

Does the Distribution of Broadcasting Revenue Improve or Harm Competitive Balance in Professional Football? A Systematic Narrative Review

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ABSTRACT

Broadcasting revenues, which are now over €12 billion per year in the continent's top divisions and leagues, are clubs' biggest revenue stream and competitive balance is essential for the commercial and sporting health of professional football leagues. This systematic narrative review collates 25 peer-reviewed journal articles that were open-access and published from 2021–2026. This review does not seek to resolve the issue of whether distribution of broadcast revenue is good or bad for competitive balance, but instead provides a framework for understanding why the available evidence is conflictual. The review creates a conceptual framework connecting broadcasting revenue to other factors influencing club budgets, player acquisition, competitive balance, fan demand, and broadcasting value, as a closed loop, along with an evidence map cross-classifying studies by method and finding. The evidence map is organised around four systematic sources of disagreement: league structure, type of competitive balance metric applied, country/competition scope, and approach in analysing the data. Generally, if domestic distribution is egalitarian or is more stable, continental qualification is multi-team and this is correlated to improved or stable balance, but some panel-econometric and club-level concentration studies report ongoing imbalance. These patterns are best read as evidence for the disagreement framework rather than as a net answer to the title question, which the included evidence is too heterogeneous in method and scope to support answering directly. The review ends with implications for UEFA and the major domestic leagues, and a research agenda for the future.

Keywords: *competitive balance; broadcasting revenue; revenue sharing; football economics; sports governance*

1. INTRODUCTION

Combining all the domestic league, UEFA club-competition and streaming deals, the value of European football's broadcasting market is now greater than €12 billion a year, making it now the main source of football's financial revenue. There are three reasons why the allocation of this money to clubs is

significant. Not only has there been a dramatic increase in financial disparity among clubs since the 1990s 'broadcasting boom', but there is a strong sense that the gap has become more significant than it has ever been before. Secondly, UEFA's Financial Fair Play and subsequent sustainability rules require it to be based on club revenue, with the distribution formula showing how much clubs can turn into squad spending. Third, the global streaming services are changing the broadcasting pool that the current distribution formulas were built upon.

There are two general philosophies of allocations at play. Collective, relatively egalitarian distribution which is used to different extent in the Premier League, Bundesliga and Ligue 1, where income from broadcasting is pooled and shared in two equal parts plus a component of merit and a component of fee for facilities. More individualised systems are linked to pre-2015 La Liga and to Serie A, and give clubs the flexibility to make individual negotiations or to keep a bigger share which generates sharper income gradients. A third, 'Continental' tier is above UEFA Champions League and Europa League prize money, and distributed by qualification, market pool and coefficient rules that play alongside and sometimes against each other of the domestic formula.

Normatively, competitive balance is important because it influences the likelihood of a club's success over time, as well as factors which drive interest in that club, its media value, and the revenue of the league, in such a way that it can be formalised as a closed feedback loop, as outlined in Section 2. It is not just that the literature provides such different conclusions depending on league structure, measurement choice, and scope of competition, but why? Previous reviews have focused on a single league or competition, so this review brings together the economics of broadcasting, the measurement of "balance," the theory of "revenue-sharing," and the issues of governance into a multidisciplinary synthesis.

The two questions, then, are: (1) What is the synthesis of the No. 1 question, and (2) What is the synthesis of the No. 2 question? The first is the one stated in the title – does distribution of broadcasting revenues promote or undermine competitive balance? The second, to which the evidence here assembled is really fit to answer, is why the published literature is not agreed upon as to the first. The 25 studies included in the analysis, as demonstrated in Sections 4–6, do not give uniform answers to the title question; either the league structure or the balance metric used, the country/competition studied or the analytical approach taken alters the verdict, sometimes for the same competition. The real contribution of the paper is the taxonomy of disagreement contained in Section 7, which turns the pattern into an explicit taxonomy. The taxonomy is presented as a direct verdict in the title question in Section 10 only indirectly, and the conditions under which each answer is valid are presented here as well.

The conceptual framework is introduced in Section 2. The methodology is described in section 3. Theoretical contributions reviewed in Section 4. Section 5 discusses the empirical evidence and the indexes and why there is disagreement. Governance debates are reviewed in section 6. Underlying mechanisms and review limitations are discussed in Section 7. Section 8 provides for real-life implications. Section 9 suggests further research and Section 10 concludes.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The structure of cause and effect that the literature assumes is presented in Figure 1, in a circular fashion, not a linear one. There are a few disagreements reported in sections 4 and 5, as they investigate only part of this loop separately.

