

## **\*\*Understanding identity and exclusion in Polish football fandom\*\***

**Article.** Kossakowski, R., Nozal, P. & Wozniak, W. (2025). Predatory fandom and autoimmune community – Polish football fandom in the search for a pure homeland. *Identities*, 92, 98-116.

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**Aim.** This research explores how Polish football fans develop a strong sense of belonging and identity, and how this relates to their attitudes towards those they consider ‘outsiders’. The core question is: how do fans create a ‘we’ and, crucially, who gets defined as ‘them’? This is important because strong group identity can be positive, but it can also lead to hostility and exclusion.

**Methods.** To understand this, researchers analyzed over two decades of content from a popular Polish football fan magazine, as well as visual displays (banners, chants, and imagery known as “tifos”) from matches between 2013 and 2021. They looked for patterns in how fans defined themselves in opposition to different groups, and how these expressions connected to broader political events and ideologies in Poland.

**Key findings.** The key finding is that Polish football fans frequently build their identity by actively defining themselves against others. This often takes the form of hostility towards groups perceived as threats to Polish values and national identity. These groups include historical rivals like Germany and Ukraine, refugees, people of different religions (particularly Islam and Judaism), and LGBTQ+ individuals. Fans often portray themselves as defenders of traditional Polish culture and actively work to maintain a ‘pure’ community by excluding those they see as outsiders. This is often expressed through aggressive language and imagery, and aligns with narratives promoted by right-wing political ideologies. The research suggests this isn’t just harmless banter; it can contribute to real-world hostility and even violence. The study highlights a tendency towards what researchers call ‘predatory identities’ – identities built on attacking others – and ‘immunized communities’ – groups that actively try to protect themselves from outside influence.

**Limitations.** The study focused on a single fan magazine and stadium displays, meaning it primarily reflects the views of those most actively involved in fan culture. It is, this, not a statement about all Polish football fans. Furthermore, the historical and political context of Poland plays a significant role in shaping these attitudes, and the relationship between fan views and political parties is complex – fans don’t always neatly align with any single political group.