



## ANALYSIS OF SANCTIONS ON CHELSEA FC: THE IMPACT OF THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT ON SPORTS CLUB OWNERSHIP

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Submission: February 3, 2025 | Revised: March 18, 2025 | Accepted: March 24, 2025

### ABSTRAK

*Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji kompleksitas hubungan antara olahraga dan politik internasional melalui studi kasus sanksi terhadap Chelsea FC dalam konteks konflik Rusia-Ukraina. Penelitian ini menganalisis bagaimana konflik antarnegara dapat memengaruhi entitas individual, khususnya dalam konteks kepemilikan klub sepak bola. Dengan menggunakan teori interdependensi kompleks kompleks Keohane dan Nye, penelitian ini menerapkan metode kualitatif dengan pendekatan studi kasus eksplanatoris, menganalisis dokumen resmi pemerintah Inggris, dokumentasi Chelsea FC, serta liputan media internasional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan smart sanctions terhadap Chelsea FC melalui Roman Abramovich sebagai pemilik klub mencerminkan evolusi signifikan dalam penggunaan instrumen kebijakan luar negeri. Terdapat tiga dimensi utama kepentingan Inggris: ekonomi, untuk memutus aliran dana oligarki Rusia; politik, untuk memperkuat posisi Inggris pasca-Brexit; dan sosial budaya, yang memanfaatkan Premier League sebagai soft power. Penelitian ini berkontribusi dalam mendemonstrasikan bagaimana olahraga modern telah bertransformasi menjadi bagian integral dari jaringan hubungan internasional yang kompleks.*

*Kata Kunci: Smart Sanctions, Interdependensi Kompleks, Chelsea FC, Premier League, Politik Olahraga*

### ABSTRACT

This research aims to examine the complex relationship between sports and international politics through the case study of sanctions imposed on Chelsea FC in the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This research analyzes how international conflicts can affect individual entities, particularly in terms of football club ownership. Utilizing the theory of complex interdependence as proposed by Keohane and Nye, this study employs a qualitative methodology with an explanatory case study approach, analyzing official documents from the UK government, Chelsea FC's documentation, and international media coverage. The findings indicate that the application of smart sanctions against Chelsea FC through its owner, Roman Abramovich, reflects a significant evolution in the use of foreign policy instruments. Three main dimensions of British interest are identified: economic, aimed at disrupting the financial flows of Russian oligarchs; political, to strengthen the United Kingdom's position in the post-Brexit landscape; and sociocultural, leveraging the Premier League as a form of soft power. This research contributes to demonstrating how modern sports have transformed into an integral part of the complex web of international relations.

Keywords: Smart Sanctions, Complex Interdependence, Chelsea FC, Premier League, Sports Politics

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## BACKGROUND

The Russia-Ukraine conflict represents one of the most complex and tension-filled geopolitical events of the 21st century, beginning with Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This escalation is rooted in tensions that have persisted since 2014, when Russia annexed Crimea. The war is driven by Russian President Vladimir Putin's desire to prevent the eastward expansion of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and to maintain Russian influence in the former Soviet territories, while Ukraine seeks to uphold its sovereignty and align itself with the West. The conflict has also triggered severe international sanctions against Russia from Western nations, resulting in the economic and diplomatic isolation of the country and bolstering the solidarity of NATO and the European Union (EU) (Saleh et al., 2023).

In reality, this conflict has implications not only for political instruments within international relations but has also significantly impacted the sports industry. Sports have historically been considered a separate realm from politics. However, with globalization, this field has evolved into a complex global industry closely interconnected with international political dynamics. No longer confined to the realm of low politics, the rapid growth of sports as entertainment, business, and a symbol of national identity has positioned it firmly within the sphere of high politics. Globalization has indeed facilitated intensive cross-border interactions in sports, involving athletes, clubs, sponsors, media, and fans from various countries. All these elements have created a complex network of interdependence (Keohane & Nye, 2012). However, this interdependence also renders sports vulnerable to political shocks, such as interstate conflicts and economic sanctions, by restricting the flow of funds, inhibiting player transfers, and complicating athletes' participation in international competitions. Political conflicts can also trigger boycotts, protests, and

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polarization among fans and athletes, undermining the spirit of sportsmanship and the universal values revered in sports (Allison, 2017).

