

The Global Media Coverage of the 2022 Qatar World Football Cup

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Mega sporting events attract global media attention such as the Olympic Games and the World Football Cup. Countries bid to host such events for a number of reasons which include favourable global media coverage serving economic, political, national, and cultural purposes. Qatar, following a long strategy of establishing itself on the world stage as a pioneer country in the Middle East, showcased its national economic achievements by organizing the World Football Cup from 20 November 2022 to 18 December 2022. The purpose of this paper is to look at the extent of media coverage demonstrated by the international media attention that is officially licenced by FIFA to cover the games: tv, radio, mobile and internet.

Keywords: *Qatar, Qatargate, Middle East, media, sports, football, FIFA, public funds*

Introduction

Qatar organized the 22nd World Football Cup (WFC) from 20th of November to 18th of December 2022, attracting worldwide attention by international media for many reasons other than the football itself. Most of this media attention was negative beginning with the official decision by FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) to award the hosting of the games to Qatar in 2010. It was claimed by many countries¹ that this decision was the result of bribery. In addition, it was also claimed that the Qatari government bribed officials of the European Union including Members of the European Parliament (MEP) to tone down their criticism of Qatar's record on human rights. The latter political scandal called "Qatargate" monopolized the European press, if not the world mass media, which distorted the image Qatar wanted to portray to the world using the WFC. On the 9th of December 2022, the Belgian police made 20 raids and proceeded with a number of arrests for the most notorious political scandal at the European Union level, the "Qatargate".

The issue of how the international mass media covered Qatar's domestic affairs as a result of hosting the WFC is not discussed here. Qatar expected much more than solely hosting a mega sports event. As with the Olympic Games, the benefits come mostly after the end of the games and last for a long period of time,

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¹This was not just a rumor. FIFA conducted an investigation but found nothing wrong. The US was very critical but the reason might be that the US came second in the bid to organize the WFC as shown below in this paper. This is not to deny that in one way or other FIFA officials are under any suspicion.

leaving a permanent effect on the economics and politics of the country.² It seems that Qatar, despite its negative world publicity, has shown to the world that it differs from many other Middle East and Muslim countries. It was the first such Arab country to organize a WFC. The excellent sport and tourist infrastructures built for the games will be an asset to be capitalized upon by the Qatari government in the future.

In the remainder of this introductory section, I provide an eclectic review of papers which relate to sports, football and the organization of sports events including the case of Qatar. Sports in general, and particularly football, have been examined in many studies. This review is based solely on recent papers published in the various academic journals of the Athens Institute for Education and Research and my work in the relative academic area.

Kang (2022) examines differences in media coverage of the 1998 France and 2002 South Korea/Japan WFC. They found that hosting the WFC had no effect on the positive image³ of a host country. Along these lines, Katyal (2021) explores Qatar's use of sport and capital as a soft diplomatic tool to raise international media visibility. Also, King and King (2018) look at the global media aspect in its general framework in creating a diplomatic rift in the Middle East. Media and especially sports journalism are the means through which politics are affected by sports. The relationship of politics and sports--particularly football--with an application to Indonesia is examined by Kristiyanto and Suparman (2019). The role of sports journalists and their ethical codes are investigated by Rojas Torrijos and Ramon-Vegas (2018). In general, sports and politics is a growing area of research. Examples of such studies are provided, among many others, by Majaro-Majesty (2015), Nicolliello (2021), and Nunes and Valério (2020).

Sports is an alternative to many other leisure activities and as such, many countries try to promote⁴ it especially for the benefit of their youth. The organization of mega sports events is an opportunity to promote physical activity. For example, Balatoni et al. (2020) look at physical activity versus video games in Hungary and argue that compulsory physical activity classes in primary and secondary schools have been effective, but the excitement of professional sports activities would bring even more enthusiasm around physical activity.

At the UEFA (Union of European Football Associations) level, Cincimino (2014) looks at clubs' revenues from the standpoint of Financial Fair Play searching for alternative solutions. Pfeffel et al. (2017) explore the image effects of UEFA through the organization of the UEFA under-19 European football championship. Espitia-Escuer and Garcia-Cebrian (2016) discuss teams' productivity and competitiveness playing in the UEFA champions league. Zawadzki (2015) questions the use of public funds in organizing the Euro 2012 in

²I have examined elsewhere the effects of the 2004 Olympic Games which were held in Athens; see Papanikos (1999, 2020, 2021).

