



## Article

# Supporter Typologies as a Framework for Sports Security Governance at Mega-Events: Morocco-Senegal 2025 AFCON Final

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## ABSTRACT

This article examines sports security governance in Morocco through the case of the 2025 Africa Cup of Nations, with particular attention to the Morocco-Senegal final held in Rabat on 18 January 2026. It argues that the event revealed a structural knowledge gap within contemporary mega-event security governance: the treatment of football crowds as homogeneous publics despite major differences in supporter cultures, repertoires of mobilization, and reactions to authority. Methodologically, the paper combines comparative typological analysis, institutional data, and case-based analytical narrative. The article shows that uniform techno-legal responses are often poorly adapted to differentiated crowd dynamics. It further demonstrates how policing failures can generate diplomatic and reputational externalities in the context of international tournaments. The Moroccan case therefore illustrates a broader governance challenge facing emerging host states preparing mega-events. The paper concludes by proposing a transition from reactive state-centric security toward culturally differentiated human security, based on mediation mechanisms, multilingual judicial safeguards, supporter liaison structures, and anticipatory risk intelligence.

## KEYWORDS

Sports governance; Football supporterism; Morocco-Senegal AFCON 2025 Final; Security policy.

## Introduction

The governance of security at mega-sporting events has undergone a remarkable transformation in Morocco over the past decade. From the gradual professionalization of stadium management to the institutional innovation of in-stadium judicial bureaus during AFCON 2025, Morocco has demonstrated a genuine capacity for adaptive governance that sets it apart from many host nations on the African continent. The ambition to co-host the 2030 FIFA World Cup is not merely a diplomatic project: it is the expression of a country that has invested systematically in the institutional, infrastructural, and human capital required to welcome the world. This paper takes these achievements seriously – and it is precisely because Morocco's security governance has reached a level of institutional maturity that the next analytical step becomes both possible and urgent.

That step is the following research question: to what extent does the absence of sociological differentiation among supporter profiles constitute a structural limitation of sports security governance for large-scale sporting events in Morocco?

The AFCON 2025 final, played on January 18, 2026, at the Prince Moulay Abdellah Stadium in Rabat, provides the most instructive empirical case available. Behind an unquestionable organizational achievement – 529 security interventions, nine operational judicial bureaus across six host cities, and 202 persons referred to justice through an innovative expedited process (El Miri, 2026) – the final also surfaced a specific and correctable knowledge gap: a security architecture designed for a domestically familiar supporter culture encountered, in a single evening, the behavioral logics of Sub-Saharan African communities whose relationship to football, collective dignity, and institutional authority follows a fundamentally different grammar. This is not a diagnosis of failure – Morocco's security apparatus performed with remarkable effectiveness along the dimensions it was designed to address. It is a diagnosis of a gap between the architecture Morocco has built and the full diversity of audiences the 2030 World Cup will bring.

The argument advanced here is that this gap is not a management deficiency: it is an analytical one. Management deficiencies are corrected by deploying more agents, more cameras, or more judicial bureaus. Analytical gaps require a different instrument: a comparative sociological framework that gives security operators the knowledge to read, distinguish, and respond appropriately to the cultural behavioral grammars of supporter communities from 48 nations across six confederations. Morocco has the institutional foundations. What this paper proposes is the knowledge architecture to complete them. The paper frames its recommendations around three interdependent pillars:

- The sociological pillar: building the three-profile comparative typology as the foundational knowledge architecture for 2030 security governance.
- The techno-legal pillar: consolidating in-stadium judicial bureaus (Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Morocco, 2025) and correcting gaps in Law 09-09 (El Yazghi, 2022).
- The geostrategic pillar: articulating sports soft power with credible hard power capacity within an integrated power doctrine grounded in cultural intelligence (Nye, 2004; UNDP, 1994).

## Methodological Note

The research question posed in this paper - to what extent does the absence of sociological differentiation among supporter profiles constitute a structural limitation of Morocco's sports security governance - calls for a specific type of inquiry. The question is not primarily empirical in the quantitative sense: it does not ask how many incidents occurred or how many supporters were convicted. It asks whether a structural condition - the absence of differentiated knowledge - can be identified as causally significant for governance outcomes. This type of question is most adequately addressed through a conceptual-analytical approach that combines three elements.

First, a comparative typological analysis of supporter communities, drawing on peer-reviewed academic literature in the sociology of sport (Elias & Dunning, 1994; Giulianotti, 1999; Spaaij, 2006; Boualam, 2022; Alegi, 2010) and social psychology (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) to construct ideal-typical configurations of supporter behavior in the Weberian sense – analytical abstractions that isolate dominant characteristics for heuristic and comparative purposes, not empirical descriptions of fixed cultural essences.