As a consequence of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA), the highest football federation in Europe, canceled the venue for the 2022 Champions League final, which was originally scheduled to take place in Saint Petersburg, and relocated it to Paris. UEFA believed that shifting the final venue was necessary to avoid undesirable situations (Prasetya, 2022). Another impact was the suspension of Russian clubs and national teams from all competitions. The German football club Schalke also decided to terminate its long-term partnership with the Russian energy giant Gazprom (Ridwan, 2022). Additionally, Manchester United, one of the top clubs in England, ended its sponsorship agreement with the Russian national airline Aeroflot (Supingah, 2022).

Beyond these cancellations, the case of sanctions against Chelsea Football Club (Chelsea FC) due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict exemplifies the vulnerability of sports to political influences and how geopolitical dynamics can penetrate and disrupt the sports world, particularly regarding club ownership. Chelsea FC is a major English football club acquired by Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch with significant ties to President Vladimir Putin. When the Russia-Ukraine conflict erupted in February 2022, Abramovich found himself in a complicated position, as he became embroiled in international turmoil due to his alleged connections with the Russian government and was placed on a list of individuals subject to economic sanctions. The United Kingdom government, as the nation where Chelsea FC competes, responded to pressure from the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the International Federation of Association Football (FIFA), and UEFA—international organizations—by imposing sanctions on Chelsea FC (UEFA.com, 2022). In this case, the United Kingdom acted as an extension of these international organizations.

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The sanctions imposed by the United Kingdom government on club owner Roman Abramovich have had wide-ranging effects on the club's operations, including financial restrictions that prevent Chelsea FC from engaging in player transfers and prohibit ticket sales. The club faced limitations regarding travel for away matches and was barred from conducting player transfer activities, which tarnished the club's image and created uncertainty among players, staff, and fans (Baskoro, 2022).

The case of Chelsea FC highlights the complexities of the relationship between sports and politics in the era of globalization. Although sports ideally exist as a neutral domain that promotes sportsmanship and friendship, the realities of international politics can penetrate these boundaries and affect sports clubs, particularly those owned by individuals linked to specific political regimes. This case demonstrates that sports, often regarded as a neutral realm, cannot escape the vortex of global politics. Therefore, a research question raised in this study is "How does the Russia-Ukraine conflict affect Chelsea FC?" This research found that the war between Russia and Ukraine led to the launch of smart sanctions against Chelsea FC. These smart sanctions contain British national interests in economy, politics, and socioculture in the implementation of its foreign policy. This research will explore the complexities of the relationship between sports and politics in the era of globalization through a case study of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine as it pertains to Chelsea FC, aiming to understand how interstate conflict influences individual entities, specifically in the context of club ownership.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

In addressing the research questions of this study, the authors employ the theory of complex interdependence. This theory, developed by Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye in 1977, emphasizes that in the modern international system, countries

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are not only bound by military and political power but also by complex and interdependent social and economic relationships (Keohane & Nye, 2012). Essentially, Keohane and Nye argue that the modern world is interconnected through various channels of complex relationships.

*Firstly*, the theory posits multiple channels of interaction. This means that relations among states do not only occur through formal diplomatic channels but can also take place through various actors, including multinational corporations, international organizations, and even individuals. *Secondly*, there is an absence of hierarchy among issues. In traditional views, military security has always been considered paramount. However, in the framework of complex interdependence, economic or environmental issues can be equally significant as security issues. *Thirdly*, military force is not the dominant tool. The use of military power is viewed as less effective for resolving issues due to its high costs and negative impact on economic relations. States tend to prefer employing economic instruments or diplomacy to achieve their goals. Interestingly, this interdependence can be symmetric or asymmetric. In symmetric relationships, both countries are equally dependent on one another. However, asymmetric relationships, where one party is more dependent than the other, are more common, creating complex power dynamics in international politics.

This theory indicates that the interdependence observed between states also influences the dynamics of conflict and the application of sanctions. From the perspective of complex interdependence theory, sanctions become an increasingly important instrument precisely because of a connected world. When countries are tied within a network of complex economic, financial, and trade relationships, sanctions can present an appealing alternative to military force. The impacts of sanctions can be vast due to interconnected systems. However, complex interdependence also demonstrates why sanctions can be a double-edged sword; as

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countries are interconnected, sanctions imposed on one nation can have unintended ripple effects.

