Anti-cheating protection measures in chess: current state of play

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Abstract
This article examines recent anti-cheating practices in the sport of chess with a focus on situational crime prevention. On the one hand, anti-cheating protection measures in chess could be considered relatively belated compared with other sports. On the other hand, however, this ‘lag’ might be appropriate since chess governing bodies have not yet introduced overly intrusive rules. These two interacting perspectives shape the aim and objectives of this research designed to protect the chess community from cheating by identifying adequate protection measures in the light of environmental criminology and sports law.

Keywords Cheating · Situational crime prevention · Chess

Introduction
This article analyses the latest trends in anti-cheating protection measures in chess. Anti-cheating issues are regulated by the 2018 Anti-Cheating Regulations, which is a product of the International Chess Federation’s (FIDE) Anti-Cheating Commission, renamed in 2019 as the FIDE Fair Play Commission (FPL). Art. 2 of these Regulations states that ‘cheating’ means the deliberate use of electronic devices or other sources of information or advice during a game. In the same year, Anti-Cheating Protection measures were enacted. From the theoretical point of view, this article deals mostly with the context of environmental criminology and the derivative approach: situational crime prevention. Environmental criminology was used to develop situational crime prevention, which looks into why crimes happen in certain

1 ‘Crime’ in this text is understood in the criminological, not the legal sense. In other words, computer-assisted or other forms of cheating in chess are primarily a disciplinary offence not necessarily penalised in national criminal laws.

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spaces and what those spaces are like. Environmental criminology makes no attempt to explain why people commit crimes but examines the circumstances and environment in which crimes occur, identifies crime trends, and discusses how victims can be safeguarded in a crime context. Environmental criminology aims to understand the multiple facets of crime rather than to explain why a certain criminal commits a specific crime. The primary notion behind environmental criminology is that criminal opportunities might arise in very specific conditions that need to be investigated so that similar situations and places can be avoided (Pocienė et al., 2010, p. 117, p. 124). By way of analogy, the chess community is attempting to understand what kind of space needs to be constructed in order to (1) prevent technological devices from being brought into and misused in the playing area and (2) prevent the unlawful use of information or advice coming not necessarily from the devices, but also from people—for example, from other players, spectators, journalists, team captains, parents of the players, VIPs, etc. In this way, the chess community seeks to develop the proper anti-crime design, one that disrupts confluences of opportunity by altering the physical world and, as a result, offenders’ perceptions of risk (Ekblom, 1997).

From a comparative and historical point of view, this situation resembles that of football when dealing with football hooliganism. While one must acknowledge that cheating cannot be likened to violence from a conventional criminological standpoint, this analogy makes perfect sense from a policy-making and risk-management perspective. Due to the fact that danger is an individual concept, whereas risk is a collective one, the social control apparatus (in the context of this article—FIDE and/or FIFA) seeks to exert control over specific groups within a society based on the perceived severity of the risks they allegedly pose to the sports community.

In relation to this, the rationale for drafting Recommendation No. R(84)8 is worth mentioning. While recommending the enhancement of coercive policies at the domestic level, the drafters of the Recommendation attached priority to strengthening cooperation between the competent state and civilian actors and proposed introducing a situational prevention policy, centred on the segregation and surveillance of football spectators. They envisaged not only keeping spectators under surveillance and controlling the sale of match tickets, but also erecting barriers to prevent invasion of the pitch and restricting, or even banning, the sale of alcohol inside stadia. Although Recommendation No. R(84)8 was not binding, it marked a turning point in the regulation of football hooliganism. For the first time, football hooliganism was seen as a public order problem, the control of which required the introduction of specific measures. The provisions of Recommendation No. R(84)8 denoted a clear departure from the moderate stance that had previously prevailed at both the domestic and international levels and prefigured the emergence of a new era of social control, based on risk management (Tsoukala, 2009, pp. 25–26). It should also be noted that situational prevention was already prevalent in UEFA’s binding instructions a year before, in 1983, which had been set up in cooperation with the English Football Association and the Deutscher Fussball-Bund. Thus, in the case of football hooliganism, it appears as though the shift in crime control policy began in the private domain, as a result of concerted action by sports organisations and public security authorities, to be further specified at the international level via an intergovernmental channel. In this regard, the Heysel stadium disaster, which is sometimes cited as the
catalyst for a new era in the management of football hooliganism in Europe, simply hastened a transformation that was already underway (Tsoukala, 2007).