Second, an institutional data analysis drawing on official communiqués from the Ministry of Justice, DGSN, and the Presidence du Ministere Public, providing verified empirical anchors for the governance argument.

Third, a case-based analytical narrative of the AFCON 2025 final, triangulated across multiple journalistic sources and used to illustrate the theoretical propositions rather than to establish causal claims independently. The principal limitations of this design are two: the absence of ethnographic fieldwork among the supporter communities analyzed, and the reliance on journalistic sources for the assessment of reputational dynamics - which would require systematic netnographic analysis (Kozinets, 2020) to be conclusively established. Both limitations open productive avenues for future empirical research.

## Risk Cartography and Genealogy of the Event

### *Anatomy of the Night of January 18, 2026*

The Morocco-Senegal match brought together in a 75,000-seat stadium the two highest-ranked continental teams, in a context of patriotism heightened by 50 years without a continental title - Morocco's last triumph dating to the 1976 AFCON in Ethiopia. The “emotional dynamism” of sports configurations (Elias & Dunning, 1994) made the event intrinsically volatile.

The pivotal incident occurred in injury time: A Senegalese goal by Ismaila Sarr was disallowed without immediate VAR recourse, followed by a penalty awarded to Morocco after video review. Coach Pape Thiaw instructed his players to leave the pitch, producing an interruption lasting (Church, 2026). The match ended 1-0 after extra time, with Senegal claiming their second continental title.

On the logistical front, the Senegalese Football Federation had been allocated 2,850 tickets in a 75,000-seat venue - the 5% regulatory CAF quota (El Yadari, 2026). The festive communal habitus of Sub-Saharan supporters found itself spatially marginalized in a configuration perceived as hostile, amplifying the reactive dimension of what followed (Bourdieu, 1980; Alegi, 2010). Critically, this dynamic has no analytical connection to the socioeconomic precarity that drives violence among Moroccan domestic supporters: it belongs to an entirely different cultural grammar that requires separate theoretical mapping.

### *The 'Narrative Fog' and Post-Match Information Warfare*

Within minutes of the final whistle, an adversarial narrative casting Morocco as a corrupt organizer spread across Senegalese social media and continental outlets. This “narrative fog” - by analogy with Clausewitz's (1832/1984) “fog of war” - to describe the state of informational turbulence in which Morocco's communication apparatus found itself. The term is used here in its analytical sense: it refers to the structural condition of informational vulnerability, not to a documented reputational outcome. Whether and to what extent Morocco's international reputation was actually damaged by this narrative circulation would require systematic ethnographic analysis – a methodological approach involving the systematic collection and contextual analysis of online commentary and media framing across multiple national digital ecosystems (Kozinets, 2020) – which falls beyond the scope of this paper and constitutes a necessary avenue for future research. What can be established on the basis of the available sources is more limited but no less analytically significant: Morocco's official communication apparatus, built around the logic of soft power hospitality (Nye, 2004), was structurally ill-equipped to respond in real time to an adversarial digital environment calibrated to Sub-Saharan media ecosystems.

### **Three Socio-Behavioral Configurations: A Typology Grounded in Cultural Context**

The typology advanced in this paper requires a preliminary methodological clarification. Academic typologies of supporter behavior are not - and should not be - primarily organized around geographical or cultural origin. As Elias and Dunning (1994) demonstrate, violence is always the product of specific social configurations, not of cultural essences. As Spaaij (2006) shows in his systematic comparison of six Western European football clubs, the most analytically productive distinctions between supporter groups rest on behavioral variables - degree of organization, relationship to institutional authority, and forms of engagement with violence - rather than on national or regional identity. And as Tajfel and Turner (1979) establish, the psychological mechanisms underlying collective violence are universal: what varies across contexts is the specific social conditions that activate them.

The three configurations presented below are therefore not cultural portraits: they are situationally specific instantiations of universal socio-behavioral mechanisms. The geographical dimension - North African, Sub-Saharan African, European, South American - is not the analytical primary variable but the contextual condition that shapes how universal mechanisms operate in each case. Morocco is the empirical anchor of the North African configuration not because Moroccan supporters are culturally predetermined to behave in a certain way, but because the specific socioeconomic conditions documented in the specific

political history analyzed in Amara (2012) and Rommel (2021), and the specific institutional dynamics described in Dorsey (2014) produce a recognizable and analytically distinct configuration of supporter behavior. Geography is the context; the configuration is the analysis.