This has three implications if considered as a loop and not a chain. First of all, the distribution formula is not the only link between revenue and balance; studies measuring only a part of the distribution process test only a part of the framework. Secondly, the loop suggests a feedback effect that has hardly been empirically investigated: if high revenues for concentrated revenue lead to increased imbalance, then more imbalance leads to lower fan interest, which in turn leads to lower broadcast fees and reduced revenues. Secondly, the loop suggests that a skewed formula's sustainability is not certain: if high revenues for concentrated revenue mean more imbalance, then more imbalance means less fan interest, means less broadcast fees, means less revenues, means more imbalance. Thirdly, it explains why distribution is such a big part of the game of promotion-relegation and qualification and relegation that both clubs are crucial to the top of the loop each season.

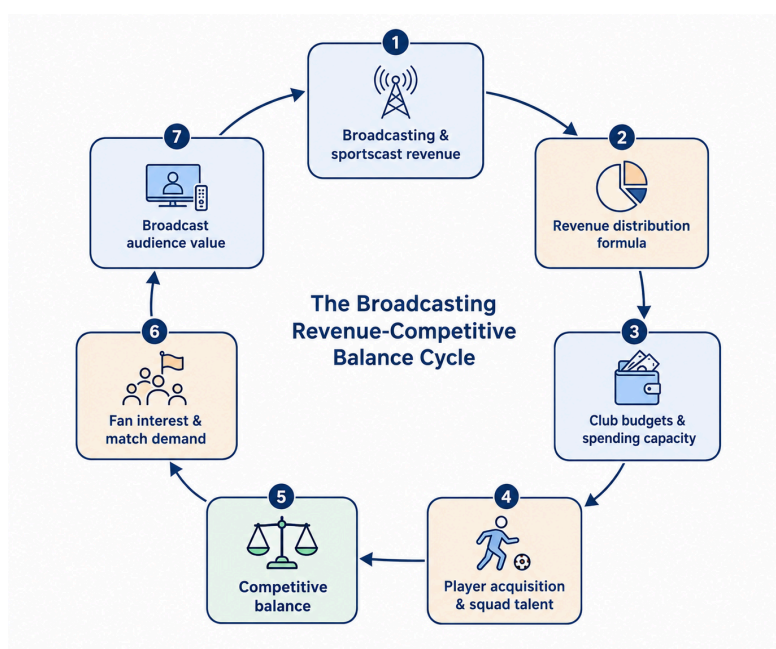


Figure 1. The broadcasting revenue competitive balance cycle is the conceptual framework. The distribution formula affects club budgets, club player acquisition, and competitive balance, which affects fans' demand, broadcasters' value, and contributes back to the revenue stream.

3. METHODS

This review adopts a systematic narrative review method, that is, a structured search (reported following the PRISMA guidelines) and interpretive thematic synthesis, rather than meta-analysis pooling, because of the methodological differences of the included studies.

3.1 Search Strategy

In June 2026, the review scanned three open access databases (Semantic Scholar, OpenAlex, Google Scholar) for peer-reviewed journal publications, as the goal was to use only open access resources and not sources that required institutional affiliation to access. A three concept Boolean string was created that included football, broadcasting/revenue-sharing and competitive-balance terms, resulting in 880 records (Semantic Scholar n=210, OpenAlex n=58, Google Scholar n=612).

Concept	Search Terms	Rationale
Football / Professional leagues	football OR soccer OR "professional football" OR "football league" OR "association football"	Sport-specific terminology, avoiding conflation with other codes of football.
Broadcasting revenue distribution	"broadcasting revenue" OR "broadcast revenue" OR "media rights" OR "sportscast revenue" OR "revenue sharing" OR "revenue distribution"	Captures collective selling, axiomatic sharing rules, and continental prize-money distribution.
Competitive balance / Parity	"competitive balance" OR parity OR "uncertainty of outcome" OR "league competitiveness"	Core outcome terminology across sports economics and operations-research traditions.