Although similar steps are being witnessed in chess 30 or 40 years later, this sport aims to achieve higher legal standards while managing the risk of cheating coming from the crowd and the players themselves and seeking to ensure a cheating-free environment through situational crime prevention. The main aim of this article is to analyse and comment on the current practice of the application of anti-cheating protection measures in chess. The objectives that help to achieve this aim are (1) to identify the main situational prevention measures; (2) to identify the main challenges to applying those measures; (3) to identify the relation between cheating prevention and safeguarding the smooth course of the game. The main method applied in the article is documentary analysis, although at times—due to the long sporting and administrative experience of the author—the text might resemble an intersubjective ethnographic study. The article is divided into two parts: the first devoted to the description of the situational crime prevention measures and the second describing the (at times intersecting, at times even conflicting) relation between preventing cheating and safeguarding the smooth course of the game.

Situational crime prevention measures in chess

The following situational preventive measures are applied in chess: metal detectors; separation of spaces; scanning by different types of scanners; using special apps to detect mobile phones and computers; identification of allowed and prohibited items; accreditation and authorisation policy. Further, these measures and the subtleties of their application are studied in more detail.

Installation of airport-like metal detectors

This is a smart preventative measure that saves time by not having to scan each player individually. At the same time, it has shortcomings that should be noted: the magnetic field generated by the frame can be extremely sensitive, reacting to even the tiniest pieces of metal. For example, a detector may react to buckles in players’ shoes, belts, credit cards in wallets, and other items. In practice, every signal from the frame must be considered and addressed as soon as possible. If the detector is beeping and the red light is at the bottom of the device, then most probably the metal is in the player’s shoes, if the bulb lights up in the middle of the frame, then probably the belt is the cause, and so on. Therefore, Fair Play Officers in chess tournaments should operate on a day-to-day tactical basis dealing with specific, immediate design problems. As Ekblom (1997) noted, crime prevention through environmental design (and indeed through other situational strategies) entails not only a paradigm shift in perspective (from envisaging use to envisaging misuse) but also a constant state of readiness to adjust to changing circumstances and adaptive offenders.

While working with players, the following problems were observed: prestigious tournaments require players to adhere to a dress code (as a rule—business casual)
that may presuppose the use of belts and more formal shoes—i.e. not sneakers. Accordingly, small metal details are likely to be detected while adhering to this code. If data from the metal detector are overemphasised and all the players are required to leave their shoes, belts, and buttons in separate boxes, delays may occur, and the smooth course of the competition may be disturbed. Such an ‘airport-like’ scenario is quite likely to happen in the future (i.e. when the chess community is used to higher safety standards), though, admittedly such standards are (and will be) hard to implement in blitz and rapid chess championships. Recently some criticism towards the dress code has been expressed by (future) World Blitz Champion Maxime Vachier-Lagrave (2021), who tweeted that “It would be more reasonable to focus on having water available for players, (…) and respecting a schedule (almost one hour late) than to pay full attention to an outdated dress code”.

Separating spectators from the playing space

This is an essential component of situational prevention. Recommendation No. R(84)8 states that effective measures shall be taken at and within stadiums to reduce spectator violence at football matches and in particular:

a. to ensure that the design and physical fabric of football stadiums provide for the safety of spectators, do not readily facilitate violence between spectators, allow effective crowd control by police and contain appropriate barriers or fencing so as to protect the playing field and to control the movement of spectators around it;
b. to segregate rival supporters, with one or more terraces reserved for visiting supporters only;
c. to ensure this segregation by controlling the sale of tickets for matches, and to avoid the casual sale of tickets that might undermine such segregation;
d. to ensure, insofar as legally possible, the exclusion of known trouble-makers.

Actually, quite similar (segregation-related) ideas are expressed in the above-mentioned Anti-Cheating Protection measures. They stipulate that organisers must clearly and carefully designate areas for players (the Playing Area) and for spectators. Organisers and arbiters shall prevent getting any chess information from outside the Playing Area. Organisers shall endeavour, in so far as possible and reasonable, to avoid contact between players and spectators. If possible, separate refreshment/toilet/smoking areas should be provided for players and spectators (in team competitions, this should be extended to include captains as a separate category).

