

Argentinian ultras operate within a network of entrenched political and social relationships, reflecting the country's complex historical trajectory. Two dominant barra brava factions, Los Borrachos del Tablón (River Plate) and La 12 (Boca Juniors), exemplify how such groups intertwine with shifting political frameworks. This study explores their origins, political entanglements, and how their evolution mirrors broader societal rifts in Argentine life.

Origins within a Volatile Political Era

La 12 emerged in the politically charged atmosphere of the late 1960s. Established by Enrique Ocampo, the group surfaced during a time of intense ideological conflict and under the authoritarian regime of Juan Carlos Onganía. Their rise prefigured the reemergence of Peronism in the early 1970s. Los Borrachos del Tablón took shape in 1975, spearheaded by Rubén “Matute” Coppola, against the backdrop of a nation on the brink of dictatorship. Officially adopting their name in 1977, their emergence during the military takeover led by General Videla holds historical significance, as it coincided with a broader transformation in how football was politicized. The military junta (1976–1983) leveraged football as a propaganda tool, most notably during the 1978 World Cup. As one account describes, Videla “used the World Cup as a public podium,” dismissing reports of systemic violence as foreign disinformation. The stark contrast between the national celebration and the atrocities committed at the nearby Naval Mechanics School epitomizes the regime's manipulation of sport as a political spectacle. In this context, organized violence became normalized, and the barra brava infrastructure found fertile ground to grow and embed itself in the political fabric.

Los Borrachos del Tablón

The group's early years were marked by factional disputes and frequent leadership turnovers. A turning point occurred in 1996 when figures like Luisito Pereyra and Edgar “Diariero” Butassi became involved in a fatal incident involving a rival supporter, leading to internal realignments. From 1997 to 2003, the faction known as “Los Patovicas,” led by Adrian Rousseau and Alan Schlenker, restructured the group into a formidable organization. By 2006, their influence extended into club management and national football circles, reportedly generating substantial monthly revenues. The Schlenker brothers were believed to be aligned with Kirchnerism, illustrating how barras often seek political patronage from ruling powers. These affiliations provide them with not only political shielding but also institutional access and financial resources.

La 12

La 12, rooted in the 1960s, invokes the long-standing notion of the “12th man”—the fan as an active player in the team’s fortunes. Over time, they’ve built a reputation for orchestrated violence and intricate economic schemes involving matchday logistics. Rafael Di Zeo, one of La 12’s most prominent leaders, has been linked to figures such as Mauricio Macri, Daniel Angelici, and other affiliates of the PRO party. At the same time, Di Zeo reportedly maintained contact with Peronist actors like Daniel Scioli and Carlos Stornelli. This dual affiliation reflects La 12’s pragmatic approach.

Comparative Dynamics of Political Affiliation

These groups symbolize Argentina’s persistent political fracture, known as *la grieta*, dividing Kirchnerist populism from its conservative adversaries. At the same time, Los Borrachos are linked to the left-leaning Kirchnerist movement; La 12’s affiliations lean toward the center-right spectrum. These alignments underscore the enduring presence of Peronist influence across both sides of the political aisle. Evidence suggests that these relationships are primarily strategic. As one analysis asserts, the *barra bravas*’ ties are forged for immediate benefit, rather than stemming from ideological alignment. They offer politicians vital services, from crowd mobilization to territorial control, while gaining institutional cover and influence in return.

National Shifts and the Barra Brava’s Adaptive Role

Contrary to expectations, the democratic transition of 1983 reinforced the *barra brava*’s influence, enabling them to institutionalize political ties. During the 2001–2002 economic meltdown, their social presence expanded, especially in marginalized areas, where state institutions were failing. Both groups adapted through successive political changes. During the Kirchnerist administrations, they consolidated their presence with differing loyalties. Under Macri’s presidency, they were forced to recalibrate their strategies, preserving influence through flexible political engagement.

Conclusion

Far from being mere supporters, Los Borrachos del Tablón and La 12 represent entrenched socio-political institutions. Their trajectories are intertwined with Argentina’s authoritarian legacy, democratic evolution, and ongoing political polarization. These groups exemplify how informal power structures rooted in football culture intersect with formal politics. By operating in stadium terraces and political backrooms, they illustrate the fluid boundaries between civic passion, organized power, and political utility in modern Argentina. Understanding these *barra*

brava organizations is crucial to grasping the alternative mechanisms of power that persist beyond traditional institutional frameworks.