### ***The Transversal Foundation: Elias and Dunning's Figurational Framework***

Before introducing the three-profile typology, it is necessary to establish the theoretical foundation that underlies all three profiles. Elias and Dunning's (1994) figurational sociology provides this transversal framework. Their concept of quest for excitement -the socially structured search for controlled emotional arousal in leisure contexts -explains why sporting events concentrate emotional intensity to a degree unmatched in other public spaces. More specifically, their notion of de-controlling of emotions - the temporary suspension of everyday emotional restraint within the bounded space of the stadium - constitutes the common mechanism across all three profiles. What differs between profiles is not the presence of this mechanism, but the social configurations that activate it, the cultural grammars that shape its expression, and the institutional triggers that convert controlled de-controlling into uncontrolled violence. Elias and Dunning explicitly caution against attributing violence to fixed cultural or geographical characteristics - violence is always the product of specific social configurations, historical processes, and relational dynamics. The three-profile typology advanced in this paper is therefore not a culturalist argument: it is a configurational argument that identifies the specific social and cultural conditions under which the universal mechanism of emotional de-controlling produces different behavioral outcomes.

### ***Social Identity Theory and Behavioral Typologies: Key Theoretical Anchors***

Two additional theoretical frameworks inform the typology. First, Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory provides the psychological micro-foundation for what this paper terms 'defensive aggression' in the Sub-Saharan profile. Social Identity Theory proposes that individuals derive part of their self-concept from membership in social groups, and that perceived threats to the group's status or dignity activate mechanisms of intergroup differentiation and, under certain conditions, collective aggression. Applied to the AFCON 2025 case, the Senegalese supporters' reaction to the disputed refereeing sequence is not an expression of cultural predisposition to violence: it is a textbook instance of identity-protective aggression triggered by a perceived threat to collective dignity – the national team functioning as the condensed symbol of the group's identity and post-colonial sovereignty.

Second, Spaaij's (2006) comparative analysis of six Western European football clubs demonstrates that the sociologically productive distinctions between supporter groups rest on context, social interaction, and collective identity – not on fixed national characteristics. His analysis shows that hooliganism takes fundamentally different forms depending on the specific club culture, local history, and institutional environment. This context-sensitivity is precisely what the three-profile typology adopted here seeks to capture: each profile designates a specific combination of socioeconomic conditions, cultural grammars, and institutional dynamics that produces a recognizable pattern of supporter behavior, without treating that pattern as a permanent cultural essence.

### ***Giulianotti's Typology: Applicability and Limits for the African Context***

A further note on the relationship between this paper's typology and Giulianotti's (1999) foundational framework is required. Giulianotti proposes four ideal types of football supporter organized along two axes – hot/cool emotional investment and traditional/consumer identification: the supporter (hot/traditional), the fan (hot/consumer), the follower (cool/traditional), and the flaneur (cool/consumer). This typology has been widely applied in European and Latin American contexts. However, it was constructed on an empirical base that is predominantly European and does not systematically address the specific cultural logics of African supporter communities. The three-profile typology proposed here is not a replacement of Giulianotti's framework but a complementary operational extension: where Giulianotti organizes supporters by their relationship to the club and the commodity

form of football, this paper organizes them by their relationship to collective identity, post-colonial sovereignty, and institutional authority – dimensions that are analytically prior in African football contexts and that the AFCON 2025 case brings into sharp relief.

### ***Grounding the Analytical Concepts: Cultural Grammar and Cultural Competency***

Two conceptual tools mobilized throughout this paper require explicit theoretical grounding. The first is cultural behavioral grammar – the structured repertoire of collective behavioral responses, emotional triggers, and relational norms that a supporter community deploys in the stadium context. This concept draws on Bourdieu's (1980) notion of habitus - the system of durable dispositions that shapes practice - applied to the specific field of supporter behavior, and on Elias and Dunning's (1994) analysis of the social configurations that produce specific forms of emotional expression in sporting contexts. What 'cultural behavioral grammar' adds to these frameworks is a deliberately comparative and operationally oriented formulation: it designates the set of behavioral signals that security operators must learn to read in order to distinguish between profiles and calibrate their responses accordingly.

The second concept is cultural competency, mobilized here in its established meaning in cross-cultural management and public policy literature: the capacity of an institutional actor to recognize, interpret, and respond appropriately to the behavioral and communicational codes of culturally different interlocutors (Betancourt et al., 2003). Its application to sports security governance is novel, but its theoretical foundation is not. Betancourt et al. (2003) define cultural competence as requiring action at three levels: organizational (institutional design), structural (operational procedures), and clinical (individual interactions). Applied to sports security governance, these three levels translate directly into: security force training curricula, judicial bureau protocols, and on-the-ground crowd management interventions.