Table 1. Search term matrix. Boolean OR within concepts; AND across concepts. Date filter: January 2021–June 2026. English only.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The studies were selected if they were published in English in the last five years (2021-2026), treated the allocation of broadcasting/sportscast revenue or a related mechanism as a key variable compared to competitive balance, and were peer-reviewed and focused on professional football or a directly comparable team-sport competition. There was no limit on the number of papers per session, but working papers, theses, preprints (not yet published in journals), industry and news commentary were excluded, even if relevant. Only a handful of basic pre-2021 journal articles were kept only if a pre-2021 article from the same research programme was included and cited directly by an article included in the 2021-2026 time frame (flagged in Table 3). Citation metadata was compared to publisher records, 2025 publications and MDPI Encyclopedia entry should be re-checked before further citations as some volume/page information was not finalised at the time of search.

3.3 Screening, Selection and Quality Appraisal

145 duplicates were removed and then 735 records were screened using title/abstract, with 121 being taken up for full-text review. In the end, 25 studies were included, with 27 outside the date range, 34 not peer-reviewed journal publications, 26 that were not sufficiently focused on the focus of revenue/allocation distribution and 9 that did not have a competitive balance outcome (Figure 2).

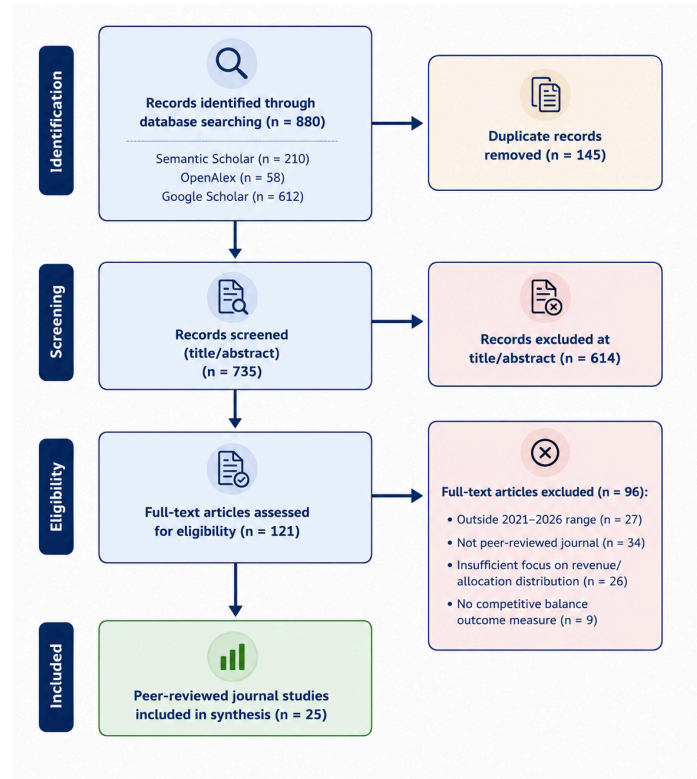


Figure 2. PRISMA flow diagram showing records identified, screened, assessed, excluded (with reasons), and included.

Table 2. Modified MMAT quality appraisal criteria.

Evidence Level	Method Type	Studies (Table 3 #)
Strong	Panel econometrics & long-run stochastic/structural models	5, 6, 7, 21, 23
Moderate-strong	Index/bibliometric analysis of a specific competition	10, 11, 12, 13, 22

Evidence Level	Method Type	Studies (Table 3 #)
Moderate	Simulation, mathematical incentive analysis, methodological index development	14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19
Moderate	Axiomatic / game-theoretic modelling	1, 2, 4
Weak-moderate	Theoretical/fan-utility modelling without panel data	8, 9
Weak	Cross-sport demand review, qualitative/policy analysis	20, 24, 25

Table 2. Evidence hierarchy applied during synthesis. Strong/moderate-strong levels are weighted most heavily; weak-level studies are retained for mechanisms rather than causal estimates.

3.4 Summary of Included Studies

Table 3 summarises the 25 included studies: scope, method, distribution mechanism, and key finding.