In chess competitions, viewers may attempt to hand over the player’s phone at any time or prompt moves using pre-arranged signals. As a result, any interaction between the player and the audience must be avoided. In practical terms, separation is achieved in a variety of ways: the area is gated off, spectators are allowed to stand one storey above the players, players having finished their games are considered spectators, etc. Journalists and VIPs (who normally have special accreditation and can enter the gaming area) create the biggest challenges in this respect. There
may be too many VIPs unknown to the Fair Play Officer, but who might possibly fall under the above definition of trouble-maker (this definition is borrowed from Recommendation No. R(84)8). In order to maintain a higher standard of social control, the number of VIPs must be limited. This suggestion is in accordance with the thoughts of one of the ‘founding fathers’ of situational crime prevention—Oscar Newman. He devoted a significant portion of his career to developing and improving a protective environment. He argues that the protective space must have distinct boundaries to demonstrate that the territory is the property of someone with a master (in the context of chess tournaments—the Fair Play Officer and Arbiter) willing to defend it. Different zones cannot be merged because an individual will lose the ability to discern where he is expected and where he is not. Clear physical or visual barriers must be installed so that an outsider knows where to go and where not to go (Newman, 1972, pp. 11–12). After the boundaries are established, the players’ attitude towards the territory also changes. When an area is (too) open and its exact boundaries are unknown, bystanders constantly walk through it and players might develop an indifferent or even angry attitude towards the surrounding environment, as they are not certain that the Playing Area is theirs. Additionally, the perception that others could cheat and the subjective likelihood of being victimised are frequent triggers for dishonesty (Smerdon, 2020). In that sense, chess players should ideally play in a ‘Faraday cage,’ away from any signals. To accomplish this, several technical steps must be taken: hotspots must be turned off, all technical staff must use wired connections, etc. In this regard, the analogy to cycling and Formula 1 is instructive: in these sports, the federations have decided to implement segregation and surveillance of athletes, and particularly their bicycles and cars, creating a ‘parc fermé.’ However, it is important to add that if a ‘Faraday cage’ is used, national laws should be examined,2 and the ability to make emergency calls should be protected.

In addition, special attention must be paid to some specific spaces, such as smoking areas and toilets. A smoking area is a designated area in which smoking is permitted, clearly distinguished from the other areas where only players and arbiters have access. According to Art. 4.1 of FIDE General Regulations for Competitions, if possible, a separate area outside the playing area shall be provided where smoking is permitted. This shall be easily accessible from the playing area. If local ordinances totally prohibit smoking on the premises, the players and officials shall be given easy access to the outside. For Fair Play purposes, that area must be under constant surveillance by an arbiter, security, or volunteer. The latter should be trained 1 or 2 days before the start of the event. Also, the players are prohibited from discussing chess matters among themselves; the smoker trashcan should be observed (visually) and scanned. Naturally, the players’ behaviour should be observed: the Fair Play Officer should monitor the situation if there are open lines of sight allowing players to communicate with the outer world using signals.

In fact, toilets are the most popular place for cheating. Because of its intrinsic solitude, the toilet area provides numerous opportunities for the use of unlawful assistance. Even the design of the toilet can be significant in this regard: for example,

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2 In some countries, such as Italy and the United States of America, signal jammers may be illegal.
a toilet without a cistern is safer because it provides fewer opportunities to hide a phone. Additionally, movable ceilings in the toilet may be a concern, since they allow practically infinite options to conceal a phone. This is why in the most prestigious tournaments it is advisable to fix sliding ceilings. When fixing the ceiling, fire prevention standards must be considered. Understandably, this must be completed well in advance of the tournament’s start. Several disciplinary cases were brought before FIDE’s Ethics and Disciplinary Commission (for example, Case No. 8/2019), in which players were penalised precisely for using their mobile phones in the toilet area. As a result, Fair Play Officers must maintain a close check on this area at all times. Moreover, some innovative methods may be implemented—for example, Fair Play Officers in charge of this area are not required to carry badges or dress in an official manner. They should be unrecognisable, with clothing that is as plain as possible. This procedure (resembling undercover investigations) is already being used in Indian and Lithuanian competitions.

Scanning participants at random and on a targeted basis

Any player can be scanned on a random basis. This can be done in public, and no specific requirements are necessary. On a targeted basis, the procedure is different. The targeted scanning area should not have metal surfaces or electronic coverage for a targeted Fair Play check. Targeted scanning should be carried out privately. Moreover, the person inspecting the player should be of the same gender as the player (Article 11.3.3 of the Laws of Chess).

The main challenge when differentiating between random and targeted testing occurs in rapid blitz events. Targeted testing requires more time and therefore might prevent a player from resting properly. More on this aspect will be found in the last part of this article called ‘Cheating prevention vs ensuring the smooth course of the game’.

