

# Favoritism under Multiple Sources of Social Pressure

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## **Abstract**

When social pressure leads to favoritism, policies might aim to reduce the bias by affecting its source. This paper shows that multiple sources may be present and telling them apart is important. We build a novel and granular dataset on European football games and revisit the view that supporting crowds make referees help the host team. We find this bias to remain unchanged even in stadiums closed due to Covid-19. Instead, influential host organizations emerge as the source of social pressure. This has an adverse effect on maintaining the ranking of influential teams and hindering the progress of smaller teams.

**Keywords:** social pressure, favoritism, persuasion, corruption, sport

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# 1 Introduction

In a situation of competition between organizations, there is often an opportunity for an agent (such as a judge or a referee) to make a decision benefiting one party. Favoritism is the practice when a decision maker gives preferential treatment to one party at the expense of another, which is not warranted by the rightful determinants. Favoritism is present in a wide variety of situations ranging from promotion decisions in organizations (Prendergast and Topel, 1996) to allocation of regional development funds (Hodler and Raschky, 2014).

Apart from explicit corruption (bribery), another common source of favoritism is social pressure: the exertion of influence by a person or a group. Social pressure includes conformity and persuasion. Conformity is about the agents' desire to conform to some expectations, to seek approval or adhere to a social image of themselves (Bursztyn and Jensen, 2017). Persuasion occurs when individuals or groups try to influence an agent's decision in their interest via persuasive behavior such as communication (DellaVigna and Gentzkow, 2010) looking for both a cognitive and an emotional response from the receiver (DeMarzo, Vayanos, and Zwiebel, 2003; Schwartzstein and Sunderam, 2021).

When social pressure leads to favoritism, policy actions should raise awareness and aim to reduce bias by affecting either party (the sender or the receiver). This is easy when there is one single channel of social pressure. However, individuals may care about the perception of more than one reference group (Bursztyn and Jensen, 2017). For instance students may care about both the perceptions of their peers and those of their prospective employers (Austen-Smith and Fryer, 2005). As for persuasion, consumers might be targeted by various parties at one and the same time.

We contribute to the literature by showing that telling apart sources of social pressure is important. We revisit Garicano, Palacios-Huerta, and Prendergast (2005) who analyzed the decisions of association football (soccer) referees and found evidence of favoritism, namely, referees helping the home team in crucially important situations.<sup>1</sup> They argued that this bias is driven by social pressure stemming from home team supporting crowds in the stadium: referees show conformity to the home team supporters and thus, internalize their preference. We argue that referees may be affected by multiple sources of social pressure, in particular, the supporting crowd in the stadium as well as the host team organization. Relying on exogenous variation in crowd size due stadium closures during the Covid pandemic, we find no effect from crowds on referee behavior. Instead, we show that the host team organization may have an influence on referees, since it is

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<sup>1</sup>There is a growing literature using sports to learn about behavior. For instance, expectation of financial rewards was shown to lead to match rigging in Japanese Sumo wrestlers (Duggan and Levitt, 2002). Gauriot and Page (2019) also use football data to talk about quality perception biased by luck, while Parsons, Sulaeman, Yates, and Hamermesh (2011) look at discrimination in US baseball.

mostly successful teams that benefit from the referees' favoritism bias. Nevertheless, social pressure remains the driver of favoritism, as we find no evidence of corruption: the bias in favor of successful teams is uncorrelated with referee career paths.

In order to be able to separate the various sources, we need appropriate data and an identification strategy that can help with the differentiation. To that end, first, we compiled a new and comprehensive dataset on European football games covering match events, referee decisions, and referee career paths. Our high granularity dataset covers 10 seasons (2011/12 to 2020/21) of the 5 most prestigious men's football leagues: the English *Premier League*, the Spanish *La Liga*, the Italian *Serie A*, the German *Bundesliga 1*, and the French *Ligue 1* first divisions. We work with event-by-event data that records each action (such as passes, disciplinary action, penalties, injuries) along with a timestamp of that event. The data covers a long period before the COVID-19 pandemic as well as games played during the pandemic.

This paper confirms the existence of the favoritism as shown by [Garicano et al. \(2005\)](#): referees indeed use their discretionary power to systematically award more stoppage time to the home team when the latter stands to benefit.<sup>2</sup> Comparing games with a one goal difference after regular time, we find that referees on average add 13 seconds more stoppage time when the home team is losing compared to when the home team is winning.<sup>3</sup>

Next we turn to understanding the sources of social pressure. First, we examine the role of supporting crowds. [Garicano et al. \(2005\)](#) argue that referees' home bias is driven by social pressure stemming from home team supporting crowds in large numbers in the stadium: referees show conformity and internalize the preferences of the home team supporters. Conformity happens as referees pursue to "satisfy the crowds": gain their approval and internalize their preferences. This mechanism is identified via a variation in crowd size and its composition: larger attendance generates greater bias, larger than usual capacity – a posited sign of a higher share of visiting crowds – yields lower bias. These findings are extended by [Dohmen \(2008\)](#), who suggested that distance from the crowds – in stadiums with running tracks – moderated the influence of crowds.

We find, however, that the bias is not driven by crowds. The global Covid pandemic in 2020 and 2021 led to sudden and unexpected stadium closures, and games were played in empty stadiums. Instead of relying on observational variation in the relative size of home supporters, we use stadium closures as a natural experiment. Using this exogenous

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<sup>2</sup>The discretionary power empowers referees to set the stoppage time at the end of each half of the game to compensate for the time lost for a variety of events such as injuries. See Section A1 of Appendix for more details.

<sup>3</sup>This difference corresponds to 5% longer stoppage time, or an average of one additional point per season and team. This is somewhat smaller than the 20 second bias found by [Dohmen \(2008\)](#) in the German Bundesliga for the 1992/93 to 2003/04 period, and substantially smaller than the 110 seconds [Garicano et al. \(2005\)](#) found for the two Spanish seasons of 1994/95 and 1998/99.

variation in home support by local crowds, we found that the bias remained unchanged even without supporters in the stadium.

The home team's organization is the second source we look at. The organization hosts the referees, who might experience social pressure from them. Persuasion could occur with the host team having the chance to repeat a positive message, and hospitality may play an important role as well. On the day of the match, referees are surrounded by members of the host organization and often spend the whole day at the premises. Before, during, and after the match, the home team staff looks after the safety and well-being of the referee. Gifts from the home team are not uncommon either.<sup>4</sup>

At the same time, referees in close proximity to players and managers could be the strongest channel. Players, especially stars will confront referees on decisions they do not like. Famous and well-known players and managers will exhume star power. Both persuasion by these people and the human desire to conform to greatness could play a role.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, players, when ex-ante expected to win at home, could exert higher levels of pressure on the referees when losing or drawing as they themselves are feeling the pressure.<sup>6</sup>

Social pressure is likely to stem from both teams, but its relative size will vary with influence. In football, the size of influence is related to sporting success (such as ranking after a season). For the referees, the desire to conform to successful teams and their star players will be stronger. These teams will also be able to mobilize more resources (better facilities and personnel) for the purpose of persuasion.<sup>7</sup> To detect social pressure related to the host team organization, we will compare teams of different ranking: more successful teams are expected to enjoy a larger home team bias.

Looking at the difference in stoppage time when it benefits the home team compared to when it benefits the away team, we indeed find that referees add more than twice as long stoppage time at the end of the second half for the benefit of the most successful third of teams compared to the rest.<sup>8</sup> The favoritism bias is the largest when a top ranked team plays a minnow: the lowest ranked teams will enjoy zero home bias when playing against top teams.

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<sup>4</sup>For anecdotal evidence, two examples are [www.theguardian.com/football/2015/mar/28/referees-football-match-day-routine-sport](http://www.theguardian.com/football/2015/mar/28/referees-football-match-day-routine-sport) and [www.as.com/en/2017/02/27/soccer/1488229755\\_283818.html](http://www.as.com/en/2017/02/27/soccer/1488229755_283818.html).

<sup>5</sup>Conformity has a large literature in psychology, see [Cialdini and Trost \(1998\)](#), with conformity to stars, in particular, discussed in many contexts such as body image in [Shorter, Brown, Quinton, and Hinton \(2008\)](#).

<sup>6</sup>We thank an anonymous referee for this point.

<sup>7</sup>Sporting success and team wealth are strongly correlated in elite sports such as football, and there is low churning at the top.

<sup>8</sup>This is in line with a related finding: using an expert panel, [Erikstad and Johansen \(2020\)](#) showed that the top two teams in Norway are more likely to get a penalty awarded.