³On the issue of image and reputation affected by media, see the case study by Pitluk et al. (2023).

⁴One aspect of this promotion is using the media venue and micro-celebrities in promoting fitness to UK youth which is examined by Djafarova and Thompson (2020). Fitness performance of youth who engage in soccer in South Africa is discussed by Ellapen et al. (2014).

Poland. Sports management and sports efficiency of the clubs competing in the UEFA Champions League are considered by Zamboni-Ferraresi et al. (2017).

Dilger and Vischer (2022) performed an interesting study using data from the German football league. Because of COVID-19, 83 games of the 2019/20 season were held without fans. They compared these 83 games with the corresponding 83 regular games between the same teams with spectators. They found that the typical home team advantage vanishes when the game is played in empty stadiums.

Bouvet (2020) takes a theoretical approach to examining the production of sports events that attract immense media attention, suggesting what the author calls a new approach to monetizing sports events. The marketing strategy of sports organizations and the education of their managers are outlined by Gebler-Branch (2018). The effectiveness of sports sponsorship in Egypt is discussed by Ibrahim (2014). The marketing issue has also been examined in many other professional sports especially in North America; see for example the study by Newman (2014).

Harasta (2021) studies the process of how to develop a sports fan from self-identification to strong loyalism (fanatism). On this issue, see also the study by Özgen and Argan (2017) on Turkish fans. Pfeffel et al. (2016) study the fans' behavior while watching football. In a series of articles, Hebbel-Seeger (2017), Hebbel-Seeger and Horky (2018), Hebbel-Seeger and Diesch (2019) and Hebbel-Seeger et al. (2017) examined the use of drones and video in sports games as a marketing tool. In two related papers, Glebova and Desbordes (2020, 2021) focus on technology, such as mobile applications, and how these new means affect the customer experience of sport spectators. Igel et al. (2018) use two example applications of Artificial Intelligence and the Internet of Things. The first, which relates to sports, includes exercise and youth culture in the smart city. Similarly, a number of studies have used the various aspects of developing a new trend; that of e-sports—see Robeers and Van Den Bulck (2018), Lemcke and Weh (2018) and Wewer (2018).

Binjwaied et al. (2015) examine the factors which affect the attendance of football matches in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. They conclude that the role of media is important in attracting more fans such as via televised media, online coverage and social media. Bachan and Reilly (2016) compare 48 European football leagues with the one in Ireland and found that the Irish clubs are supported by fans as much as in the other European leagues. Borges (2018) looks at how football clubs can build constant relations with their fans. He argues that clubs represent communities⁵ and as such, the football clubs employ communication and media consultants to improve their relationships with their fans. He examines three football clubs Benfica, Botafogo and Paris Saint-Germain, using an ethnographical-interview approach to examine media professionals from the club-owned media channels. In an interesting study, Harman (2022) looks at gender equality by examining male and female football performance. The gender issue in sports is also examined by Hyre et al. (2017). In the relative football literature for competitive balance, financing and the organization structure of the football leagues at national and international levels have been extensively discussed.

⁵An example of how sports interact with a local community (the Greater August Town, Jamaica) is examined by Burke et al. (2014).

Examples of this literature can be found in the studies of Huth and Kurscheidt (2022), Leite (2017), Magueta et al. (2015), Maugendre (2018), Ogunsanya and Rasheed (2019), Papanikos (2014, 2017, 2021, 2022) and Suominen (2017, 2018).