Notably, complex interdependence also explains the emergence of targeted or “smart sanctions.” This concept has arisen as an important advancement in the theory as states increasingly employ sanctions that target specific individuals or sectors. These sanctions are designed to minimize negative impacts on the general population while focusing on particular entities or individuals involved.

In the paper “*Targeted Sanctions and Deterrence in the Twenty-first Century*” by Francesco Giumelli (2021), it is described how the use of sanctions is often associated with compulsion and prevention. The former implies that sanctions contribute to changing the target's behavior, while the latter indicates that the threat of harm from sanctions can deter actors from initiating certain policies. However, the elements of change need careful consideration, as sanctions target not only countries and governments but also individuals and non-state actors.

Research by Ivan Timofeev et al. (2024) titled “*The Illusion of ‘Smart’ Sanctions: The Russian Case*” indicates that smart sanctions often have weak and limited effects over time. Additionally, while aimed at minimizing the impact on the general population, these sanctions often produce significant spillover effects, including economic, political, legal, and psychological impacts. This suggests that smart sanctions are not entirely exempt from negative consequences for the broader society.

Iryna Bogdanova (2024), in her article “*Targeted Financial Sanctions and Asset Confiscation: A Thorny Legal Path from Freeze to Confiscate*,” identifies several components within smart sanctions. *First*, asset freezes are a common form of sanction, wherein funds or resources of targeted individuals or entities are frozen. This does not change ownership but prevents access to those assets. *Second*, trade restrictions can encompass specific trade limitations, such as bans on the export or

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import of certain goods that may be used for military purposes or that support human rights violations. *Third*, monitoring and enforcement mechanisms are essential to ensure compliance with sanctions and to identify violations. This often involves international cooperation and the use of technology to track financial flows. *Lastly*, flexibility and adaptability are crucial, allowing sanctions to be adjusted to changing situations and enabling adaptations of targets or types of sanctions based on effectiveness and responses from the targeted parties.

Interestingly, Daniel W. Drezner (2024), in his article "*Global Economic Sanctions*," elucidates how smart sanctions operate within the context of complex interdependence. He exemplifies how the asset freezes of Russian oligarchs not only affect the targeted individuals but also their business networks across various countries. According to Drezner, the effectiveness of smart sanctions remains contingent upon the broader political and economic context. The impact of smart sanctions is also influenced by the duration and intensity of the sanctions. Long-term sanctions applied with sufficient intensity can create greater pressure but may also trigger negative reactions against the sanctions themselves. Overall, the effectiveness of smart sanctions cannot be separated from the broader political and economic context. Their success heavily depends on internal and external dynamics.

The compelling feature of smart sanctions in the context of complex interdependence is their ability to leverage intricate networks of relationships to achieve political goals while minimizing humanitarian impacts. This reflects an evolution in our understanding of how power operates within an interconnected international system. As globalization continues to advance, the utilization of smart sanctions illustrates a departure from traditional coercive measures that primarily relied on military force and broad economic sanctions.

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## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative method with an explanatory case study approach. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2015), a case study serves to provide a deep description and analysis of a system, illustrating how certain components are interconnected and function integratively. In this study, Chelsea FC has been selected as a case to illustrate the complexities of the relationship between international conflict, specifically the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and sports, particularly football, alongside concepts such as smart sanctions and complex interdependence. However, the unique characteristics of this case, being an elite club in the Premier League owned by an individual under sanctions, may not fully reflect the dynamics occurring in other contexts.

The case study approach also comes with limitations, as not all clubs face the same political and financial pressures or have the same global visibility to attract the attention and actions of international football authorities. Furthermore, the specific geopolitical context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict may restrict the applicability of these findings to other conflict situations. The sanctions imposed, the actors involved, and the responses from the international community can vary significantly from one case to another.

To address the limitations of generalizability, this research utilizes primary data comprising official documents from the United Kingdom government regarding sanctions against Roman Abramovich and official documents from Chelsea FC related to the impact of these sanctions, as well as secondary data from international media coverage of the Chelsea FC case and scholarly journal articles concerning smart sanctions and complex interdependence. In this study, the authors conduct validity checks through data triangulation to strengthen the validity of the findings and reduce the risk of bias inherent in focusing on a single case.