In our exercise, we aimed at showing an example when social pressure may come from different sources. We found that the traditionally assumed source, namely, crowds, cannot explain favoritism. How can we reconcile our results with earlier ones? We suspect that earlier results on crowds may have been confounded by the characteristics of the host team organization that remain in play even behind closed doors: more successful teams have larger stadiums, and are less likely to have running tracks (no top team in Germany has tracks, while 9.8% of the rest have tracks). A large and highly granular dataset as well as exogenous variation was necessary to distinguish these two sources of social pressure.

Importantly in this setup, social pressure may have an aggregate consequence. If the top ranked teams get additional help from the referees, social pressure will contribute to maintaining the ranking, thereby making it more difficult for smaller teams to catch up.

Finally, we examine whether there could be a more obvious explanation for favoritism that could, at the same time, act as a key possible confounder: corruption. While direct bribery is extremely unlikely,<sup>9</sup> referees may expect professional rewards in the future when helping the most successful teams.<sup>10</sup> To refute this alternative hypothesis, we examined referees' careers in the prestigious pan-European competitions where only the most successful teams play. If favoritism was driven by the expectation to work more in these leagues, referees with higher bias would be picked more often – in collusion with participating teams. We find no such evidence.

There are several previous studies looking at sports outcomes in games played behind closed doors, that is without supporting crowds. [Bryson, Dolton, Reade, Schreyer, and Singleton \(2021\)](#), [Reade, Schreyer, and Singleton \(2022\)](#), [Wolaver and Magee \(2022\)](#), and [Morita and Araki \(2022\)](#) all found that in terms of disciplinary action, the home bias changed substantially during closed games. However, while such actions are easier to observe, identification is problematic, as these referee decisions are intertwined with the actions of the players. This makes it difficult to empirically disentangle referee and player behavior.<sup>11</sup> Importantly, [Caselli, Falco, and Mattera \(2022\)](#) identified a differentiated effect of crowd presence on player behavior and performance. Specifically, African players performed better in closed games. This points to the fact that support or opposition of attending crowds can have diverse and specific impacts on individuals participating in the games.

Another related paper to ours is [Gong \(2022\)](#) who assesses whether the referees' home bias changed without crowd support in NBA games. He compares the probabilities of incorrect referee decisions made against home versus away players in the last two minutes

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<sup>9</sup>Although not unheard of, see the Italian match fixing case <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Calciopoli>

<sup>10</sup>For instance, the most successful teams are able to pressure the UEFA to adapt its competition formats in their favor or avoid penalties. For some discussion, see Appendix Section [A1.4](#).

<sup>11</sup>See e.g. [Carmichael and Thomas \(2005\)](#); [Dawson and Dobson \(2010\)](#), and for a review, [Dohmen and Sauermaann \(2016\)](#).

of narrow margin games. He finds that the empty arenas due to the Covid-19 pandemic have no differential effect on home bias. However, in this basketball example, no baseline home bias were identified even before having closed games. This means confounders of the referees bias, such as team influence, could not be investigated either.

This paper contributes to understanding the importance that social pressure may be related to several actors at once, and their identification will have different policy outcomes. Consider the case of possibly biased arbitration judgments in investor-state dispute settlements (Behn, Berge, and Langford, 2018). Regarding those, there may be a variety of social pressures: persuasion by and conformity to wealthy countries as well as crowd pressure via social media or protests. In the case of investigating bias in online reviews (Vollaard and van Ours, 2022), reviewers may be subject to social pressure when favoring big brands popular among large sections of consumers as well as be the target of persuasion by companies sending gifts and offering marketing events. In both these scenarios, our results suggest that an analysis must tackle different sources rather than assuming any. The paper is also related to the literature on multi-sender communication (Battaglini, 2002; Gentzkow and Kamenica, 2016, 2016), showing a case of strongly correlated signals by the senders.

As we are interested in broader social settings, we acknowledge that the world of football is particular. However, all games are televised, and detailed data (like the ones that we use) are shared in real time and such transparency should minimize any biased behavior. Thus, in other social and economic settings with a lack of similar levels of public attention, one may expect a higher bias.

In what follows, we first describe the dataset we used and key empirical methods we applied in Section 2. Then we discuss our results step by step in Section 3, before a brief summary in Section 4.

## 2 Data and Empirical Strategy

In this section, we first present our dataset, which has been compiled from several sources. Second, we describe our core empirical model and the variables we used.

### 2.1 Data Sources

Our main dataset covers the universe of men’s football matches of the top five European leagues (England, France, Germany, Italy, Spain). In a season, each team plays every other team twice, once at home and once as visitor. Over the period of 10 seasons (from 2011/12 to 2020/21), we have  $N = 18,118$  matches.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>There are 20 teams in a league (18 in Germany),  $10 \times 4 \times 20 \times 19 + 10 \times 1 \times 18 \times 17 = 18260$ . Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the season 2019/20 of the French Ligue 1 finished early, with only 279 out of

Such a dataset has several advantages. Multiple leagues allow filtering out possible country specific rules and customs and lead to high external validity, and a large coverage is also necessary to power our identification. Likewise, detailed and long time series information is necessary to examine referees' careers.

The main dataset is an event-by-event level description of every game, collected from [whoscored.com](https://www.whoscored.com). This records each and every action happening on the pitch. Each event has a type and a timestamp (at the second level). Event types include: pass, ball recovery, foul, tackle, throw-in, free-kick, yellow and red card, substitution, penalties, shot, goal, or corner. In a typical game, an event happens once in every 3.6 seconds: there are 1432 events recorded in the regular playtime of 90 minutes, and 90.1 events during stoppage time. Where relevant, the dataset also contains the location of the event on the pitch (in terms of  $x$  and  $y$  coordinates).

The second set of data is at the game level. It includes the venue of the game, attendance in the stadium, the result (goals by home and away teams), referee name, date, and time.

The third set of data concerns referees' experience in terms of the number of games they refereed in domestic and European competitions. The data have been collected from [soccerway.com](https://www.soccerway.com).

Furthermore, we used complementary data from a variety of sources. Information on stadiums comes from [transfermarkt.com](https://www.transfermarkt.com) as well as from Wikipedia pages of teams. We used Deloitte Football Money League to identify top clubs.<sup>13</sup> We collected data to estimate the squad value of each team for every season, using historical player valuations from [transfermarkt.com](https://www.transfermarkt.com). Finally, for each league and season we downloaded the clubs' Elo rating score at the start of the season from [elorating.com](https://www.elorating.com).

## 2.2 Empirical Strategy

Our main outcome variable of interest, *Stoppage\_time*, is the length of playtime (measured in seconds) beyond the regular time (90:00 minutes). We measure this as the timestamp of the game end in the event data. Thus, this indicates the time on the clock (beyond 90 minutes) when the referee blows the final whistle. This can (and often does) slightly differ from the expected stoppage time indicated by the referee at the end of the regular time, as referees may adjust the indicated time based on events like fouls and substitutions that happen during the stoppage time. Again, this variable is measured in seconds, allowing us to measure changes at a high level of precision.

We follow [Garicano et al. \(2005\)](#), and focus only on the cleanest comparison to study

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380 games played. Due to data coverage deficiencies, we lost 41 games.

<sup>13</sup>See: [Deloitte Football Money League](#) Wikipedia page. The 20 teams include 6 English, 4 Italian, 4 German, 3 French, and 3 Spanish teams.

referees’ favoritism bias: looking at matches where the goal difference at the end of regular time (90:00) is exactly one goal. Our key independent variable is an indicator variable,  $Home\_lose$ , as we compare the length of stoppage time in games when the home team is losing by one goal ( $Home\_lose = 1$ ) with games where it is winning by one goal ( $Home\_lose = 0$ ). For each game, events are aggregated at the first half, the second half, as well as the first and second stoppage time periods.