#	Author(s) & Year	League/Sport Scope	Method	Distribution/Allocation Mechanism	Key Finding
1	Bergantiños & Moreno-Ter nero (2021)	Theoretical, European football broadcasting	Axiomatic game theory	Symmetric/additive sharing rules	Characterises compromise sharing rules between two focal allocation methods; some support a majority-voting equilibrium among clubs.
2	Rocaboy (2023)	Theoretical, multi-league	Game-theoretic modelling	Optimal inter-league broadcasting rule	An optimal sharing rule must account for competition between leagues, not only within one.
3	Pawlowski & Budzinski (2022)	Europe, Big 5	Welfare/policy analysis	Egalitarian distribution & luxury tax	Equal distribution and a progressive luxury tax are the most promising levers for restoring balance.
4	Rockerbie (2024)	MLB, NFL, NBA, EPL	Theoretical review	Equal vs. merit-based sharing	The effect of sharing on balance is ambiguous; it

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#	Author(s) & Year	League/Sport Scope	Method	Distribution/Allocation Mechanism	Key Finding
					depends on absolute vs. relative quality heterogeneity.
5	Serrano, Espitia-Escuer, Montañés & Acero (2022)	18 European leagues, 1992/93–2018/19	Time-series structural break analysis	Long-run revenue/balance trend	Imbalance has been a largely permanent feature of European football since the 1990s broadcasting boom.
6	Scelles, François & Dermit-Richard (2022)	European men's first tiers, 2006–2018	Panel econometric analysis	Cross-country balance determinants	Broadcasting concentration is among the strongest cross-country determinants of declining balance.
7	Gasparetto, Mishchenko & Zaitsev (2023)	European top-tier leagues	Panel econometric analysis	Multi-factor balance determinants	Revenue distribution interacts with league size and promotion/relegation structure.
8	Cheah (2023)	General team-sport model, fan utility	Theoretical utility-maximisation model	Broadcast revenue & weaker-club catch-up	Broadcasts reduce attendance but need not worsen balance; weaker teams can catch up via broadcast revenue.
9	Cheah (2025)	General team-sport model	Theoretical model, media technology	Media-technology-driven revenue shifts	New media technologies can shift revenue back toward big-market clubs.
10	Csató & Petróczy (2024)	UEFA Champions League knockout stage, 2003–2023	Bibliometric index construction	Qualification/prize-money structure	Balance among clubs and countries has remained stable due to multi-team qualification rules.
11	Triguero-Ruiz & Avila-Cano (2023)	UEFA Champions League group stage,	Quantitative balance index analysis	Group-stage qualification/seedling	Reports a decline in ex ante and ex post balance over two decades.

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#	Author(s) & Year	League/Sport Scope	Method	Distribution/Allocation Mechanism	Key Finding
		1999/2000–2017/18			
12	Avila-Cano & Triguero-Ruiz (2023)	Major European football leagues	Distance-to-competitive-balance index	Domestic revenue concentration	Confirms rising concentration of results within major domestic leagues.
13	Avila-Cano & Triguero-Ruiz (2024)	UEFA Champions League	Quantitative group-difficulty analysis	Pot allocation/seeding	No evidence that winners started in an "easy" group.
14	Avila-Cano, Owen & Triguero-Ruiz (2023)	Rugby union (comparator)	Methodological index development	Bonus-point distribution systems	New balance indices for bonus-point leagues, transferable to football.
15	Avila-Cano, Ruiz-Sepulveda & Triguero-Ruiz (2021)	Bilateral sports competitions (general)	Mathematical index development	Maximum concentration benchmark	Method for benchmarking maximum possible concentration of results.
16	Gyimesi (2024)	Post-2024 Champions League & proposed Super League	Simulation study (Elo-based)	League-phase vs. closed-league prize structures	The 2024/25 reform improves balance more than a simulated Super League.
17	Csató & Ilyin (2025)	Post-2024 UEFA Champions League qualification	Mathematical incentive analysis	Qualification-linked prize allocation	Misaligned incentives can reward strategically weaker performance.
18	Csató (2023)	General tournament design (football-relevant)	Operations-research/game theory	Tie-breaking and scheduling rules	Poor tie-breaking rules create uncompetitive matches independent of revenue.