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By leveraging these diverse data sources, the research aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of how international conflicts and the associated sanction mechanisms interact with the world of sports, thereby contributing valuable insights into the broader implications for football governance and the relationship between politics and sport.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Impacts of the Russia-Ukraine Conflict on Chelsea FC**

Historically, sports clubs emerged from local communities, with ownership structures reflecting their grassroots origins. In recent decades, the ownership of football clubs in England has undergone significant changes, driven by important transformations. For much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, early clubs were typically owned by local members or associations, functioning as non-profit entities focused on sporting achievements and community engagement. However, since the 1980s and 1990s, a new trend emerged where clubs began to be listed on stock markets, altering the dynamics of ownership. Wray Vamplew (2019) notes that club ownership is based on control of rules and property rights, as well as patronage, indicating that ownership is highly influenced by funding or investment.

Since the early 2000s, there has been a significant increase in foreign ownership, with many Premier League clubs acquired by international investors. This trend has continued with rising interest from investors in various nations, particularly those with strong economic power, who view football clubs as prestigious assets. The transformation of club ownership has ultimately been influenced by business interests, significantly impacting the structure and management of clubs, which are now more reliant on investors. The presence of new owners, particularly large investors, is one way to ensure the sustainability of the club (Goig, 2014).

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Domestic and foreign club owners often have different objectives regarding their ownership. Domestic owners tend to be more focused on sporting success and are willing to spend more to improve club performance, while foreign owners, especially those with investment backgrounds, often prioritize profitability and financial stability over aggressively pursuing sporting success. Changes in ownership structures have also attracted attention from the government and regulatory bodies in football, leading to calls for increased regulation to protect clubs and maintain the integrity of competitions, especially amid concerns regarding financial sustainability (Evans et al., 2024).

Chelsea FC was founded in 1905 at The Rising Sun Pub (now The Butcher's Hook), adjacent to Stamford Bridge. In its early decades, Chelsea FC experienced significant ups and downs (Glanvill, 2005). However, the most dramatic transformation occurred in 2003 when Roman Abramovich acquired the club. Under Abramovich's ownership, Chelsea FC became a dominant force in English and European football. Massive investments in player transfers and club infrastructure, along with top managers like José Mourinho, Carlo Ancelotti, and Thomas Tuchel, resulted in the most successful period in the club's history. Chelsea FC won five Premier League titles, two UEFA Champions League titles (2012 and 2021), two Europa League titles, five Football Association Challenge Cups (FA Cups), and various other trophies (Robani, 2022). The club's success also stemmed from a highly successful academy development strategy, with Cobham Academy producing many talented players such as John Terry, Mason Mount, and Reece James. Investment in youth development became one of the important legacies of Abramovich's era (Kalumata, 2022).

However, in 2022, Chelsea FC's history entered a new chapter when Roman Abramovich, as the club's owner, faced sanctions related to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The United Kingdom government, through the Office of Financial Sanctions

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Implementation (OFSI), issued the official document “Notice of Financial Sanctions” on March 10, 2022. This document provided the legal basis for applying sanctions against Abramovich as part of the sanctions regime against Russia (*OFSI Consolidated List Search*, n.d.). There were two key points regarding this matter. *First*, the document explained the basis for imposing sanctions. Abramovich was placed on the sanctions list due to his connections with Vladimir Putin and the Russian government. The United Kingdom government identified Abramovich as a “pro-Kremlin oligarch” with close ties to Putin for several decades, specifically noting that he had derived financial benefits and preferential support from the Russian government. Former United Kingdom Prime Minister Boris Johnson stated that the issuance of sanctions against Russian businessmen in the United Kingdom aimed to deter Russia (Parkinson, 2022).

*Second*, the document detailed the scope of the sanctions applied. These sanctions included the freezing of all assets owned or controlled by Abramovich in the United Kingdom, prohibiting transactions with United Kingdom financial institutions, banning entry or transit through the United Kingdom, and imposing restrictions on companies owned or controlled by Abramovich, including Chelsea FC (Allegretti & Jolly, 2022).

From the perspective of Chelsea FC, the document included a “General License” allowing the club to continue operations with certain restrictions. These included permitting the club to complete scheduled matches, allowing payment of staff and player wages, and enabling season ticket holders to attend matches. However, the club was prohibited from making new player transfers, selling new merchandise, selling match tickets, and engaging in new contract negotiations. All of these factors diminished Chelsea FC’s asset value, which was also reflected in the withdrawal of a primary sponsor, the mobile phone company Three (Anderson & Singleton, 2022). As a consequence of the sanctions, several players left Chelsea FC

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on free transfers, resulting in financial losses for the club. The documentation also outlined mechanisms for oversight and compliance, granting OFSI the authority to monitor the implementation of sanctions and impose penalties for violations. Financial institutions were required to report any transactions involving Abramovich or his assets. Abramovich was granted the right to contest the sanctions through OFSI or seek a judicial review in United Kingdom courts.