The average stoppage time is 253 seconds, ranging from 3 to 660 seconds. The home team wins slightly more games than the away team (57% compared to 43%), consistent with the well-documented general home advantage in sport (Jamieson, 2010). For a broader review of descriptive statistics, see Table A2 in the Appendix. This difference between average stoppage time by the home team losing or winning, however, could be confounded by a variety of factors, such as injuries correlated with both stoppage time and the result, or differences in the playing style of the home team. To partial these out, we estimate the following model with OLS:

$$Stoppage\_time_{h,a,s} = \beta Home\_lose_{h,a,s} + \gamma Controls_{h,a,s} + \theta_l + \eta_h + \epsilon_{h,a,s}, \quad (1)$$

where our unit of observation is a single game played between home team  $h$ , and away team  $a$  in season  $s$  in league  $l$ . As each team hosts every other team once in a season, the  $h, a$  dyad uniquely identifies a game in any season  $s$ . We use a rich set of control variables ( $Controls_{h,a,s}$ ) as described below. Standard errors are clustered at the home team level.<sup>14</sup>

As control, we include the following variables. First and most importantly, we approximate the justifiable length of stoppage time by counting the time during which the ball is likely to have been out of play in the second half. Our granular event dataset introduced above allows us to calculate the measure of *Wasted time* as a sum of seconds between two consecutive events if the first event is a foul, a card, a ball picked up by the keeper, or a goal; or if the second event is a corner, a throw-in, or a substitution. Thus, this variable captures all the events associated with time wasting, including those that determine the length of the stoppage time as per the Laws of The Game (see Section A1 of Appendix). To make sure that the measure also captures longer interruptions of the games such as injuries or cooling breaks, we also add any interruption of the game that is longer than 30 seconds. In addition, to make sure that our results are not driven by extraordinary games with very long interruption (such as a serious injury), we exclude matches that fall within the top 5% of relevant matches in terms of the longest interruption.<sup>15</sup> In the second half, wasted time varies between 11 and 33 minutes, its average is 21 minutes (out

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<sup>14</sup>Standard errors with the alternative home-away level clusters are slightly smaller.

<sup>15</sup>This step excludes matches where the game stopped for at least 266 seconds (almost 3 minutes).



of 45+4.5), equivalent to c. 60% effective playing time. Second, in addition to wasted time, we also control for the number of events associated with long stops: yellow or red cards, substitutions, fouls, and goals in the second half. It may matter, as referees may use heuristics, such as the number of these key events to decide stoppage time. Furthermore, these events are potentially confounding variables as they can be correlated with the goal difference as well, given that the playing style of the teams usually varies depending on winning or losing.

Third, a potential further confounding effect may be that instead of favoring the home team, referees may simply let the attacks started during the end of the stoppage time finish. It is a confounder because in general, the losing team is likely to play more offensively during stoppage time (as they need to score a goal), and the away team is more likely to lose (due to the home advantage in general). To control for this possibility, we generate a variable by taking into account the passes of the losing team during stoppage time, and take the average distance of these passes from the team's own goal line. This variable (called *Losing offensiveness*) is measured in units of distance from the team's own goal line, on a scale from 0 to 100.

Fourth, during the examined 10-year period, the video assistant referee (VAR) technology was introduced, and its use may affect both the stoppage time setting and the activity of players. Thus, we added a league-season level variable (*VAR*) indicating whether the technology was in use.<sup>16</sup>

Fifth, for each match we also control for the round of the season. This variable runs from 1 (the first match in the season for each team) to 38 (the last match in the season for each team in case of a league with 20 teams). In later rounds, there is more at stake in the game, which can affect both the referee's and team's behavior.

Finally, in line with earlier literature, we add league and home team fixed effects ( $\theta_l$  and  $\eta_h$ , respectively) to capture the footballing style and quality of the team. This allows within-team comparisons of stoppage time conditional on end of regular time results. Our baseline specification does not include referee fixed effects, as we cannot rule out the possibility that the allocation of referees is not random, and may be a part of the mechanism through which bias works. That said, all our results are robust to including referee fixed effects, as well as to including referee age (as a proxy for their experience) as a control variable.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup>VAR has been in operation since season 2017/18 in Germany and Italy, since season 2018/19 in France and Spain, and since season 2019/20 in England. See more in Section A1 in the Appendix.

<sup>17</sup>Results are available on the project's GitHub page.

### 3 Results

This section presents our empirical findings. We confirm the existence of a referee favoritism bias towards the home team, and show that this bias is not driven by the fans in the stadium. As a next step, we show that influential teams enjoy a larger favoritism bias from referees.

#### 3.1 Home-team Bias is Still There, But Not Because of the Crowd

In our dataset, 12.4 seconds is the raw difference between the additional stoppage time if the home team is losing by one goal and the additional time when it is winning by one goal. As shown in Table 1, once all control variables are added, this difference is marginally changed to 13.41.<sup>18</sup> Detailed regression results are shown in Table A3 in the Appendix, revealing how each of the control variables is related to the length of stoppage time in our baseline specification with various fixed effects (Model 2 of Table 1). We see that stoppage time is indeed correlated with events in the game such as fouls or disciplinary actions. Furthermore, it shows that our baseline estimations are not sensitive to the choice of fixed effects, including fixed effects for the referees.

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Europe in spring 2020, practically every football league was suspended as of the second weekend of March. France closed the 2019/2020 season early, while other leagues resumed around May-June, with matches played behind closed doors. Closed door games continued in the 2020/21 season and in spring 2021, while partial opening meant that for 139 games stadiums were filled to an average capacity of 13%. Over these two years, about 2/3 of the games were played in fully or partially closed stadiums. (For details, see Appendix Table A1 in the Appendix.) We created two indicator variables,  $Closed = 1$  when attendance is zero, and  $Covid = 1$  that also includes very low attendance games in 2021. As partial opening only affects 6.6% of the games, it will turn out to have very little impact.

To find out if the difference disappeared during closed games, we added an interaction term to equation (1) and estimated:

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<sup>18</sup>Our results refer to the 2011-2021 period. Note that our estimated coefficient for Germany is 16 seconds, close to what was measured earlier by Dohmen (2008) but a magnitude smaller than the one in Garicano et al. (2005). For lack of available data from the period, it is difficult to make a direct comparison, but the difference in estimates is not driven by modelling choices: a replication of their core model (in their Table 2, column 4) offers a similar estimate to our favored specification (Appendix, Table A4). It is possible that in the nineties there was less oversight of referee behavior in Spain.

Table 1: Presence of home bias, no crowd effect

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Home lose	12.40*** (2.07)	13.41*** (1.65)	13.81*** (1.60)	13.70*** (1.61)
Home lose $\times$ Covid			-2.41 (5.19)	
Home lose $\times$ Closed				-0.99 (5.08)
Controls	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
League FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.01	0.45	0.46	0.45
Observations	6667	6667	6667	6667

*Note:* Games with a single goal difference after regular time. Dependent variable is stoppage time in seconds. Controls include time with ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, round of season, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from opponent's goal line in the extra time. In columns 3 and 4, all controls are also interacted with the Covid or the Closed dummy. Standard errors clustered at home team level. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

$$\begin{aligned}
\text{Stoppage\_time}_{h,a,s} = & \beta_1 \text{Home lose}_{h,a,s} + \beta_2 \text{Closed}_{h,a,s} + \beta_3 \text{Home lose}_{h,a,s} \times \text{Closed}_{h,a,s} \\
& + \gamma \text{Controls}_{h,a,s} + \eta_{\text{hometeam}_h} + \epsilon_{h,a,s},
\end{aligned} \tag{2}$$

where our treatment indicator  $\text{Closed}_{h,a,s}$  flags closed matches. An alternative is where instead, we flag all closed and partially open games ( $\text{Covid}_{h,a,s}$ ). All control variables are also interacted with the *Closed* (or *Covid*) dummy to capture that without crowds players may behave differently or referees may take a different amount of time to make decisions.

Columns 3 and 4 in Table 1 show that the bias is unchanged whether the game is played in full or (mostly) empty stadiums: the estimated interaction terms are very close to zero. This result is robust to changing the mix of control variables (including adding referee fixed effects).<sup>19</sup>

<sup>19</sup>Another novelty during Covid was having cooling breaks in the summer games of 2020. We checked robustness by taking these games out, and it had no impact. Results are shared on the project's GitHub page.

The exogenous variation in crowd presence allowed us to test the hypothesis that the favoritism bias from referees favoring the home team is the consequence of the social pressure exerted by the fans of the home team in the stadium. Our results confirmed the existence of bias in referee decisions, but we can rule out that this is driven by the size of the crowd, as the bias remains unchanged even in the extreme case of closed stadiums. This is our first main result: any difference in the crowd size is very unlikely to be the mechanism behind social pressure, therefore, referees must be helping the home team for other reasons.

### 3.2 The Home-team Bias Driven by Influential Teams

If favoritism bias from referees is not driven by crowds, there must be some other mechanism that leads to biased behavior.

In this section we investigate if the size of the home-team bias is correlated with team influence. Sporting success and financial clout allow teams to have influence: they attract players, fans, investment, or media interest. Influence will also provide teams with the capacity to exert social pressure in the form of the persuasion of independent agents.