### ***Profile 1 – The North African Model: Socioeconomic Precarity and Political Voice***

The North African model is the most systematically documented in the academic literature, with a consistent pattern of structural characteristics across Morocco Algeria (Amara, 2012), Egypt (Rommel, 2021), and the broader MENA region (Dorsey, 2014).

The first characteristic is the socioeconomic substrate. Across North Africa, stadium violence is statistically associated with socioeconomic precarity: youth unemployment, school dropout, informal employment, and urban overcrowding in peripheral neighborhoods (Amara, 2012).

The second characteristic is the political expression function. The North African stadium is structurally characterized by its role as a substitute public sphere (Habermas, 1989): a space where political dissatisfaction that cannot be articulated in official channels finds expressive outlet. In Algeria, Amara (2012) documents how Ultra chants served as coded political commentary. In Egypt, Rommel (2021) shows how the Ultras Ahlawy played a direct role in the 2011 revolution and were subsequently targeted by the state for this political function. In Morocco, fieldwork among WAC and RCA supporters demonstrates that relative frustration is converted into political Voice (Hirschman, 1970) in the stadium, the last arena where transgression is simultaneously tolerated and aestheticized.

The third characteristic is the 'Hooltra' hybridization. This paper proposes the conceptual figure of the 'Hooltra' to designate this characteristic hybrid: an actor who has internalized Ultra symbolic codes while manifesting, in certain configurations, a disposition toward expressive, uncodified, immediate violence rooted in structural precarity. The class habitus (Bourdieu, 1980) and configurational dynamics (Elias & Dunning, 1994) combine to produce this specific North African inflection, consistent across Morocco, Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia (Dorsey, 2014).

The fourth characteristic is a specific relationship with state authority: structural tension in which the state simultaneously tolerates the expressive function of Ultra groups, instrumentalizes their energy for national team matches, and represses their political articulations when they cross implicit thresholds – what Dorsey (2014) terms 'managed volatility'.

## ***Profile 2 – The Sub-Saharan African Model: Communal Festivity and Reactive Dignity***

Sub-Saharan African supporter culture is the most undertheorized in the existing literature – a theoretical gap with direct governance consequences, since security operators who have not encountered this profile systematically misread its behavioral signals. Two foundational studies provide the empirical and theoretical basis. Alegi (2010), in *Laduma! Soccer, Politics and Society in South Africa*, documents a supporter culture rooted in communal festivity, township solidarity, and the social function of football as a vector of collective dignity and post-colonial identity. Darby (2002), in his analysis of African football's relationship with FIFA and global governance, contextualizes this festive tradition within a history of colonial and post-colonial power asymmetries that have made international football a charged space of sovereignty assertion and dignity reclamation for Sub-Saharan nations.

The AFCON 2025 itself produced what may be the most powerful single empirical illustration of this framework: the case of Michel Kuka Mboladinga, known across the continent as 'Lumumba Ve'a'. Throughout each of the Democratic Republic of Congo's matches at the tournament, Mboladinga stood completely motionless on a small platform in the stands for the entire 90 minutes – right arm raised, palm open toward the sky, wearing a suit in the colors of the Congolese flag and 1960s-era glasses (France 24, January 7, 2026). His posture reproduced exactly the statue of Patrice Lumumba – the DRC's first Prime Minister after independence from Belgium, assassinated in 1961 – installed on Lumumba's mausoleum in Kinshasa. In interviews, Mboladinga stated explicitly that his gesture embodied 'values of dignity, freedom, and national sovereignty' (Wakat Sera, January 2026). He has maintained this practice since 2013.

The resonance of Mboladinga's gesture – and the incident that followed – constitute a clinical illustration of the Tajfel and Turner (1979) Social Identity Theory framework. When Algeria eliminated the DRC and Algerian forward Mohamed Amoura mimicked Mboladinga's posture in mock celebration, the reaction was immediate and continental: the gesture was condemned as a mockery of Patrice Lumumba himself – a Pan-African independence figure who had also expressed solidarity with the Algerian revolution. Amoura subsequently issued a public apology, stating he was unaware of the meaning and history of the gesture (Al Jazeera, January 22, 2026). If a North African athlete with this cultural proximity could misread the symbolic charge of Mboladinga's posture, the probability that Moroccan security operators will misread equivalent cultural signals during the 2030 World Cup is structurally very high without specific preparation.