The imposition of sanctions on Chelsea FC through Roman Abramovich marked a historic moment in the Premier League. This is the first time a Premier League club faced operational restrictions due to sanctions imposed on its owner. This case created a new precedent in the governance of football in England, prompting the Premier League to revise its ownership regulations and create new protocols for addressing similar situations in the future. Previously, the Premier League lacked a clear regulatory framework for dealing with clubs whose owners faced international sanctions (Buckingham & Slater, 2022).

On March 10, 2022, Chelsea FC released an initial statement on their official website (*Statement from Chelsea FC*, 2022) addressing the sanctions. Key points from their official communication included a note that Chelsea FC would operate under a special license issued by the United Kingdom government, allowing them to continue certain football-related activities. The club also detailed how match operations would function post-sanctions. Financially, the impact of these sanctions reached hundreds of millions of pounds. This can be compared to financial data published on Chelsea FC's official website, where in the financial year 2020/2021, the group's turnover was £434.9 million, driven by the club's success in the Champions League and the figures carried over from the extended 2019/2020 season into the 2020/2021 financial year (*Chelsea FC 2021/22 Financial Results*, 2023). The recorded revenue decreased due to COVID-19 and contributed to a loss of £153.4 million for

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the year ending June 30, 2021. In the announcement of the annual financial results for 2021/2022, turnover increased to £481.3 million from £434.9 million the previous year.

Despite the increase, this figure was not significant, as it was profoundly influenced by the sanctions imposed on Abramovich. As a result of the sanctions, the club was required to operate within the constraints of a special license issued by the United Kingdom government. These restrictions remained in place until the completion of the club's sale on May 30, 2022. During this period, Chelsea FC faced limitations in various areas, including but not limited to its ability to sell match tickets and season tickets, sell merchandise, receive event bookings, and sign contracts with players and commercial sponsors. Collectively, these restrictions led to extraordinary expenditures and loss of revenue (*Chelsea FC 2021/22 Financial Results*, 2023). Consequently, Chelsea FC recorded a pre-tax loss, excluding player losses and one-off costs, of £26.6 million for the year ending June 30, 2022, with total net losses amounting to £121.3 million.

The application of smart sanctions against Abramovich illustrates a significant evolution in the use of foreign policy instruments. In the case of Chelsea FC, it is evident that the sanctions not only affected diplomatic relations between the United Kingdom and Russia but also implicated various actors, including Roman Abramovich as an oligarch, Chelsea FC as a football club, the Premier League as a league, and a range of stakeholders such as sponsors and players. Reuters, in its report titled "*UK halts Chelsea sale after Abramovich sanctions*," explained how the United Kingdom government designed a special "General License" allowing the club to operate under certain limitations. This reflects the principles of smart sanctions that seek to balance the pressure on the target with the sustainability of the institution (Timofeev et al., 2024). This dynamic demonstrates the complexity of network relationships in modern football.

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The sanctions against Abramovich have also created extensive ripple effects within complex institutions like football clubs. This case highlights how issues of sports and business can be as significant as traditional security issues. Sanctions against Chelsea FC are not solely about militarily pressuring Russia; they also employ economic and social leverage through the football industry to achieve political goals. The interdependence inherent in modern football blurs the line between individual ownership and institutional operations. The sanctions imposed on Chelsea FC serve as an example of how states utilize economic instruments rather than military ones to achieve their political objectives. This aligns with Drezner's views in his article, "*Global Economic Sanctions*" 3/24/2025 1:50:00 AM, where he explains how the asset freezes of oligarchs can impact their business networks across countries.

Interestingly, the complexity of interdependence in modern football complicates the application of smart sanctions. As noted in documents, the Premier League even had to revise its ownership regulations because it lacked a clear regulatory framework for addressing situations in which club owners face international sanctions. The Chelsea FC case is a tangible example of how, in an interconnected world, sanctions against one individual can create far-reaching impacts within a complex ecosystem. This observation aligns with the premise of complex interdependence theory, which articulates how actors within the modern international system are interconnected through various channels and mutual dependencies. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, Roman Abramovich serves as a focal point illustrating the interconnectedness of politics, business, and sports. Geopolitical sanctions have cross-sectoral impacts, as sanctions against Abramovich translated into asset freezes and forced the sale of the club, demonstrating the extensive consequences of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on the international football ecosystem.