#	Author(s) & Year	League/Sport Scope	Method	Distribution/Allocation Mechanism	Key Finding
19	Csató, Molontay & Pintér (2024)	Double round-robin tournaments (football-relevant)	Mathematical/game-theoretic modelling	Schedule-driven incentive structures	Scheduling can create unequal incentive structures among teams.
20	Oh, Lee & Jang (2023)	Overwatch League esports (comparator)	Econometric viewership analysis	Outcome uncertainty & broadcasting viewership	Outcome uncertainty raises viewership, supporting the commercial case for balance policies.
21	Carreras-Simó & García (2022)	Big Five European leagues	Panel econometric analysis	Squad talent & broadcasting-funded spending	Broadcasting-funded squad talent strongly predicts sporting success.
22	Manasis (2022)	Professional team sports leagues (general)	Adjusted-entropy index development	Long-run balance measurement	Adjusted entropy index more sensitive to revenue-driven shifts in dominance.
23	Basini, Tsouli, Ntzoufras & Friel (2023)	English Premier League, 40+ seasons	Stochastic block model	Long-run domestic balance	Persistent latent tiers of club strength consistent with revenue-reinforced stratification.
24	Johnson & Fort (2022)	Cross-sport (soccer-centric review)	Systematic literature review	Outcome uncertainty & fan demand	Weak support for the claim that football fans value outcome uncertainty.
25	Brannagan, Scelles, Valenti, Inoue, Grix & Perkin (2022)	European Super League proposal, 2021	Qualitative policy analysis	Breakaway-league revenue motive	The 2021 Super League attempt was motivated by a desire to capture revenue outside the solidarity system.

Table 3. Summary of key peer-reviewed studies included in the review (N = 25). All entries are journal articles published 2021–2026; entries 14 and 15 apply methodological tools from football and a comparator sport respectively.

3.5 Synthesis Approach

The studies have been organized by themes into three strands: theoretical (Section 4), empirical/index-based (Section 5), and governance-oriented (Section 6). The focus in particular is on the explanation of disagreement, with each set of conflicting findings being linked to a named source of disagreement: league structure, balance metric, country/competition or model, and shown as an evidence map (Figure 3).

4. THEORETICAL VIEWS ON REVENUE SHARING AND COMPETITIVE BALANCE

Bergantiños and Moreno-Ternero (2021) describe a family of "compromise" sharing rules between two basic allocation methods, with polar positions regarding the loyalty of the club's audience and demonstrate that some of the members of this family support a majority-voting equilibrium between clubs, which helps explain why certain formulas are used in practice. This is extended to inter-league competition by Rocaboy (2023) from the within-league perspective to consider a cross-league perspective on competition for talent and audience, which is generally not accounted for by domestic only studies in Section 5.

The simplest theoretical answers to the question of why the empirical results are mixed are provided by Rockerbie's (2024) synthesis, which shows that in a two-club model there is an ambiguous effect of revenue sharing on competitive balance and that the sign depends on one parameter. Sharing creates a balance in the sense that each club will be less likely to overinvest in talent if the only difference between clubs is the absolute qualification effect on revenue. Alternatively, if the only difference between clubs is relative quality, the same policy can cause a decline in balance since smaller clubs provide a subsidy to the investment of the larger clubs. With this one result alone, it is easy to predict that the studies from different contexts with different club heterogeneity will conclude differently regarding the same policy, as was found in Section 5.

5. EMPIRICAL AND INDEX BASED EVIDENCE

5.1 Domestic league evidence: Revenue concentration versus structural permanence

In their recent papers, Scelles, François and Dermit-Richard (2022) and Gasparetto, Mishchenko and Zaitsev (2023) discuss the decline of domestic balance as a recent phenomenon and model it using the mid-2000s panels of broadcasting concentration, league size and promotion-relegation structure. Taking a longer time period 1992/93-2018/19, Serrano, Espitia-Escuer, Montañés and Acero (2022) find using structural-break tests that imbalance is not a recent or increasing phenomenon since the 1990s broadcasting boom, but is more likely to have been a persistent trend. The findings relate to various time horizons, and to various questions: Are there time horizons over which these "short panels" can detect the presence or absence of an increasing imbalance in concentration? Are there time horizons over which the

"structural break" analysis can ask whether a truly competitive baseline ever existed? It is their joint recommendation that the distribution of revenues from broadcasting might have been determined early in the broadcasting era to be a broadly unbalanced one, but that later policy moved it only slightly.

The other difference is whether there is a connection between the revenue and spending that causes imbalance. Carreras-Simó and García (2022) demonstrate that the success in the Big Five leagues is highly related to squad talent, with the latter being disproportionately generated by broadcasting revenues, whereas Basini, Tsouli, Ntzoufras and Friel (2023) apply a stochastic block model to more than forty Premier League seasons to show that the latent strength tiers are always present and are consistent with the same channel. Manasis (2022) adds a measurement level point: the trend of the squad-talent studies is explained in part by the fact that some studies understate it, largely because the entropy index can be adjusted, as Manasis does, to be more sensitive to this shift towards dominance in the test than concentration measures.

