the effectiveness of the technology adopted.

7 Final considerations

As a point of departure—or rather, of arrival—based on the data presented here, it is necessary to highlight three sensitive issues that must be revised regarding public security policies in Brazilian football: I) the absence of supporters in the processes of public policy formation; II) the limited logic that public security policies are constructed without citizen participation and solely through security and justice institutions; and III) the urgent need to distinguish the concepts of security and surveillance.

Public security policies in football aim at the adoption of surveillance technologies targeting supporters. Whether through the socially and spatially segregating construction of stadiums, marked by strong social control over supporters (Reis; Lopes; Martins, 2014), or through the classification of supporters—especially members of organized supporters' groups—as undisciplined (Lopes; Perina, 2018). However, the use of the disciplining and control of bodies (Foucault, 2013) has become increasingly evident and segregating with the mandatory implementation of facial-recognition technology in stadiums with a capacity above 20,000 people.

Based on the analysis of the data obtained in the field, following the entry into force of the Lei Geral do Esporte (Law No. 14,597/2023) and the case of the Confiança-SE supporter escorted by the police after a false positive produced by facial recognition at Rei Pelé Stadium, supporters emphasized the racial bias of the technology. Supporters are denied the right to choose whether to provide their biometric data. Many clubs are registering supporters even before the purchase of tickets. Nevertheless, there is a desire to attend their club's matches in stadiums. Due to the emotions that football mobilizes, supporters encourage their club under all circumstances; in Spanish, the term *aguante* is widely used in this sense of submitting oneself to anything out of love for one's team (Cabrera, 2022). Therefore, this condition is accepted for the sake of a greater purpose. The supporter becomes a hostage to new surveillance technologies, without critical opposition, due to their love for the club, just as they submit to a series of economic

violences, such as the high prices of tickets and sports merchandise, out of devotion to their team.

A mechanism included in the “security” section of the Lei Geral do Esporte (Law No. 14,597/2023), however, exposes a range of supporters to insecurity given the high rate of failure with women and Black people. What this technology promotes is the surveillance of supporters; however, surveillance is not synonymous with security. Security is socially constructed through a set of factors, including the reduction of beliefs about danger (Borges, 2011).

Given the limited quantification of information on violence in Brazilian football by public authorities, and its consequent lack of public dissemination, it is not possible to assess the effectiveness and efficiency of public policies addressing an evident problem. Due to the lack of transparency in public actions on this topic, the Observatório Social do Futebol (Football Social Observatory) was founded as an outreach project of the Rio de Janeiro State University (UERJ). This project is grounded in the production of scientifically informed, theoretically oriented, empirically based, and politically committed knowledge concerning the social relations constructed from and through football, aiming at the production of data for use by society and public institutions working to reduce episodes of violence in Brazilian football (Cabrera et al., 2024).

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