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## Dimensions of British Interests

In examining the dimensions of British interests in this case, it is important to understand that the sanctions against Chelsea FC cannot be separated from the broader context, namely the relationship between Roman Abramovich, the owner of the club, and Russian President Vladimir Putin. The United Kingdom government identified Abramovich as an oligarch with close ties to Putin. When the Russia-Ukraine conflict broke out, the United Kingdom felt the need to take firm action against individuals considered influential in the Russian government. These sanctions demonstrate the United Kingdom's commitment to standing with its allies in Europe and NATO in confronting Russian aggression against Ukraine. The United Kingdom wanted to show that it would not allow individuals associated with the Russian government to use their assets and influence in the United Kingdom without consequences.

The complex interdependence theory developed by Keohane and Nye emphasizes that in modern global politics, relationships between nations involve a variety of interconnected actors and channels. In this case, the sanctions against Abramovich and Chelsea FC illustrate how football has become an instrument in the complexities of international relations. British interests can be analyzed through three primary channels, according to the theory of complex interdependence.

*First*, the economic channel. Football can also have significant economic impacts on the global economy, communities, and industries. Major football events can boost the economy and have profound social effects. The Premier League is an immensely valuable economic asset for the United Kingdom. Premier League matches have even become a significant economic instrument for the United Kingdom, particularly through substantial financial investments in football clubs (Iorwerth et al., 2018). A recent study highlights the significant economic and social impacts of the Premier League across the United Kingdom. The analysis reveals that

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the Premier League and its clubs contributed £8 billion to the United Kingdom economy during the 2021/2022 season, with its economic contributions likely to continue growing. This contribution has increased by £400 million based on the latest assessment for the 2019/2020 season (*Economic and Social Impact of Premier League Highlighted by Report*, 2024).

These sanctions, of course, have significant implications. Chelsea FC is one of the largest football clubs in England, with considerable economic value. When the sanctions were imposed, the club faced various operational restrictions, including bans on selling new match tickets and merchandise and conducting player transfers. This demonstrates the seriousness of the United Kingdom government in pressing on the economic interests of individuals connected to the Russian government. The freezing of assets owned by Russians as a retaliatory action against the invasion of Ukraine is a legitimate and effective step taken by the United Kingdom government. The goal is to sever the financial flows of Russian oligarchs and reduce Russia's influence in strategic sectors. By stigmatizing individuals close to the Putin regime, it is hoped that this can undermine elite support and encourage rebellion. As a result, these sanctions have been effective in shaking Putin's authority and destroying the façade of control that previously hindered efforts to overthrow him (Harrington, 2022). This shows how modern power is no longer solely about military strength, but economic connections can be as potent as tanks and missiles.

*Second*, the political channel. The United Kingdom government under Boris Johnson at the time faced significant domestic pressure to take decisive action against Russian influence. Sanctions against Chelsea FC and Abramovich helped the government assert its resolve and the seriousness of its efforts to confront the influence of Russian oligarchs in the United Kingdom (Parkinson, 2022).

Furthermore, polling conducted by the website [yougov.co.uk](https://www.yougov.co.uk) revealed that the majority of the British public supported strong actions against Russia, including

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boycotting Russian products and brands (Pheby, 2022). Even up to 2023, other polls showed data indicating that 81 percent of British citizens wanted Ukraine to win, compared to only three percent for Russia (Smith, 2023). This provides evidence that the sanctions implemented by the United Kingdom government resonate with public commitment and are easily understood by the populace.

In the international context, these sanctions helped the United Kingdom rebuild its credibility as a global power post-Brexit. The rhetoric of “Global Britain,” articulated since 2016, has been manifested through actions against Chelsea FC, demonstrating the United Kingdom’s ability to take significant steps independently (Hadfield & Whitman, 2023). This further reinforces the United Kingdom’s position as a leader in global efforts against Russian aggression. In a parliamentary report, it was outlined how the sanctions against Chelsea FC helped to enhance coordination between the United Kingdom and its NATO and EU allies. This action demonstrates the United Kingdom’s commitment to a collective Western response even after leaving the EU (*House of Lords - The Ukraine Effect: The Impact of Russia’s Invasion of Ukraine on the UK–EU Relationship - European Union Committee, n.d.*). This directly connects to what Drezner said about how sanctions work best when aligned with the broader political context.