Not every domestic evidence supports the revenue deterioration argument in terms of balance and in this case the reason for the disagreement is because of modelling assumptions—in no way due to data or country differences. Under the market structure it makes it a node of the assumed model, Cheah (2023) demonstrates it theoretically that broadcast reduces attendance without necessarily compromising the balance, as weaker teams can use the broadcast revenue to make up for their deficit. In the sequel, Cheah (2025) modified one of the assumptions (the media-delivery technology) and demonstrated that instead of the result shifting toward smaller-market clubs, it could shift back to big-market clubs. Theoretical predictions here, however, depend on the technology of broadcasting, and they differ between the two papers, because the two are modelling different technologies.

5.2 UEFA Champions League evidence: club-level decline versus country-level stability

The biggest split is over the Champions League. Meanwhile, in the group-stage, Triguero-Ruiz and Avila-Cano (2023) report a drop in ex ante and ex post balance between 1999/00 and 2017/18 and Avila-Cano and Triguero-Ruiz (2023) find a similar decline in a distance-to-competitive-balance index for major domestic leagues. The study by Csató and Petróczy (2024) on the knockout stage between 2003 and 2023, on the basis of bibliometric indicators, confirms the stability of the balance between clubs and countries. This isn't about one study being incorrect: The falling-balance studies are looking at concentration in the club level in the group stage, where more and more of the dominant clubs from club history are squeezing into the tournament's end. The stability finding measures country concentration, and is protected by a mechanism in the UEFA rules ensuring that there is a representation from the four most competitive leagues. If balance decreases at the club level, but not at the country level, then the number of leagues in which the players can play may remain the same, and they may only be redistributed within the same number of leagues.

A related debate is whether observed patterns are caused by seeding and/or scheduling, rather than by revenue. Avila-Cano and Triguero-Ruiz (2024) contradict the popular belief that an easy draw is a benefit for the winner, and Csató (2023) and Csató, Molontay and Pintér (2024) demonstrate that scheduling and tie-breaking procedures can have an effect on the competitive nature of the match, aside from revenue.

This is expanded by Csató and Ilyin (2025) to the post-2024 qualification system where they identify misaligned incentives that can lead to a reward for strategically weaker performance. Much of the balance variation arising from revenue and prize money could simply be a result of decisions taken in tournament design that are not explicitly linked to the distribution of the revenue, but are decisions nonetheless that UEFA frequently incorporates into its arguments for reform.

5.3 Comparator evidence and the contested demand side rationale

Both methodological tools by Avila-Cano and colleagues (2023) for rugby union and Avila-Cano, Ruiz-Sepulveda and Triguero-Ruiz (2021) for maximum concentration in bilateral competitions are methodological but not competing empirical approaches. The real disagreement comes from Oh, Lee, and Jang (2023) that outcome uncertainty increases the viewership of sports games, which is more consistent with a pro-balance policy, and Johnson and Fort (2022) review that weak support exists for football fans to value outcome uncertainty. A sport-specific explanation seems the most likely: the uncertainty over the short-term might be more potent for esports fans than for football fans, who plausibly have some demand based on club identity and competition, while the former do not.

5.4 Evidence Map

All 25 studies are cross-classified by method (columns) and finding direction (rows) in figure 3. Disagreement is focused in the index/bibliometric and panel-econometric columns; the two families used most frequently to the Champions league and home league questions above, where the assumptions are made explicit rather than being blanketly derived from data. The surprising thing about the balance is that while no qualitative/policy study reports balance as improving, that is the case because balance is consistently over-represented in governance events, like the Super League bid, that are a reaction to perceived failures in balance.

	Axiomatic / game-theoretic	Panel econometric	Index / bibliometric	Simulation / mathematical	Qualitative / policy
Balance improves or is stable	#1 #2 Compromise & inter-league rules support balance under conditions	#21 Talent spending predicts success (reinforces gaps)	#10 Qualification rules stabilise country- level balance	#16 Reform improves balance vs. Super League alternative	
Balance declines or is contingent	#4 Ambiguous effect; depends on quality heterogeneity type	#5 #6 #7 #23 Structural decline; cross-country & stratification evidence	#11 #12 Group-stage & DCB indices show decline	#17 Misaligned qualification incentives	#25 Super League driven by revenue capture motive
Mixed / depends on metric or scope		#8 #9 Fan-utility models: broadcast effect sign-dependent on media technology	#13 #14 #15 #22 Result depends on index choice & competition scope	#18 #19 Scheduling/tie- break rules shift balance independent of revenue	#20 #24 Demand-side rationale for redistribution is contested

Figure 3. Evidence map of the 25 included studies, cross-classified by method and reported finding direction. Study numbers correspond to Table 3.