Financial and sporting success are strongly correlated: wealthier teams will have better players and will win more often. In our baseline specification we use the league table ranking as it is a well-defined order of team success. In our data, wealth and quality measures are highly correlated with a correlation coefficient between 57% and 92%. In a robustness check, we use replicate results with other metrics of influence.

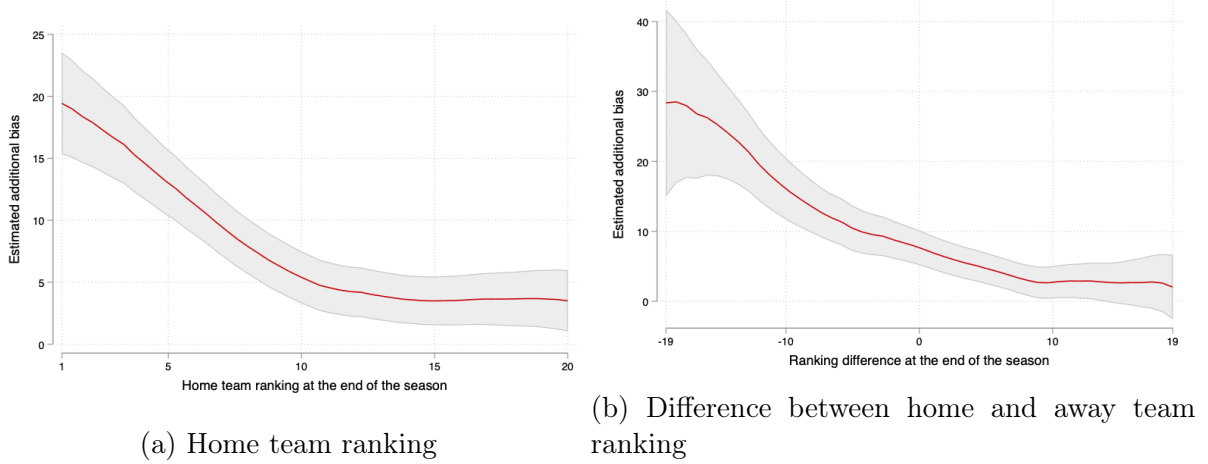
Ranking is defined as the end-of-season position of the team in the league table, the lower the better (1 is the title winner, 18 or 20 is the last team). The final ranking of a team at the end of a season is close to its expected average ranking throughout the season, and it may be easily compared across leagues and seasons.

To uncover the relationship between stoppage time and ranking, we first estimate a model with only the football rule controls (such as time with the ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions), as described in Section 3.1. Then, we compute the difference between predicted and actual stoppage time. This deviation,  $\widehat{Bias}$  from equation (3), is the measure of the unexplained difference.

$$\widehat{Bias} = Stoppage\_time_{h,a,s} - (\hat{\gamma}Controls_{h,a,s} + \hat{\eta}_{hometeam_h}) \quad (3)$$

In the second step, using local polynomial smoothing regressions, we plot this bias against heterogeneity by the ranking of the home team. In Figure 1a, we see a fairly strong pattern with the higher-ranked teams enjoying a greater home-team bias. In Figure 1b, we see a similar pattern with the difference plotted against bias: when the top team plays against the lowest ranked one, the gap is 30 seconds, but it goes down to 0 when a

Figure 1: Heterogeneity of home-team bias by team ranking



*Note:* Local polynomial smoothing and a 95% confidence interval. Bias measured in seconds, rank between 1 (best) and 20 (worst); 1-18 for Germany. Predicted stoppage time is the residual from a regression of stoppage time on football rule controls (time with ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, round of season, whether VAR was used, losing offensiveness (as average distance of the passes of the losing team from the opponent’s goal line in the stoppage time) all interacted with the *Closed* dummy.

minnow plays at home against a top team.<sup>20</sup>

Both graphs suggest that influence in terms of ranking may be non-linear. This may stem from an important rule: the top six teams will play in the rewarding European championships in the following season. Thus, we will also consider a binary variable, *Top6*, to measure influence by being inside or outside the top six teams per league.

We estimate this heterogeneity in two ways. First, we investigate the difference along team influence (here: ranking) with  $\beta_3$  in equation (4) measuring the heterogeneity in home-team bias. The  $Home\_ranking_{h,s}$  variable may be estimated in a linear form or with a binary *Top6* variable.

$$\begin{aligned}
 Stoppage\_time_{h,a,s} = & \beta_1 Home\_lose_{h,a,s} \\
 & + \beta_2 Home\_ranking_{h,s} + \beta_3 Home\_lose_{h,a,s} \times Home\_ranking_{h,s} \\
 & + \gamma Controls_{h,a,s} + \eta_{hometeam_h} + \epsilon_{h,a,s},
 \end{aligned} \tag{4}$$

Second, an alternative model uses the difference between home and away team ranking, with  $\beta_3$  measuring the heterogeneity in home-team bias in terms of the difference between ranking. The  $Home\_ranking\_difference_{h,s}$  variable may be estimated in a linear form

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<sup>20</sup>Alternatively, confounders may be partialled out of rank as well, only to result in a very similar graph.

or with a binary variable, where high difference is defined as a gap greater than -10. In both models note that home team fixed effects allow within team comparisons of different opponents.

$$\begin{aligned}
\textit{Stoppage\_time}_{h,a,s} = & \beta_1 \textit{Home\_lose}_{h,a,s} \\
& + \beta_2 \textit{Home\_ranking\_difference}_{h,a,s} \\
& + \beta_3 \textit{Home\_lose}_{h,a,s} \times \textit{Home\_ranking\_difference}_{h,a,s} \\
& + \gamma \textit{Controls}_{h,a,s} + \eta_{\textit{hometeam}_h} + \epsilon_{h,a,s},
\end{aligned} \tag{5}$$

The results of both models are presented in Table 2. In the simplest setup with the Top6 indicator in column (1) of Table 2, we see that influential teams enjoy a home-team bias that is more than twice the one for the rest (10.7 vs. 23.5 seconds). Looking at the home team’s ranking in a linear way in Column (2), we see  $22.22 - 1 \times 0.76 = 21.46$  seconds for the top team, reduced by 0.67 seconds per rank, shrinking to 7 seconds  $22.22 - 20 \times 0.76$  for the lowest ranked one.

Next, we add the difference between teams in terms of ranking from the perspective of the home team. The difference thus ranges between 19 (when the lowest ranked team plays at home against the best one) and -19 (when the top team hosts the bottom team).

In the binary setting (Column 3), we once again find that when there is a sizeable rank gap in favor of the home team, the bias is twice the size compared to a case with no difference (12.35 vs  $12.35 + 17.62 = 29.97$  seconds). In the linear model (Column 4), for equally ranked teams the bias is 14.29 seconds and the slope is -0.81. So the lowest ranked team actually has a -1,1-second (i.e., negative) bias when playing against the top team, while the top team enjoys a 29.7-second benefit against the lowest one.

These results suggest that referees have a home-team bias that is substantially higher for more influential (top-ranked) teams, especially when they play against less influential (low-ranked) ones. The results is rather stable across leagues as shown by Figure A4 in the Appendix.

As noted earlier, influence captures aspects of financial and sporting success, and ranking is not the only way to measure it. We considered three alternatives.

First, perceived quality may be better captured by the so-called Elo rating of the teams. The Elo rating system, originating from chess, is based on past performance of the teams. The relative rating of two teams is designed to capture the expected outcome of the game.

Second, monetary wealth may be better proxied by the estimated squad value of each team at the start of the season. This is based on adding up individual player values for squads and using values from Transfermarkt.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>For example, in the 2018/19 season, Arsenal, an English Premier League team, is valued at 659

Table 2: Regressions indicating home-team bias heterogeneity

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Home lose	10.74*** (1.75)	22.22*** (3.54)	12.35*** (1.65)	14.29*** (1.70)
Home lose $\times$ Home Top 6	12.77*** (3.07)			
Home lose $\times$ Home rank		-0.76*** (0.27)		
Home lose $\times$ Home-away rank diff $\leq -10$			17.62*** (5.79)	
Home lose $\times$ Home-away rank diff				-0.81*** (0.20)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
League FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.46
Observations	6667	6667	6667	6667

*Note:* Games with a single goal difference after regular time. Dependent variable is stoppage time in seconds. Controls include time with ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, round of season, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from the opponent's goal line in the stoppage time. Control variables are also interacted with the *Closed* dummy. Standard errors clustered at home team level. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Third, another monetary measure is revenues generated by the club. Top revenues over 10 years is an indicator of being among the the 20 teams that have generated the highest average revenue over 10 years. It is a binary variable by design.