From these foundations, this paper conceptualizes the specific violence mechanism of the Sub-Saharan profile: defensive aggression triggered by perceived institutional injustice. Three structural features define it: the trigger is situational, not structural; the cultural grammar is rooted in collective dignity and post-colonial sovereignty (Tajfel & Turner, 1979); and the amplification mechanism is spatial – the restriction of Senegalese supporters to 2,850 seats in a 75,000-seat venue (El Yadari, 2026) created a configuration that magnified every perceived slight.

## ***Profile 3 – Other Cultural Traditions: European and South American Models***

### **a. The European Model: Ritualized Confrontation and Negotiated Protocols**

Williams, Dunning, and Murphy (1989), in *Hooligans Abroad*, established the foundational typology of British hooliganism as a working-class phenomenon of ritualized territorial confrontation. Bromberger (1995) demonstrates that European spectatorship functions as a structured world-view of collective identity. Giulianotti (1999) maps the diversity of European supporter typologies. Tsoukala (2009), in *Football Hooliganism in Europe*, documents the key policy innovation that has transformed European sports security: the negotiated protocol between security authorities, clubs, and supporter associations – stewardship systems, Supporter Liaison Officers (SLOs), Fan Embassies during international tournaments, and designated supporter sections. Spaaij (2006) further demonstrates that hooliganism takes fundamentally different forms depending on the specific club culture and local institutional context, confirming that even within the European model, context shapes the configuration.

The critical insight for Moroccan authorities is that this profile is governable through established, transferable protocols – provided Moroccan security operators are trained to recognize the behavioral grammar of European Ultra and hooligan groups and deploy the appropriate instruments rather than improvising coercive responses to recognized rituals.

b. The South American Model: Barras Bravas and Organized Patronage

Garriga Zucal (2007), in his landmark ethnographic study *Haciendo amigos a las pinas*, documents the structural characteristic of the barra brava: an organized supporter group whose violence is not expressive, reactive, or ritualized – it is institutionally embedded in a system of economic and political patronage linking supporter group leaders to club management, local politicians, and informal economic networks. More than 300 supporter deaths were recorded in Argentine football between 1958 and 2015 (Garriga Zucal, 2007; Alabarces, 2004), establishing the barra brava model as the most lethally violent in the comparative literature. For Moroccan security authorities, this profile requires intelligence-based security management – monitoring of group leadership networks and coordination with South American football federations – rather than standard crowd management protocols.

**Table 1. Comparative Typology of Supporter Cultural Profiles: Key Dimensions and 2030 Governance Implications**

Dimension	North African (Boualam 2022; Amara 2012; Rommel 2021; Dorsey 2014)	Sub-Saharan African (Alegi 2010; Darby 2002; Tajfel & Turner 1979)	European (Williams et al. 1989; Tsoukala 2009; Spaaij 2006)	South American (Garriga Zucal 2007; Alabarces 2004)
Violence trigger	Chronic: socioeconomic precarity, relative frustration	Situational: perceived institutional injustice, violated collective dignity	Territorial/ideological : rival group, political identity	Organized: patronage network decisions
Violence logic	Expressive, political, rooted in structural poverty	Reactive, dignity-triggered, communal	Ritualized, codified, bounded by group codes	Purposeful, institutionally embedded
Theoretical framework	Bourdieu (1980); Elias & Dunning (1994); Hirschman (1970)	Tajfel & Turner (1979); Alegi (2010); Darby (2002)	Williams et al. (1989); Spaaij (2006); Tsoukala (2009)	Garriga Zucal (2007); Alabarces (2004)
Primary security instrument	Social stewardship + partnership + prevention	Cultural mediation + spatial equity + institutional fairness	SLO protocols + separation management	Intelligence-based + inter-federation coordination

Note. SLO = Supporter Liaison Officer. Asian, North American and Oceanian profiles are excluded given insufficient peer-reviewed documentation of their violence dynamics in international tournament contexts. Source: Author's synthesis.

## Evaluation of the Techno-Legal Matrix

### *Law 09-09: A Framework Designed for One Profile*

Promulgated by Dahir No. 1-11-38 of June 2, 2011, Law No. 09-09 constitutes the legal foundation of Morocco's security architecture (Royaume du Maroc, 2011). Moncef El Yazghi summarizes its chronic implementation gap: Law 09-09 was 'created not to be applied' (El Yazghi, cited in *Le Matin.ma*, March 14, 2022). Beyond this deficit, the typological analysis of Section 4 reveals a deeper structural limitation: the law was conceived for the North African 'Hooltra' profile. Applied to Sub-Saharan supporters in defensive aggression mode, it risks amplifying the sense of institutional injustice that triggered the reaction. Applied to barra brava leadership networks whose violence is pre-organized outside the stadium, its coercive provisions address the wrong level of the phenomenon entirely.