These sanctions also create an important precedent regarding how sport washing (the use of sports to improve a political image) can be addressed. For years, Abramovich has used Chelsea FC to build a positive image in the United Kingdom and the international community. These sanctions send a message that the use of sports clubs for political purposes will not be tolerated.

*Third*, the sociocultural channel. The most interesting aspect is the social and cultural dimension. Football has played a vital role in the dissemination of culture and national identity in England and has become a unifying force that transcends national boundaries. It began in 1888 when The English Football League (EFL) was

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established as the world's first football league and became the precursor to football in England. The spread of English culture through football has primarily occurred through the popularity and globalization of the Premier League. English football has become a global cultural phenomenon that transcends national borders, significantly influencing language and cultural identity worldwide.

The Premier League has seen a significant increase in popularity since 1992, with a rise in viewership and expanding media coverage, including television, radio, and social media (Penn & Penn, 2021). The Premier League has become part of "super-diversity," where top European teams showcase striking ethnic and linguistic diversity, bringing together fans from around the world. English football has influenced language use, with "football language" becoming part of the global linguistic repertoire. This creates bridges for cross-cultural and linguistic communication and reinforces global identity among fans (Bergh & Ohlander, 2020).

Sanctions against Chelsea and Abramovich reflect the United Kingdom's complex strategy of using sociocultural channels to strengthen its global position. By leveraging the global popularity of the Premier League, the United Kingdom demonstrates influence in international football. Additionally, these sanctions illustrate the United Kingdom government's resistance to oligarchic influence and promote a model of club ownership that is more responsible. The success of this strategy lies in the United Kingdom's ability to combine various dimensions of national interest with public legitimacy and democratic values.

The social dimension of these sanctions is also important to consider. Chelsea FC has millions of fans and is an integral part of the community in London. The United Kingdom government must balance political interests with impacts on local communities. That is why the sanctions were designed in such a way that the club could continue to operate, albeit with restrictions.

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The overall situation illustrates the complexities of the relationships between sports, politics, and economics in the modern era and how the United Kingdom seeks to balance various interests in the face of geopolitical challenges. Another aspect of this case is how it demonstrates the evolution of international power. Traditional sanctions may focus solely on intergovernmental actions. However, the United Kingdom uses a football club that may seem distant from international politics to make a significant political statement. This reflects the idea proposed by Keohane and Nye that modern international relations operate through various channels.

Thus, the Chelsea FC case provides a concrete example of how complex interdependence theory can explain the use of smart sanctions as instruments of foreign policy in the modern world. This case demonstrates how football, which has traditionally been regarded as just a sport, has become part of a complex network connecting a country's economic, political, and sociocultural interests. Football clubs no longer function merely as sports entities but also as economic assets and diplomatic tools. In the case of Chelsea FC, the sanctions targeted the club's owner, Roman Abramovich, in response to his involvement with the Russian government. In a broader context, the Chelsea FC case and the impacts of the Russia-Ukraine conflict on sports club ownership illustrate how complex interdependence theory can elucidate the dynamics of current international relations. Countries are interconnected through various channels, so actions taken in one aspect can have far-reaching consequences in others.

### **Sanctions against Roman Abramovich**

The sanctions imposed on Roman Abramovich as the owner of Chelsea FC have significantly impacted his personal financial condition. One direct consequence of these sanctions is the freezing of Abramovich's assets in the United Kingdom,

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estimated to be worth up to £10 billion. This means that all properties, bank accounts, and other business interests he held in the United Kingdom were frozen and could not be accessed or sold (*Russia Sanctions*, 2022). United Kingdom Foreign Secretary Liz Truss stated that this asset freeze represents the largest in British history. The freezing of assets prevented Abramovich's financial assets from being sent back to Russia.

As a result of the asset freeze, Abramovich was also unable to sell Chelsea FC, which is one of his most valuable assets. This means that he was stuck with club ownership that he could not break or transfer to raise funds. Abramovich was forced to offer the club for sale under conditions of sanctions where prospective buyers had to go through a strict approval process, and there were rules stipulating that the proceeds from the sale would be held in a special account supervised by the United Kingdom government. Ultimately, in May 2022, Chelsea FC was sold to a consortium led by Todd Boehly for around £4.25 billion, with the proceeds of the sale not going directly into Abramovich's account but allocated for humanitarian purposes in Ukraine (BBC News Indonesia, 2022).