In Table 3 below we reproduced key results with alternative influential team definitions. In Model (1), *Home favorite* dummy is defined as the home team being one of the 20 richest teams as per Deloitte Football Money League. In Model (2), matches where home minus away Elo rating differences are in the top quartile within the given season and league are defined as games with home favorite. Model (3) defines Home favorite games as those where the difference between the squad value of the home and away team belongs to the top quartile within the given season and league. Our findings are robust to applying any of these definitions instead of our core metric.

million euros making it the 6th most valuable team (while the team holds the 5th position in the points table). [https://www.transfermarkt.com/premier-league/startseite/wettbewerb/GB1/plus/?saison\\_id=2018](https://www.transfermarkt.com/premier-league/startseite/wettbewerb/GB1/plus/?saison_id=2018).

Table 3: Robustness home-team bias heterogeneity

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Home lose	12.35*** (1.74)	10.55*** (1.75)	11.03*** (1.69)
Home favorite	-2.84 (4.03)	-7.08*** (2.20)	-2.68 (2.30)
Home lose $\times$ Home favorite	10.69** (4.32)	13.41*** (4.01)	12.62*** (3.93)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
League FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.46	0.46	0.46
Favorite definition	20 richest	ELO diff	Squad value diff
Observations	6667	6667	6667

*Note:* Games with a single goal difference after regular time. Dependent variable is stoppage time in seconds. Controls include time with ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, round of season, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from opponent’s goal line in the stoppage time. Control variables are also interacted with the *closed* dummy. Standard errors clustered at home team level. \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

To summarize, we find that influential (top-ranked) teams benefit substantially more from referee decisions. When playing at home, the top teams seem to create an environment that makes referees more inclined to help. It is the influence of the host team organization and not the crowd size that affects referee behavior.

Our findings may explain earlier evidence in the literature suggesting crowd and stadium characteristics affecting referee decisions. Team influence is correlated with many observable characteristics: stadium attendance and capacity or the type of stadium teams have.

Importantly, the variation in attendance and in the attendance-to-capacity ratio in particular are both strongly correlated with the popularity of both home and away teams. In our data, 75% of the variation in the attendance rate, an earlier measure of the crowd effect (Garicano et al., 2005) is explained by the home team, the league, the season, and the popularity of the away team. As such, no proper inference can be made on the basis of the variation in absolute or relative attendance (see Table A5 in the Appendix).

Similarly, for running tracks (Dohmen and Sauermann, 2016), the top 6 teams in Germany have no tracks in their stadium but some of the rest (like Hertha Berlin, or Nürnberg) do. Hence, crowd influence loses its explanatory power once confounders are



taken into consideration.<sup>22</sup>

### 3.3 Is There Corruption? Referee Career in Europe

Finally, we investigate if career concerns may motivate referees to help influential teams. The specific question we address here is whether more biased referees are more likely to get work in the UEFA Champions League and in the UEFA Europa League games. Refereeing in these European games is a pinnacle of a referee’s career, and the number of games they worked at is a key career success metric. Influential teams – especially those with regular presence in these competitions also having positions on UEFA boards – can (albeit rather informally) block unwanted referees and possibly promote preferred ones.<sup>23</sup>

To analyze careers, we aggregated game information into an unbalanced referee-season panel ( $N = 1,148$ ) of referees ( $N = 233$ ) and seasons ( $N = 10, s = 2011-12 \dots 2020-21$ ). On average, we observe a referee for 4.9 seasons in their national leagues working at 70 games, 33 of which have a one-goal difference after 90 minutes.

We keep only referee-season pairs where we observe at least one 0:1 and 1:0 result after regular time and we are left with 179 referees and  $N = 711$  observations. This dataset is merged with information on referee work during the same period in either UEFA leagues. We also have personal information on referees (age), as well as their past work in our sample (the number of games refereed in previous years).

For each referee-season pair, we define average favoritism bias from referees in two ways. First, for referee  $r$  in season  $s$ ,  $Bias_{r,s}$  is the average difference between the stoppage time when the home team is losing vs. winning. Second,  $Bias\_pred_{r,s}$  is the average deviation from the predicted stoppage time for referee  $r$  when the home team is losing vs. winning, based on our model (3).

To analyze the relationship between European career and bias, we first estimate a cross-sectional linear probability regression, with the dependent variable,  $Euro_{r,s}$  taking up 1 when referee  $r$  worked at least a single game at either competitions in season  $s$  and 0 otherwise.

Experience is a key potential confounder in this model, and hence we add age (linearly) and dummies for each number of seasons of experience, as well as the number of domestic league games refereed. All right-hand side variables refer to the  $s - 1$  season. We also add league and season dummies.

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<sup>22</sup>Close to fans is defined as not having a track or a sizable gap between the pitch and fans. An example for a stadium with tracks is Hertha Berlin for a covered gap is West Ham’s London Stadium.

<sup>23</sup>See a short discussion in A1.4 in the Appendix.

$$Pr(Euro_{r,s} = 1) = \alpha + \beta_1 Bias_{r,(s-1)} + \gamma_1 Experience_{r,(s-1)} + \gamma_2 Dom\_games_{r,(s-1)} + \gamma_3 Age_{r,s} + L + S + \epsilon_{r,s}, \quad (6)$$

Alternatives include restricting the sample for the 7th national league season only for each referee (Columns 3,4), replacing bias with predicted bias (Column 2), and having the number of European games instead of a binary variable (Column 4). Finally, (in Column 5) we repeat the model of Column 1, with a different bias definition. *bias\_influence*<sub>r,s</sub> is calculated only for influential (top 6 ranked) teams. There are far fewer observations here, so we only estimate a pooled OLS.

Table 4: Referees' favoritism bias and UEFA jobs

	(1) Binary All All	(2) Binary All All	(3) Binary 7th All	(4) Count 7th All	(5) Binary All Influential
Mean home bias	0.0001 (0.0002)		0.0010 (0.0009)	0.0026 (0.0032)	-0.0004 (0.0006)
Mean pred. home bias		0.0002 (0.0002)			
Domestic games (N)	0.0292** (0.0081)	0.0292** (0.0082)	0.0419** (0.0173)	0.2529*** (0.0571)	0.0146 (0.0102)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
League FE	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Season FE	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
$R^2$	0.38	0.38	0.36	0.46	0.39
Observations	553	553	78	78	223

*Note:* Column 1,2,3,5: Dependent variable is binary, refereed in Europe, linear probability model. Column 4: Count of games in Europe, OLS. In columns 1-4, the bias is the difference in the average residual when the home team is losing vs. winning. Predicted bias in column (2) is based on 3. In column 5, it is the difference between influential and non-influential teams when losing at home. Robust standard errors (col 3,4), referee level clustered standard errors (col 1,2,5). \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*  $p < 0.1$ .

Results are presented in Table 4. We find no correlation between bias and probability (or count) of refereeing European games. Thus, we see no correlation between any type of favoritism bias from referees and the likelihood of the referee working in the UEFA competitions. Referees do not (or cannot) expect any benefit in terms of European success in case they help teams that are likely to play in European competitions.

## 4 Conclusions

In this paper, we extended and revisited earlier evidence of favoritism under social pressure, as measured by home-team favoring bias among European football referees. Using extensive data consisting of c. 7 thousand football matches from 10 seasons of the 5 top European leagues, we find that referees support the home team by allowing the game to last longer if it's losing. The point estimate of this bias is 13 seconds or 5% of the extra time. The magnitude is comparable to earlier studies 20 years ago.

Our key contribution is understanding the source of social pressure pushing referees to make such decisions. Unlike previously assumed, the bias is not due to crowds as it exists even in the absence of home fans: it persisted when games were played in empty stadiums during the Covid pandemic.

Importantly, the bias is actually larger when it favors influential (top-ranked) teams and is especially large when an influential team is losing at home to a minnow. The point estimate of influential team bias is 24-30 seconds or 10% of the extra time.

To be certain that social pressure is in play rather than corruption, we showed that the favoritism bias from referees is, however, uncorrelated with career benefits.