### *The Innovation of Judicial Bureaus: An Achievement Whose Limits the Senegalese Case Exposed*

AFCON 2025 produced a significant institutional innovation: 9 judicial bureaus in 6 host cities (Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech, Agadir, Fez, Tangier), operational from December 20, 2025, leading to 202 persons referred to justice, 82 cases sent to trial, and 56 transactional fines (Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Morocco, 2025; El Miri, 2026). The principal case that tested the limits of this innovation was the trial of the 18 Senegalese supporters arrested following the final.

On February 19, 2026 the Tribunal de Premiere Instance of Rabat rendered its verdict. Nine supporters were sentenced to one year of imprisonment and a 5,000 dirham fine (approximately 460 euros); six to six months and a 2,000 dirham fine; three to three months and a 1,000 dirham fine (Africa Presse, February 20, 2026; Pravda FR, February 20, 2026). Defense lawyer Me Patrick Kabou publicly denounced the absence of legal representation and a Wolof interpreter during the investigation phases and before the Procureur du Roi, stating his clients 'consider themselves hostages awaiting liberation by their captors' and initially declined to file an appeal on the grounds that doing so would 'endorse the manifest absence of a fair trial' (24 Heures Info, February 23, 2026). An appeal was subsequently opened before the Cour d'Appel de Rabat, with a hearing postponed to March 30, 2026 (Medias24, March 17, 2026).

These procedural failures are analytically significant beyond their immediate context. They constitute the institutional expression of the knowledge gap identified in Section 4: a judicial apparatus designed for the domestic 'Hooltra' profile – where the defendant shares the legal language, cultural framework, and institutional expectations of the Moroccan system – was applied without adaptation to Sub-Saharan supporters whose behavior followed a dignity-triggered reactive logic. In Tajfel and Turner's (1979) Social Identity Theory terms, the judicial process itself became a new trigger for identity-protective response rather than its resolution: the original perceived injustice (the refereeing decision) was compounded by a second institutional humiliation (a judicial process conducted in a language the defendant does not understand, without cultural mediation).

### *The Diplomatic Fallout: When Sports Governance Becomes Foreign Policy*

The diplomatic sequence triggered by the February 19 verdict is analyzed here not as a narrative of events but as an empirical demonstration of three analytically prior propositions – propositions that the theoretical framework of Section 4 already predicts independently of the specific incident.

The first proposition is that applying domestic security instruments to foreign supporters without cultural calibration produces diplomatic externalities that security planners systematically fail to anticipate. Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) predicts that perceived institutional injustice directed at a group symbol activates identity-protective responses that extend well beyond the individuals directly involved. Senegalese Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko's public statement – 'For two countries that call themselves friends like Morocco and Senegal, things should not have come to this' (Afrik.com, February 2026) – illustrates this precisely: the 18 convicted supporters were experienced, in Senegalese public discourse, not as 18 individuals who had committed infractions, but as 18 representatives of a national

community that had been institutionally humiliated twice.

The second proposition is that the fragile soft power paradox operates at the bilateral as well as the informational level. Morocco's investment in its image as a hospitable African host nation was directly damaged in precisely the bilateral relationship that constitutes one of its most important African diplomatic partnerships. President Bassirou Diomaye Faye announced his intention to write personally to King Mohammed VI to request a royal pardon (Dakar Poste, 2026) — a mechanism that would allow Morocco to resolve the affair without formally compromising its judicial sovereignty. Civil society organization Horizon sans Frontieres warned that 'excessive penal response risks not only feeding a sense of injustice, but also weakening the spirit of fraternity that historically unites Senegal and Morocco' (Pravda FR, February 20, 2026).

The third proposition is that the 2030 governance challenge is geopolitical, not merely operational. Security decisions made within Moroccan stadia will have consequences in foreign ministries. The appropriate response is not to weaken the judicial innovation of in-stadium bureaus — which remains valuable — but to equip it with the cultural mediation architecture that its current design structurally lacks.

### ***Technology Without Cultural Competency: A Structural Blind Spot***

The security apparatus mobilized 3,000 to 4,000 personnel per match (DGSN, 2025), supplemented by drones and facial recognition cameras. These tools showed their limits in the face of sudden emotional embasement (Elias & Dunning, 1994). Technology cannot read cultural behavioral grammar: it cannot distinguish the slow-building structural frustration of the North African 'Hooltra' from the rapid dignity-triggered flare of a Sub-Saharan supporter community (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), or from the pre-organized movement of a barra brava leadership network (Garriga Zucal, 2007). Without cultural competency built into its interpretation framework (Betancourt et al., 2003), the technological security system sees the behavior but cannot read its meaning.