In addition to being unable to sell Chelsea FC, Abramovich also lost the ability to generate income from the club. As an owner, he previously had access to the profits generated by Chelsea FC's operations, such as revenue from ticket sales, TV rights, and sponsorship. However, with the sanctions in place, all these revenue streams ceased. The impact of the sanctions is not limited to Abramovich's assets in the UK or his ownership of Chelsea FC. As a prominent business figure with interests in various sectors and countries, his reputation and relationships were also affected. Many business partners may be reluctant to collaborate with a sanctioned individual, fearing legal or financial consequences for themselves. This could lead to lost investment opportunities, canceled deals, or withdrawal of support from major projects .

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The sanctions imposed on Abramovich contribute, in part, to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. These sanctions can be viewed not just as economic actions but as strategic attacks targeting the inner circle of Putin's power. As one of the oligarchs closest to the Russian government, the freezing of Abramovich's assets has significant psychological effects. It sends a message that elites close to the Kremlin are not immune to international consequences. However, while the sanctions apply personal pressure on Abramovich, their impact on Russia's capabilities in the conflict is relatively limited. The reason is that Abramovich is just one of many Russian oligarchs. There are still numerous other Russian oligarchs who have long developed strategies to protect their wealth. Asset diversification allows them to maintain an international network for asset transfers to countries that do not support sanctions, such as China and the United Arab Emirates (Nicolazzo et al., 2022).

## CONCLUSION

In the modern era of globalization marked by increasingly complex interconnectivity, the case of sanctions against Chelsea FC and Roman Abramovich provides a profound illustration of how sports can no longer be separated from global political dynamics. The sanctions against Abramovich are part of the international response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, demonstrating the complex evolution of modern foreign policy instruments. This case shows how geopolitical conflicts can penetrate various sectors, including sports.

The application of smart sanctions against Chelsea FC through Roman Abramovich signifies a significant evolution in the use of foreign policy instruments. The United Kingdom government strategically leveraged the position of the Premier League to achieve its political and diplomatic objectives in responding to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. The uniqueness of these sanctions lies in their careful design, which aims to exert pressure on specific targets while attempting to minimize the impact on

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the club's operations and the broader community. The Russia-Ukraine conflict has affected sports club ownership, particularly Chelsea FC. Roman Abramovich, a Russian oligarch with close ties to Vladimir Putin, was forced to sell Chelsea FC after facing pressure and sanctions from the United Kingdom government. This illustrates how political conflicts can influence sports club ownership and the football industry as a whole.

An in-depth analysis of British interests in this case reveals three interconnected key dimensions. The sanctions not only have economic impacts but also consequences that span social, political, and cultural fields. The economic dimension demonstrates how these sanctions aim to sever the financial flows of Russian oligarchs and reduce their influence in strategic sectors. In the political dimension, these actions reinforce the United Kingdom's position as a global leader post-Brexit and strengthen coordination with Western alliances. Meanwhile, the sociocultural dimension showcases the use of the Premier League as a soft power instrument to shape global public opinion and promote democratic values. More than just a case of individual sanctions, the Chelsea FC situation has created an important precedent in global football governance. This case has prompted the Premier League to initiate significant reforms in club ownership rules and develop new protocols to address similar challenges in the future. This illustrates how geopolitical dynamics can catalyze structural changes in the sports industry.

This research underscores that in the era of complex interdependence, sports have become an integral part of a complex web of international relations. The Chelsea FC case demonstrates the evolution in the use of smart sanctions as more precise foreign policy instruments, considering the complexities of relationships within the modern international system. This experience provides valuable lessons for policymakers, sports managers, and academics regarding the importance of building a more robust regulatory framework to anticipate future challenges. As the

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complexities of international relations and the strategic role of sports in global diplomacy increase, a deeper understanding of the interactions between sports and politics becomes increasingly crucial. The smart sanctions implemented by the United Kingdom government sent a strong political message in the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

Nevertheless, the sanctions against Chelsea FC have only a limited impact on Russia's capabilities in the conflict. This is because Abramovich is merely one of many Russian oligarchs with complex business networks that enable the diversion of his business assets.

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