The favoritism bias is quite sizeable in the sense that for more influential teams the 30-second extra represents an almost 10% longer stoppage time. We can translate it into financial benefit. The team that is losing at 90:00 equalizes or even wins on 7% of the matches, so there is a 0.7% chance that the home bias would change the points outcome of the game, on average by 1.3 points (sometimes lagging teams even win). With 38 games in a season, it adds up to almost 0.4 points. For a team like Manchester United, which spends on average 6.5 million USD per point, the bias would correspond to more than 2.5 million USD.<sup>24</sup>

Thus, instead of adherence to social pressure (crowds), we find evidence for adherence to host organizations, especially influential ones. So why do referees support these teams? After ruling out direct social pressure or corruption, we are left with a more nuanced explanation: it may be the consequence of an unconscious bias driven by a persuasive home team organization. People are often uncertain about their decisions and this is when this bias kicks in: favoring or being more willing to err on the side of a persuasive group. For instance, referees may make errors in not compensating enough for wasted time. Such an error may go unpunished if it hurts a small team but may get massive coverage in the media when a top team suffers.

This paper has shown that it is hard to wipe out favoritism. This paper shows that there could be multiple sources of social pressure – in our case, influential organizations beyond the crowds. In the past decades, football organizations have (correctly) focused on taming crowds and punishing aggressive behavior. However, the power of some clubs

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<sup>24</sup>Calculated based on the estimated salary costs and transfer fees collected from [spotrac.com](https://www.spotrac.com).

may have even increased, with a global audience, more money, and higher stakes. Understanding the multiple sources of social pressure can help understand why crowd control is not enough to make referees cut favoritism.

While we were able to estimate influential team bias, there is room for future research in understanding how exactly influential organizations use their star power to exert social pressure.

# Appendix

## A1 Football Rules and Practices

### A1.1 Stoppage Time

The length of the stoppage time is carefully but not very strictly defined in professional football. According to Point 7.3 of *Laws of the Game*, the official rules of football maintained by the International Football Association Board, the stoppage time at the end of both halves should compensate for the time lost through substitutions, injuries, wasting time, disciplinary sanctions, cooling breaks, VAR checks, and any other cause such as goal celebrations.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the referee decision is driven by a set of detailed rules regarding which events may generate an extension, but the exact length is determined by the referee.<sup>26</sup>

Figure A1 plots the kernel density estimate of stoppage time distribution across all matches in our sample. We can observe spikes around each minute, the largest at 3 minutes.

### A1.2 VAR

The Video Assistant Referee (VAR) system aims to minimize human errors and their influence on match outcomes. Video replays of key events of the game (such as goals, potential penalty situations, and potential red card fouls) are reviewed by an official who communicates with the referee on the pitch. If a potential referee mistake is identified, the game is interrupted for an on-field review of the situation, often lasting several minutes. Time spent reviewing decisions is intended to be compensated for by adding more stoppage time.

### A1.3 Leagues

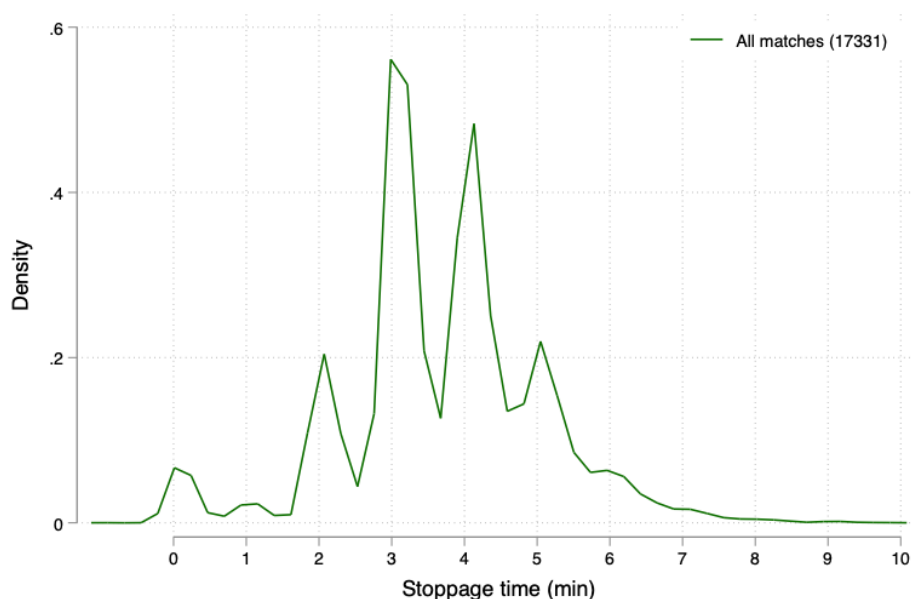
In a sport season, teams play in their national leagues twice with every other team, once home and once as visitor. A win yields three points, a draw yields one, and a lose yields nothing. These points sum up at the end of season to yield a final league table and create the ranking of teams. As of season 2020/2021, the first four teams from each league will play in the UEFA Champions League, the fifth and sixth will play in the less lucrative

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<sup>25</sup>The official *Laws of the Game* are available at [www.theifab.com/laws-of-the-game-documents/](http://www.theifab.com/laws-of-the-game-documents/).

<sup>26</sup>See, for example, the following quote by former referee Dermot Gallagher: “(...)we’ve had this standardisation that we’re going to play 30 seconds per substitution, and for excessive goal celebrations we’re to play another 30 seconds – so it starts to tot up, and this is why we find the three or four minutes we have on average at most games.” – [www.playtheadvantage.com/2014/05/27/how-stoppage-time-is-determined/](http://www.playtheadvantage.com/2014/05/27/how-stoppage-time-is-determined/)

Figure A1: Distribution of additional time



UEFA Europa League next season. The last two three teams will be relegated to second divisions. Often a single point decides about winning European spots or relegation.

#### A1.4 Big Team Influence at UEFA

Formally, teams can have no say over referee jobs.<sup>27</sup> However, there were several news reports when teams tried to exert pressure on UEFA regarding referees.<sup>28</sup>

Another area where teams do have informal influence is the format of European games. Indeed, as early as 1997, major teams made the Champions League include runner-ups from 8 leagues, and it was later extended to include the current 4 teams of the top 5 leagues. In 2021, UEFA proposed changes in the Champion League to please the dozen most influential teams that were trying to break away and form the Super League.<sup>29</sup> The new Champion League format benefits the big teams (mainly English ones).<sup>30</sup>

Football Leaks, a blog, exposed several cases that according to UEFA regulations should have ended with certain penalties but had not in the end, such as for Manchester

<sup>27</sup>See [www.documents.uefa.com/r/Regulations-of-the-UEFA-Champions-League-2022/23/Article-48-Appointment-and-replacement-of-referees-Online](http://www.documents.uefa.com/r/Regulations-of-the-UEFA-Champions-League-2022/23/Article-48-Appointment-and-replacement-of-referees-Online).

<sup>28</sup>For example, see [www.firstpost.com/sports/champions-league-juventus-blames-uefa-chief-refereeing-officer-pierluigi-collina-of-bias-against-serie-a-clubs-4429027.html](http://www.firstpost.com/sports/champions-league-juventus-blames-uefa-chief-refereeing-officer-pierluigi-collina-of-bias-against-serie-a-clubs-4429027.html).

<sup>29</sup>[www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/champions-league-plan-premier-league-26923957](http://www.mirror.co.uk/sport/football/champions-league-plan-premier-league-26923957)

<sup>30</sup>[www.forbes.com/sites/steveprice/2022/05/11/ufas-champions-league-changes-benefit-the-big-six-and-newcastle-united/?sh=44446ce57743](http://www.forbes.com/sites/steveprice/2022/05/11/ufas-champions-league-changes-benefit-the-big-six-and-newcastle-united/?sh=44446ce57743)

City and PSG.<sup>31</sup> There are other tax and doping cases of big teams that UEFA helped cover up.<sup>32</sup> These events all suggest a substantial informal influence of big teams on the decision making of UEFA.

## A2 Covid and Closures

Due to the Covid-19 outbreak in Europe in spring 2020, practically every football league was suspended as of the second weekend of March. The last round before suspension was played behind closed doors in Italy on the 8th and 9th of March, as well as the last game in our sample, played on the 11th of March in Germany. The remaining games of the 19/20 season were played, with a more intensive schedule, starting as of the 16th of May in Germany, the 11th of June in Spain, the 17th of June in England, and as of the 21st of June in England. Each of these games was played behind closed doors, with no fans allowed to enter the stadium. In France, the remaining games of the 19/20 season were not played.