## **The Strategic Pivot: Toward Culturally Differentiated Human Security**

### ***The Epistemological Shift Required***

The dominant Moroccan security paradigm is state-centric: protection of public order, neutralization of disruptors, defense of national image. The typological analysis of Section 4 reveals its limits. Applying North African 'Hooltra' protocols to Sub-Saharan supporters in defensive aggression mode amplifies the sense of injustice. Applying crowd management protocols to barra brava networks misses the organized dimension entirely. The transition toward 'human security' (UNDP, 1994) must be understood as a structural epistemological shift: security authorities must ask, before any intervention, which profile is operating here? — and calibrate accordingly. This is not merely a philosophical commitment: it is the most cost-effective security investment Morocco can make before 2030.

### ***Gender Inclusion as a Cross-Cultural Regulator***

Across all four supporter profiles, feminization of stadium stands functions as a structural de-escalation instrument, documented in the European context (Tsoukala, 2009), consistent with the festive communal logic of Sub-Saharan culture (Alegi, 2010), and identified as a significant moderating factor in North African dynamics. A policy targeting 30% female attendance at first-division matches by 2028 constitutes a cross-culturally effective investment.

## Operational Roadmap – Horizon 2030

### *Recommendations from the Rabat Symposium, Articulated with the Typological Framework*

The Rabat Symposium produced 15 structuring recommendations (Mokhliss, 2026) organized across three intervention levels. These recommendations are here presented with explicit specification of which cultural profile each primarily addresses.

#### Level 1: Prevention and Inclusion (Recommendations 1-5)

1. Transform Ultra groups into security partners (North African profile): institutionalize partnership conventions between supporter associations, clubs, and local authorities, drawing on the political sociology of Moroccan supporterism and the regional North African context (Amara, 2012; Dorsey, 2014).
2. Create a national program of cultural mediators (Sub-Saharan and Other profiles): trained specialists from each major participating confederation region, deployed as cultural liaison officers. This is the most innovative recommendation for the 2030 context, directly derived from the typological analysis of Section 4 and the cultural competency framework of Betancourt et al. (2003).
3. Deploy a feminization policy for stadium stands (cross-cultural): target 30% female spectators at first-division matches by 2028.
4. Negotiate an equitable ticketing protocol with CAF and FIFA for 2030 (Sub-Saharan profile): establish a minimum quota of 15% for visiting team supporters, correcting the spatial asymmetry documented at AFCON 2025 (El Yadari, 2026).
5. Integrate the three-profile typology into mandatory security force training (all profiles): socioeconomic determinants for North African dynamics; communal dignity logic for Sub-Saharan supporterism (Alegi, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1979); codified protocols for European Ultra management (Tsoukala, 2009; Spaaij, 2006); and organized patronage logic of barras bravas (Garriga Zucal, 2007).

#### Level 2: Operations and Technology (Recommendations 6-11)

6. Create cybernetic monitoring units (all profiles): detect tension narratives 24-48 hours before matches in the specific media ecosystems of all participating nations' communities (Mokhliss, 2026).
7. Institutionalize in-stadium judicial bureaus with profile-sensitive protocols (all profiles): equip judicial bureaus with cultural mediators, multilingual legal assistance, and differentiated intervention protocols calibrated to each cultural profile (Ministry of Justice of the Kingdom of Morocco, 2025).
8. Establish a National Observatory of Sports Violence with a comparative mandate (all profiles): produce and update the three-profile typological framework as pre-2030 data accumulates.
9. Render Law 09-09 effectively applied and internationally adapted (all profiles): create a national evaluation commission and develop supplementary provisions addressing foreign supporter groups (Royaume du Maroc, 2011; El Yazghi, 2022).
10. Develop profile-specific emotion management protocols (all profiles): train commanders to distinguish between the slow-build frustration of the North African 'Hooltra', the rapid dignity-triggered flare of Sub-Saharan supporters (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), and the organized movement signals of barra brava networks (Garriga Zucal, 2007).
11. Define a multilingual, multi-platform crisis communication plan (all profiles): activable within two hours, calibrated to the media ecosystems of each major supporter community expected in 2030 (Nye, 2004).

#### Level 3: Governance and Diplomacy (Recommendations 12-15)

12. Negotiate with CAF and FIFA a crisis management protocol: including pre-conflictual mediation clauses, transparent VAR procedures, and mandatory cultural liaison officer deployment for finals.