The best evidence is found in panel-econometric and stochastic-model studies using multi-decade samples (5, 6, 7, 21, 23) which agree to a structurally stratified or declining balance. The studies labeled as axiomatic (1, 2, 4) are all best read as theory that explains why their panel evidence is contingent, not universal; the four studies labeled Champions League (10–13) are all best read as agreeing after different units of analysis are taken into account.

6. GOVERNANCE, REFORM AND THE EUROPEAN SUPER LEAGUE DEBATE

The 2021 breakaway Super League attempt highlighted the serious lack of domestic competitive balance, which Pawlowski and Budzinski (2022) are concerned is presently getting worse. They compare a closed Super League format to the current pyramid system and believe the format would produce a more balanced league but the current system could produce a similar or better level of welfare if a balanced system could be achieved through targeted reform. The two most promising levers are identified as a more equitable distribution of broadcasting revenues, and a progressive (or excess) tax on luxury goods, with the proposed transfer-fee tax estimated to have a small impact.

Qualitatively, Brannagan et al. (2022) examine the aborted 2021 Super League and find that the attempt was largely driven by the desire of some elite clubs to bring in an alternative revenue generation system that was less based on solidarity. As such, governance reforms driven by revenue protection do not necessarily lead to better competitive balance, and can create new strategic imbalances, as revenue-protection and balance-improvement motives are complementary by chance, not design, in the wake of the 2024 qualification reform (as illustrated by Csató and Ilyin 2025).

A more positive comparison is that of the simulation conducted in 2024/25 by Gyimesi (2024) which shows that the 2024/25 Champions League reform results in less imbalance with respect to the 2023/24 format and a simulated Super League scenario in terms of both match uncertainty and stakeless-match incidence. In combination with the scheduling results in Section 5.2, this suggests that the absolute amount of revenue distributed is not the key factor determining the direction of the change, but that the direction of the change depends on the nature of the reform, and not on revenue growth.

7. DISCUSSION

7.1 Why do equal revenue systems sometimes work and sometimes fail?

The finding is that egalitarian sharing balances only when there are differences in club absolute, not in club relative, quality (Rockerbie, 2024). It should perform best when clubs vary primarily in the properties specific to the club, e.g., size of the city, and best when only a few possess large advantages over the direct competitors because sharing then subsidises the direct competitors. This is one possible explanation for the fact that egalitarian-sharing leagues are frequently mentioned as being comparatively competitive, although none of the present studies puts this test straight. What this review confirms directly

is that even in an ‘egalitarian league’ the strength tiers can be observed over time: Basini, Tsouli, Ntzoufras and Friel (2023) identify strength tiers in the 40+ Premier League seasons. Equal sharing does not undo compounded advantage – it is likely to reduce it.

7.2 How does promotion and relegation affect incentives?

Promotion-relegation systems create a constant rotation of clubs that are promoted up and clubs that are relegated, and create a threat of relegation for the clubs that are promoted that can be a threat to the more prosperous clubs. Gasparetto, Mishchenko and Zaitsev (2023) demonstrate that this structure is correlated with revenue distribution. In conceptual terms, relegation has the effect of taking a club further away from the top of the feedback loop (Figure 2) for at least one season and gives them a chance to start from a lower level, which is a natural limitation on the possibility of permanent success. It also implies that formulas based on past revenue will underestimate the current demand of a newly promoted club (which was not directly tested in this study).

7.3 How does UEFA prize money interact with domestic broadcasting income?

UEFA's qualification regulations illustrated how the country-level balance is maintained while the club-level balance suffers, as the Champions League is a second, uncoordinated distribution system, on top of the domestic formulas. The UEFA prize money is paid directly to the qualifying club and is likely to add to the value of the domestic TV channel, but this is not isolated here, empirically. If it does exist, the uplift is more likely to be dished out again to the same club as part of a merit-based formula scheme, partially counterbalancing any domestic egalitarian effects. The finding of Csató and Ilyin (2025) is one of the observed evidences of this coordination gap between UEFA's rules and the 55 domestic formulas under them.