Season 20/21 started in August 2020 in France and in September 2020 for the rest of the leagues. The vast majority of the games were played behind closed doors. Depending on the severity of the Covid situation, some leagues allowed a restricted number of fans to be present in the stadium for short periods throughout the season. This was the case for France between August and October 2020; for England and Germany between September and October 2020, and in May 2021; for Italy and Spain in May 2021. As Table A1 shows, this partial opening meant that the stadiums were filled to 10-15% of capacity on average. No match was played with full capacity of fans during season 20/21 – the highest attendance-to capacity ratio in our sample is 34%.

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<sup>31</sup>[www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-6347551/Leaked-documents-claim-Manchester-City-hid-30m-UEFA-FFP-investigators.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sport/sportsnews/article-6347551/Leaked-documents-claim-Manchester-City-hid-30m-UEFA-FFP-investigators.html)

<sup>32</sup>[www.spiegel.de/international/world/football-leaks-doping-tests-and-real-madrid-a-1240035.html](http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/football-leaks-doping-tests-and-real-madrid-a-1240035.html)

Table A1: Attendance of matches during Covid

Season	N	N closed	N open	Mean attendance	Max attendance
England 19/20	380	92	0		
England 20/21	380	346	34	12.3	25.9
France 19/20	279	1	0		
France 20/21	378	316	62	15.1	33.8
Germany 19/20	306	83	0		
Germany 20/21	306	269	37	10.4	20.5
Italy 19/20	380	132	0		
Italy 20/21	380	379	1	1.3	1.3
Spain 19/20	380	111	0		
Spain 20/21	378	373	5	11.9	21.7

*Note:* The last two columns indicate the mean and maximum, respectively, of attendance-to-capacity percentage among games where reported attendance was greater than zero.

### A3 Data Cleaning

For 8 games, the source of our event data contains either no information or obviously erroneous information, such as extremely few events recorded. As we cannot construct the measures of interest for these matches, our analysis excludes them.

Our *Losing offensiveness* measure is not observed for 7 games in our sample, implying that on these games the losing team did not have a single pass in the stoppage time. Thus, we impute a value of 0 for these in our analysis, indicating maximum distance from the opponent's goal line.

### A4 Descriptive Statistics

Figure A2 shows the average stoppage time by goal difference at 90:00. It shows a pattern very similar to the one documented by (Garicano et al., 2005): the average stoppage time is longer for tighter matches. Since goals in stoppage time are rare events, matches with more than one goal difference at the end of the regular time are highly likely to be already settled, and in this case referees tend to blow the final whistle significantly earlier, serving the interest of both teams.

Table A2 presents some informative descriptive statistics about the variables included in the analysis.

Figure A3 looks at densities only for games where the home team is winning or losing by a single goal, and we can see that home winning games are characterised by shorter stoppage time than home losing games. A Kolmogorov-Smirnov test also confirms the statistical significance of the difference between the two distributions.



Figure A2: Stoppage time awarded by score margin

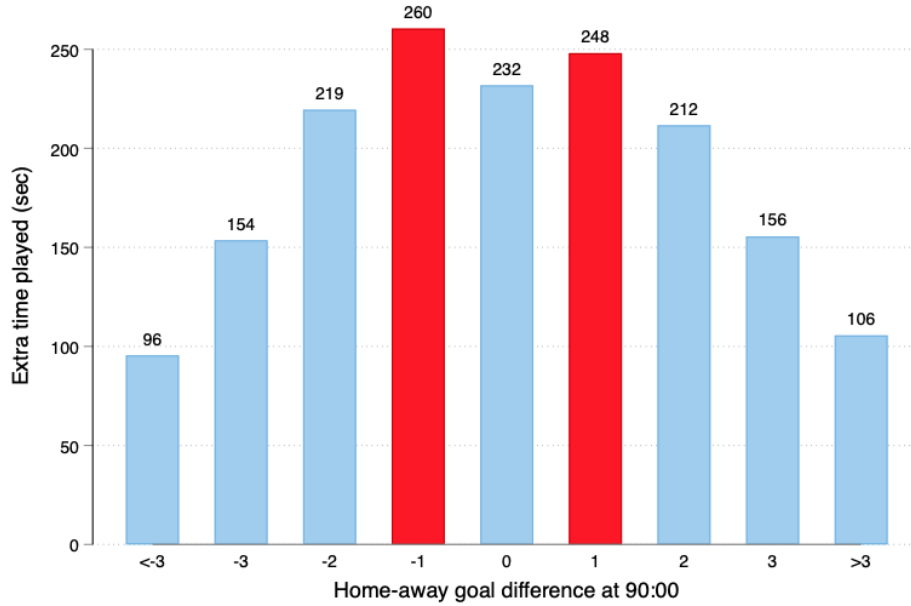
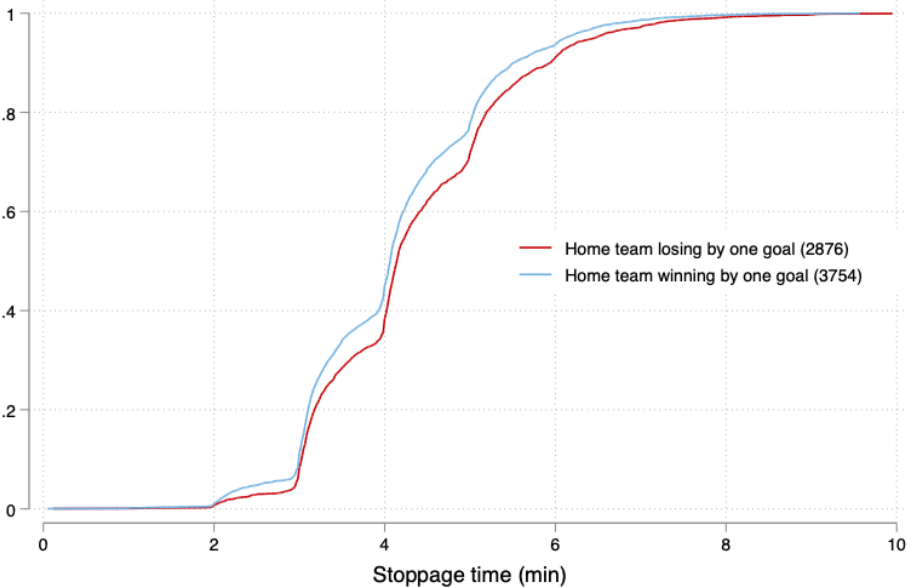


Table A2: Summary statistics

	Mean	SD	Median	Min	Max	N
Stoppage time (sec)	253.43	69.02	246	3	660	6667
Home losing (0/1)	0.43	0.50	0	0	1	6667
Wasted time	1244.42	184.55	1241	661	1964	6667
Cards	3.13	1.88	3	0	13	6667
Subs	5.74	1.14	6	2	10	6667
Fouls	14.42	4.18	14	3	33	6667
Goals	1.39	1.13	1	0	7	6667
Losing offensiveness	61.00	9.06	61.56	7.10	100.00	6661
Goals in stoppage time	0.16	0.39	0	0	3	6667
Round	19.17	10.75	19	1	38	6667
Elo ranking difference (home-away)	-8.29	145.12	-5.70	-482.57	477.84	6667
Home rank	10.66	5.55	11.00	1.00	20.00	6667
Away rank	10.23	5.62	10.00	1.00	20.00	6667
Home-away rank difference	0.43	7.93	1	-19	19	6667
Home team value (m EUR)	8.28	9.44	5	1	64	6667
Away team value (m EUR)	9.03	10.21	5	1	64	6667
Value difference (H-A)	-0.75	12.63	-0.17	-61.60	61.60	6667
VAR (0/1)	0.30	0.46	0.00	0.00	1.00	6667

*Note:* The sample consists of games with a one goal difference at 90:00, from seasons between 2011/12 and 2020/21 of the top 5 European football leagues. See Section 2.2 for a detailed description of the variables.

Figure A3: Comparing the cumulative distribution of home team leading vs losing



## A5 Additional tables

First, we present the detailed regression results with all control variables<sup>33</sup>. Then, we show a replication of the core table in (Garicano et al., 2005) followed by a table on attendance.

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<sup>33</sup>Note that for this table, the parameters we estimate here are not directly meaningful, as the actual number of seconds spent on these events are already partialled out by the wasted time variable. This functional form decision allows for referee heuristics to be accounted for.