13. Create an African Center for Sports Security Training in Rabat: with an explicit mandate to develop and disseminate the three-profile typological framework – establishing Morocco as the continental hub of culturally informed sports security expertise.
14. Integrate a 'sports violence and social exclusion' component into the National Human Development Strategy, addressing the socioeconomic roots of North African domestic supporter violence (Amara, 2012).
15. Pilot an 'Ultras Ambassadors' program for Moroccan domestic supporter management, and establish Supporter Liaison Officer frameworks adapted to each confederation's cultural profile for the management of visiting communities (Tsoukala, 2009; Mokhliss, 2026).

## **Beyond Soft Power: An Integrated Power Doctrine Grounded in Cultural Intelligence**

### *The Fragile Soft Power Paradox*

Before developing this argument, the concept of the 'fragile soft power paradox' requires situating within the existing literature on soft power and its limits. Nye's (2004) original theorization acknowledges that soft power is inherently fragile – dependent on credibility, legitimacy, and the absence of contradicting hard power failures. Scholars critical of the soft power framework, including Lukes (2005) in his analysis of power's three dimensions and Gallarotti (2010) in his study of the power curse, have argued that soft power investments are structurally vulnerable to adversarial counter-narratives and cannot substitute for coercive capacity in crisis situations. The 'fragile soft power paradox' proposed here extends this critique specifically to the sports diplomacy context: it designates the structural gap between the image projected through mega-event organization and the actual capacity to defend that image against adversarial informational campaigns. This is not a new phenomenon – it is an application of an established critique to a specific and undertheorized empirical domain.

The January 18, 2026 incident exposed a structural tension: investment in sports soft power and hospitality (Nye, 2004) does not protect national reputation when adversarial 'narrative fog' conditions are assembled. Gulf monarchies provide the most instructive illustration: Saudi Arabia and the UAE have invested tens of billions in global sports – the 2022 World Cup, LIV Golf, Formula 1, European football – without this image investment protecting their infrastructure against Houthi and Iranian drone and missile attacks during 2019-2024. Sports hospitality is not a missile defense system.

### *Toward an Integrated Power Doctrine*

Morocco must articulate sports soft power with credible hard power capacity within a coherent integrated power doctrine. This doctrine has three dimensions: rapid juridico-diplomatic response capacity; internal deterrence through systematic and visible application of Law 09-09 (Royaume du Maroc, 2011); and real-time image defense through permanent cybernetic monitoring units.

Crucially, this integrated power doctrine must be grounded in the cultural intelligence that the three-profile typological framework provides. The 2030 World Cup will be decided not only by logistical excellence but in moments of cultural friction between security apparatus and supporter communities. Morocco must combine warm hospitality with a cultural competency architecture (Betancourt et al., 2003) that makes every security interaction with a foreign supporter community a demonstration of informed respect rather than a trigger for escalation.

## **Conclusion**

The Morocco-Senegal final of January 18, 2026, will remain in the annals not as a failure, but as a revelator. In the compressed time of a single football evening, it exposed the governance challenge Morocco must address before 2030: stadium violence is not a uniform phenomenon, and a uniform security response applied across radically different cultural profiles is the primary source of escalation risk in a context of international diversity.

The practical stakes of instrumentalizing this typological knowledge deserve explicit articulation. For

Moroccan security authorities, integrating the three-profile framework into operational practice means three concrete things. First, security personnel assigned to matches involving Sub-Saharan national teams must be trained to recognize dignity-triggered reactive dynamics (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and deploy de-escalation rather than coercive protocols as the primary response – a specific competency that standard crowd management training does not provide. Second, judicial officers assigned to in-stadium bureaus must be equipped with cultural mediators and interpreters covering the principal languages of participating nations – not as a diplomatic courtesy, but as a structural condition of the legitimacy and effectiveness of the judicial process itself. Third, negotiators engaging with CAF and FIFA on the 2030 operational framework must be able to articulate the cultural specificity of each supporter community's spatial and ticketing needs – because, as the 2,850-ticket allocation demonstrated, regulatory compliance does not guarantee perceived fairness, and perceived unfairness is the primary trigger of the Sub-Saharan violence profile.

The profiles typological framework advanced in this paper constitutes a concrete, empirically grounded, and operationally actionable architecture for that governance challenge. The security authority that can read these differences and calibrate its interventions accordingly will transform a potential liability into a governance achievement: a 2030 World Cup that enhances rather than undermines Morocco's sovereign standing as a host nation capable of welcoming the full diversity of the world's supporter cultures with intelligence, dignity, and effectiveness.

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