7.4 Limitations of This Review

This review may not include all relevant literature on the subject, as it focuses on English-language, peer-reviewed journal articles found in three open access journal indexes, and will miss recent working papers and literature that is only indexed in subscription-based journal indexes. No meta-analysis was performed; included studies have different metrics and specifications so no single pooled effect size is reported. No validated risk-of-bias instrument was found for this literature, but MMAT and an evidence-level ranking (Table 2) were used for quality appraisal, which should be interpreted as informed.

8. PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR UEFA AND MAJOR DOMESTIC LEAGUES

The mechanisms in Section 7 are expressed in terms of policy options to those responsible for establishing distribution formulas. Table 4 provides the key recommendations and associated trade-offs for each; none of the studies in this review directly models these trade-offs, and they should be considered and not assumed away.

Body	Recommendation	Main Trade-off
UEFA	Test qualification/prize-money reforms against domestic-formula interaction effects prospectively; index solidarity payments to qualifying clubs' domestic value uplift.	Greater administrative complexity; a more redistributive formula may weaken clubs' incentive to compete for qualification.
Premier League	Periodically recalibrate the equal/merit split against updated stratification metrics (e.g., adjusted entropy).	Reducing the merit-based share weakens the direct financial reward for on-pitch success.
La Liga / Serie A / Bundesliga	Narrow remaining top-to-bottom revenue gaps using axiomatic compromise sharing rules; Bundesliga's 50+1 rule already limits compounding advantage.	Narrower domestic gaps could reduce these leagues' clubs' spending power relative to Premier League rivals in European competition.
Spending caps / luxury taxes	Treat as a complement to revenue-sharing reform, addressing the player-acquisition link rather than the distribution formula itself.	May reduce investment incentives in facilities/youth development and could raise EU state-aid or free-movement concerns if applied unevenly.

Table 4. Practical implications and trade-offs for UEFA and major domestic leagues.

9. FUTURE RESEARCH AGENDA

Two immediate priorities follow from Section 5.4: studies integrating multiple competitive balance metrics within a single model, and studies jointly modelling domestic broadcasting revenue alongside Champions League prize money and qualification rules, testing the coordination gap hypothesised in Section 7.3.

Methodologically, AI-based forecasting could extend the simulation studies in Section 5.2 to probabilistic estimates of proposed reforms, and network analysis could model the feedback loop in Figure 1 as a dynamic multi-club system. Audience modelling that tests, within football, the uncertainty-viewership relationship Oh, Lee, and Jang (2023) establish for esports would help resolve the demand-side disagreement in Section 5.3.

Substantively, the literature remains confined to men's top-tier European football; women's football, where distribution formulas are still being established, and emerging leagues such as the Saudi Pro League and Major League Soccer, remain understudied. Two structural changes also deserve attention: streaming-platform entrants (Amazon, Netflix, DAZN), which may decouple revenue growth from the broadcaster-driven cycle in Figure 1, and private equity or multi-club ownership, which could alter the player-acquisition link independently of any single league's formula.

10. CONCLUSION

Given the variance of methods, scope and balance metrics of the 25 peer-reviewed journal studies gathered for this review, there is no single "yes" or "no" answer to whether broadcasting revenue distribution benefits or detracts from competitive balance (Section 7.4); no meta-analysis was conducted as a result. The taxonomy developed in Section 7: disagreement across the 25 studies is consistent with the source of club heterogeneity (Section 4), the unit and metric of balance measurement (Section 5.2), the time horizon examined (Section 5.1), and the specific reform or technology assumption modeled (Sections 5.1, 6). The individual findings summarised in Sections 4–6 are not only contradictory, but also answers to more specific questions than the title question, and for each answer, the taxonomy specifies the conditions under which it applies. The conceptual framework in Section 2 shows why these mechanisms interact in a closed loop rather than a simple chain, and Section 8 translates that loop into concrete options for UEFA and major domestic leagues, each with an acknowledged trade-off.

Broadcasting revenue distribution is one input among several, including qualification rules, scheduling design, promotion-relegation structure, and cost-side regulation, that jointly determine competitive balance outcomes. No single distribution formula can be assumed to improve or harm balance independent of this broader, interacting context, and the limitations set out in Section 7.4, particularly the English-only, peer-reviewed-only, open-access-only scope and the absence of meta-analysis, should be kept in view when applying these conclusions beyond the specific leagues and competitions this review covers.

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