Table A3: Detailed regressions indicating home-team bias

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Home lose	12.40*** (2.07)	13.38*** (1.91)	11.65*** (1.65)	13.41*** (1.65)	13.40*** (1.62)
Wasted time		0.18*** (0.01)	0.17*** (0.01)	0.18*** (0.01)	0.18*** (0.01)
Cards		3.42*** (0.58)	4.75*** (0.48)	4.40*** (0.46)	4.28*** (0.45)
Subs		4.69*** (0.85)	7.95*** (0.84)	7.39*** (0.81)	7.94*** (0.78)
Fouls		-3.01*** (0.28)	-2.03*** (0.21)	-2.07*** (0.21)	-1.84*** (0.21)
Goals		-4.21*** (0.74)	-4.12*** (0.70)	-4.53*** (0.71)	-4.18*** (0.74)
Losing offensiveness		0.18** (0.08)	0.25*** (0.07)	0.29*** (0.07)	0.26*** (0.07)
ET goals		19.13*** (2.18)	18.41*** (2.06)	18.21*** (2.05)	18.04*** (1.93)
VAR		13.66*** (2.30)	14.46*** (1.93)	14.60*** (1.94)	18.05*** (2.16)
Round		-0.15** (0.06)	-0.21*** (0.06)	-0.21*** (0.06)	-0.21*** (0.06)
Constant	248.04*** (2.48)	13.93 (9.21)			
League FE	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Referee FE	No	No	No	No	Yes
Observations	6667	6667	6667	6667	6646
$R^2$	0.01	0.33	0.42	0.45	0.49

*Note:* Standard errors clustered at home team level.

Table A4: Replication of home bias from [Garicano et al. \(2005\)](#)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Home lose	9.07*** (1.68)	8.97*** (1.74)	9.07*** (2.97)	3.30 (3.34)	11.25* (6.20)
Yellow	7.61*** (0.46)	7.71*** (0.48)	7.67*** (0.48)	8.08*** (0.53)	8.07*** (0.52)
Red	18.38*** (1.75)	18.95*** (1.68)	18.87*** (1.73)		
Subs	14.20*** (1.08)	13.92*** (1.10)	14.44*** (1.10)		
Home value million	-0.65** (0.27)	-0.63** (0.27)	-0.51*** (0.13)	-0.85*** (0.17)	-0.82*** (0.17)
Away value million	-0.47*** (0.10)	-0.45*** (0.11)	-0.46*** (0.10)	-0.59*** (0.10)	-0.62*** (0.10)
Home rank	-0.23 (0.32)	-0.27 (0.30)	-0.53** (0.25)	-0.58** (0.28)	-0.57** (0.28)
Home-away rank diff	0.30* (0.16)	0.27* (0.15)	0.25 (0.16)	0.38** (0.17)	0.36** (0.17)
Round			-0.16** (0.08)	-0.21*** (0.08)	-0.22*** (0.08)
Home lose $\times$ Round			0.00 (0.12)		
Attendance 1000				229.85** (88.44)	137.39 (98.00)
Home lose $\times$ Attendance 1000				204.39* (108.95)	299.69** (119.97)
Attendance/Capacity (%)					0.19** (0.07)
Home lose $\times$ Attendance/Capacity (%)					-0.14 (0.09)
League FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Referee FE	No	Yes	No	No	No
Season FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
$R^2$	0.31	0.36	0.29	0.26	0.26
<i>Model</i>	T2C4	T2C6	T5C4	T6C3	T6C4
Observations	5876	5853	5876	5390	5390

*Note:* Standard errors clustered at home team level. Controls include time with the ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from opponent's goal line in the stoppage time.

Table A5: Explaining attendance/capacity ratio

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Away Top 6	6.05*** (0.46)		
Home-away rank diff $\leq -10$		-1.84*** (0.47)	
Home-away rank diff			0.28*** (0.04)
Season FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
League FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.76	0.75	0.76
Observations	16075	16075	16075

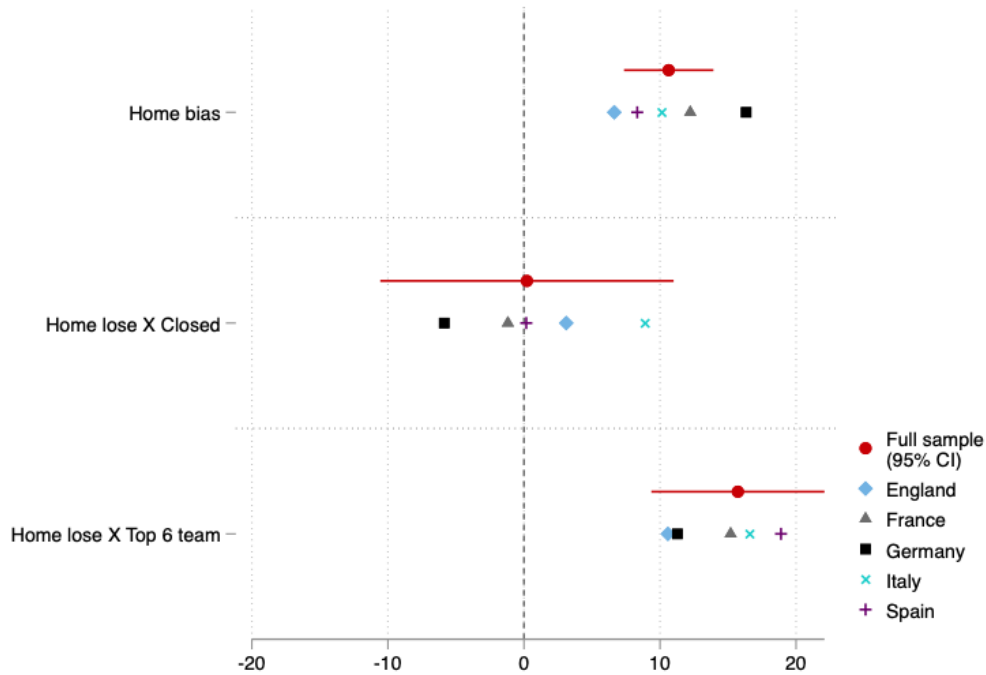
*Note:* Standard errors clustered at home team level.

## A6 Persistent Results across Leagues and Time

Different countries and leagues may have different customs and regulations. Thus, we might see heterogeneity for any of our results, or find that they are driven by peculiarities in a single country.

To illustrate how heterogeneous our main findings are across countries, we run regressions of Model (4) of Table 1 and Model (1) of Table 2 for each league separately (without league fixed effects). The estimated coefficients are presented in Tables A6 and A7.

Figure A4: Estimated regression coefficients by league



We find that all main results are highly robust across leagues. First, the home-team bias is very similar, ranging between 9.3 and 17.9 seconds (not statistically different from each other). Second, we see that during closed games, all leagues experienced a small change only, with point estimates ranging between -5.9 and +6.5 seconds, neither being statistically different from zero. Third, in terms of the moderator variable of influential teams, the interaction term of the home lose indicator and the indicator for the top 6 teams is rather stable across leagues, ranging between 6.8-17.2 seconds (neither is statistically different). Note, however, that broken down by leagues, this result lacks statistical power, and the results are not always significant. This is because top teams rarely lose at home, and the number of observations by league is too small. Figure A4 summarizes our main findings.

Tables A6 and A7 show the regressions visualized on Figure A4.

Table A6: Regressions by league

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Home lose	9.37*** (3.22)	13.22*** (2.62)	17.91*** (5.33)	14.43*** (2.82)	12.36*** (3.64)
Home lose $\times$ Closed	-0.72 (9.81)	-4.79 (10.92)	-5.93 (11.55)	6.54 (7.99)	0.92 (12.93)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1370	1397	1055	1432	1413
$R^2$	0.37	0.44	0.43	0.40	0.41
League	England	France	Germany	Italy	Spain

*Note:* Standard errors clustered at home team level. Controls include time with the ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from opponent's goal line in the stoppage time.

Table A7: Regressions by league

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Home lose	7.74* (4.13)	10.38*** (3.31)	15.12*** (4.89)	12.55*** (3.04)	8.75** (4.26)
Home lose $\times$ Home Top 6	6.79 (6.89)	12.60** (6.16)	11.55 (7.89)	11.68** (5.61)	17.28*** (6.19)
Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Home team FE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
$R^2$	0.37	0.44	0.43	0.40	0.41
League	England	France	Germany	Italy	Spain
Observations	1370	1397	1055	1432	1413

*Note:* Standard errors clustered at home team level. Controls include time with the ball out of play, number of cards, substitutions, fouls, goals, goals in stoppage time, whether VAR was used, and the average distance of the passes of the losing team from opponent's goal line in the stoppage time. All these variables are also interacted with the *Closed* dummy.



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