Using scanners, both linear and nonlinear, using special Apps to detect mobile phones or computers

Linear scanners detect metallic material whereas nonlinear scanners detect the connection itself. Nonlinear scanners are able to detect smart cheating—for instance, a tiny installation in the players’ ears. In this respect, nonlinear scanners can identify sections of specific materials that are not visible to the naked eye. It is important to note that nonlinear detectors are more subtle, and reading the data they present requires knowledge and experience. Additionally, certain problems must be addressed. It is vital to understand the experience of inmates in this regard. The most frequent method of evading the nonlinear scanner is to wrap the phone in aluminium foil (or other metal, like copper, zinc, iron, or steel). This approach may function as a simplified Faraday Cage, deflecting signals and therefore rendering the phone untraceable. Whereas one of the most prevalent methods of evading linear scanners is to use a tiny mobile phone made almost entirely of plastic. Additionally, prisoners ingest the SIM card, preventing it from being picked up and retrieve it later.
(Dunn, 2016). Thus, both linear and nonlinear scanners must be used—because only
the combination of the two enables the detection of unwanted devices.

With regards to the specialised applications used to detect mobile phones or
laptops, one of the most popular is the ‘Bluetooth Finder.’ This programme can
be downloaded from Google Play. This App makes it possible to locate and find
Bluetooth devices using the received signal strength indication (RSSI). The closer
one gets, the stronger the signal will be. The devices will be displayed in a list with
their name, MAC ID, a graphical signal strength meter (S Meter), and units in deci-
bels dBm. Depending on the device, the signal strength could be updated at 1–10 s
intervals.

**Identification of allowed and prohibited items**

*Prohibited items* include mobile phones, unapproved electronic devices, all kinds
of watches, pens, and wallets—that is, objects that might include metal elements
and impede the work of airport-like metal detectors within the space. The list is not
exhaustive. Prohibited items should be stored in the locker area. In order to block
signals from phones, the lockers should be made of metal, not plastic, thus acting as
a Faraday cage.

*Permitted items* include water, chocolate, and other foods; see-through bags (for
example, made of plastic); money in the form of banknotes and coins (i.e. not credit
cards). The latter is explained by the fact that credit cards include small metal ele-
ments that might beep while going through a metal detector.

As for the specific challenges, it can be mentioned that, while working with chess
players during the 2021 World Blitz and Rapid Chess Championship in Warsaw, the
biggest challenge was to explain and ensure that wallets were not allowed. Chess
players were afraid, or simply did not want, to leave their wallets in the locker area,
which is why constant beeping was heard, often coming from the players’ pockets
where wallets were kept.

**Accreditation and authorisation policy**

Accreditation and authorisation policies are a touchy subject. They are occasion-
ally too permissive, since commercial interests can prevail over concerns about fair-
ness. The interests of sponsors and VIPs are often considered more important than
the implementation of anti-cheating strategies. From the criminological standpoint,
such a situation might be called anomie or normlessness. Similar observations have
been made while researching football hooliganism. For example, Dominique Bodin
attributes its development to the adoption of anomic behaviour in stadiums, stem-
ing not only from a failure to enforce the law, but also from the social vacuum left
by football club officials who have been too complacent about the excesses commit-
ted by supporters attending their matches (Tsoukala, 2009, p. 102). Having said this,
five steps are suggested below to ensure that accreditation and authorisation policies
are more formal and less ‘anomic’.
(a) As per the FIDE Laws of Chess Article 12.8 “Unless authorised by the arbiter, it is forbidden for anybody to use a mobile phone or any kind of communication
device in the playing venue or any contiguous area designated by the arbiter”. This provision needs to be interpreted wisely, and authorisation can be granted by the Chief Arbiter in consultation with the Fair Play team in a tournament where a Fair Play team is appointed. Without consulting FPL, no arbiter should give permission for the use of any mobile or electronic device.

(b) The number of accredited Organisers and VIPs in the playing area with approval to carry mobile phones should be limited. The organisers cannot accredit everyone as Organisers/VIPs with the right to access the playing area, even without electronic devices. The Fair Play team or arbiters have great difficulty when 50–70 accredited Organisers, VIPs, etc., are inside the playing area.

(c) The guardians/seconds of the players (whatever the status of the player) must be accredited as ‘Guest’ or ‘Accompany’ only and not be given unlimited access to the playing area except for the spectators’ area.

(d) As far as possible, prestigious tournaments must issue a Match Card along with the Player Accreditation. Once the player finishes the games, the Match Card should be handed over to the Arbiter in order to differentiate the players who have finished their game from those whose games are still running. This is especially important when the accreditation card does not bear the name of the player.

(e) All the Press/Media/Photo/Video accredited personnel must use a camera for photography and not mobile phones. A difficult situation arises if the organisers grant accreditation to members of the press with mobiles even before the FPL takes charge, and unpleasant scenarios may develop between the FPL, Organisers, and Press.

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Preventing cheating versus ensuring the game runs smoothly

It is crucial to understand that anti-cheating procedures should not be carried out for their own sake, and the smooth course of the game must not suffer because of them. I will present three examples where anti-cheating procedures might distract honest players: (a) the beeps of metal detectors; (b) the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic; (c) random testing.

In the case of the beeps from airport-like metal detectors, it is important to ensure that they do not beep during the games, which is why the detectors have to be covered during play. It is also important that players do not have to go through them after finishing their game. As mentioned earlier, players’ attire often includes small metal details frequently setting off the detectors (at least for the time being, as long as players are still not used to following the proper dress code without metal details), and naturally, this must be avoided.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the tables were placed further apart, with the result that the arbiters did not have enough time to supervise all the boards and the number of arbiters was sometimes insufficient to ensure both anti-cheating and fair play. For this reason, the public at large often complains that there are not enough
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arbiter to detect *inter alia* touch-move (i.e. that a player shall move with the piece he touched) or the 50 moves rule (i.e. that a player can claim a draw if there were no moves with pawns for 50 moves), or that certain spectators actually used their telephones for various purposes, etc. It is worth adding that in FIDE events one arbiter usually supervises 6–12 boards—and this number is indeed demanding; the arbiter must not only be professional and vigilant but also physically fit. For example, in the biggest Indian open tournament, the arbiters are allowed to sit for only 10–15 min per hour, whereas the game may last 5–6 h. Taking into account these aggravated conditions, it can be said that the lack of arbiters often leads to situations where priority is given (and probably should be given) to basic matters: arbiters just try to look at the boards and players but may not thoroughly inspect toilets or smoking areas, may not check whether the spectators give some pre-agreed signals to the players, and may not check the whole area (which can be extensive, for example, an ice-hockey arena), etc.

As for random testing, the biggest concern is that it should not be too interventionist, and the experience of other sports may be helpful here. For example, during the London 2012 Olympics, women heptathlonist Austra Skujyte was tested after the first day of the heptathlon, which is a very rare, but not prohibited, occurrence. According to the Lithuanian National Olympic Committee, such testing (even if athletes are randomly selected) violates an athlete’s right to rest, as the athlete returned to the Olympic village two hours later than her competitors, exhausted, unable to eat normally, and thus had no chance of winning a medal. This case at the London Olympics demonstrates the possibility of discrimination in the administration of the anti-doping system (Zaksaite, 2012). It was an instance of what legal theory refers to as ‘legal fiction’, which allows for the law to be applied in a (factually) discriminatory manner, but *de jure* the applier may be right due to the random nature of the testing system. If it is determined that similar procedures are unjust, anti-cheating control may lose its authority, as it may influence the course or outcome of the competition in an unreasonable manner. In this regard, the proportionality principle must always be followed: for example, less intrusive procedures prior to the game are recommended to avoid disbalancing the player. Additionally, the player should not be frisked during a time-trouble; this can occur only if there is a very reasonable suspicion that the player is cheating. And the latter concept is intersubjective: time-trouble refers not only to objective time management but also to the player’s state of mind.

**Concluding insights**

In chess, situational crime prevention requires a combination of criminological, technological, and legal understanding. It is not easy to strike a balance between cheating prevention and the smooth flow of the game. Some regulations may even be in conflict with one another, such as the dress code, which may cause delays if participants are required to remove their shoes and other clothing with small metal features. It is also worth noting that chess players often lack discipline and view similar approaches with scepticism. Some humorous remarks were heard at the World
Rapid Championship 2021, such as that see-through bags should most probably be made of glass. While Fair Play Officers may find such a viewpoint troublesome, academics may find it intriguing. Chess players as intellectuals are (over)sensitive of what Yevgeny Zamyatin, Aldous Huxley, and George Orwell warned decades ago—that the private sphere will be annihilated, not in a totalitarian regime, but under the mass society and mass culture of the modern world (Bauman & Donskis, 2013, p. 111).

It should also be highlighted that Covid-19 regulations have made the function of an arbiter more difficult. Finally, any scanning or frisking should not be overly intrusive or discriminatory. These concerns are all similar to issues arising in other sports such as crowd management in football or conducting (random) doping testing. Chess players, spectators, and especially, VIPs are currently somewhat privileged in this regard, as they can still enjoy a relaxed atmosphere; but it is one that will most likely become more formal and stricter in the future. It is also necessary to note the connection between increased social control and the massive reforms demanded from FIDE. Fair Play Officers must be trained, the tournament space must be checked (or even created) in advance, and a conceptual shift in perspective must occur. It is no longer acceptable to regard a Fair Play Officer as someone who simply does not interfere with competition. To avoid cheating, he or she should assess the risk of doing so in advance and take steps to eliminate any potential triggers. As a result, a proactive approach is required, whereas a reactive one is simply out of date.

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