The above literature shows how extensive the subject of sports is in general, but most importantly for this study, is the connection of sports with international media—this relationship is explained by the very strong association of international politics with sports. Mega sports events have international political implications that no study can ignore. One proof of that is the huge interest as shown by the extensive media attention from so many different countries that covered the 2022 WFC. The extent of this media coverage is the subject of this paper. This paper does not look at, and therefore does not evaluate, international media costs and benefits from hosting the 2022 WFC. Instead, it only concentrates on two issues. First, the media effect starts from the time a country has decided to play a role in the international sports organization of events. This issue is explored by looking at how a country prepares a bid for such sports events which by themselves create an international media attention. Bribing or not, the FIFA officials would never be sufficient to vote in favor of awarding such a mega event to a country that does not meet some minimum organizational and infrastructure requirements. After all, the second runner up, the USA, has the money and the political “ethics” not to be beaten by such malicious practices that are ubiquitous in the international area of sports and politics. Second, this paper examines the extent of media coverage of the 2022 WFC by looking at the official license data provided by FIFA. The emphasis is on the globalization of the media coverage of the event. These two issues are discussed in the following two sections of the paper. The last section of the paper concludes.

Bidding, Preparing and Staging the Games

Qatar started its preparations to bid for the 2022 WFC long before its formal submission of application in 2010. Qatar had to prove to the world sports community that it had the capacity and the ability to organize mega sports events. It did so by showing examples, i.e., it organized many such sports events in the time period preceding the WFC. Table 1 lists the mega sports events hosted in Qatar since 1998. FIFA awarded the WFC to Qatar on 2 December 2010.⁶ By 2010, Qatar had already organized 18 small and big international sports events, including three annual events that take place every year in Qatar. The first of these annual events started in 1998 and continue thereafter.

After winning the 2022 WFC, Qatar organized another 13 international sports events including two which are strictly related to football: the FIFA Club World Cup in 2019 and the AFC Champions League in 2020.

⁶For more details see FIFA’s website at: <https://publications.fifa.com/en/sustainability-report/sustainability-at-the-fifa-world-cup/profile-of-the-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022/>.

Table 1. *Mega Sports Events Hosted by Qatar Since 1998*

No	Year	Event	No	Year	Event
1	1998-	Qatar Masters (Golf Championship)	17	2010	IAAF World Indoor Championships
2	1993-	Qatar Open (Tennis Tournament)	18	2010	ISAF World Junior 470 Sailing Championships
3	2001-	Qatar Classic (Squash International Tournament)	19	2011	Asian Football Cup
4	2004	Asian Handball Championships	20	2011	Arab Games
5	2004	ITTF World Team Table Tennis Championships	21	2012	Asian Shooting Championships
6	2005	Asian Basketball Championships	22	2014	FINA Short Course World Championships
7	2005	World Weightlifting Championships	23	2015	IHF Handball World Championships
8	2005	West Asian Games	24	2015	Doha 2015 IPC Athletics World Championships
9	2006	Asian Sailing Championships	25	2015	World Amateur Boxing Championships
10	2006	Asian Games	26	2015	World Robot Olympiad
11	2008	Asian Indoor Athletics Championships	27	2016	UCI Road Cycling World Championships
12	2008	Asian Youth Wrestling Championships	28	2018	FIG Artistic Gymnastics World Championships
13	2008	Asian Optimist Sailing Championships	29	2019	IAAF World Championships
14	2009	Asian Fencing Championships	30	2019	FIFA Club World Cup
15	2009	FIVB Club World Championships	31	2020	AFC Champions League
16	2009	ISF World Gymnasiade	32	2022	FIFA World Cup

The organization of such international mega sports events served three purposes. First, it showed the world that Qatar has the infrastructure, the managerial ability and above all, the willingness to host international mega sport events. This by itself helped Qatar to win the bid and host the games of 2022. Second, the continuing organization of mega sports events, even after winning the bid, gave Qatar a great opportunity to acquire the necessary experience in the organization of such events which was necessary for staging the 2022 WFC. Third, all these sports events provided the opportunity to showcase Qatar to the world that a Middle Eastern Muslim country can make a breakthrough and organize sports events—something that was previously only the privilege of some Western and Asian countries. All these sports events in Qatar (Table 1) attracted worldwide publicity. Of course, the argument of “sportswashing” and using sports as a soft diplomacy tool to promote the interests of Qatari government is as true as for any other country which uses sports to cover up for many domestic problems, such as extensive poverty and violations of human rights including the rights of women and migrant workers.

Including Qatar, five countries applied to organize the 2022 WFC—among them the most powerful nation in the world today, the USA. The others were

Australia, Japan and South Korea. Table 2 shows the results of the votes. In total, 22 FIFA officials voted. There were 12 votes needed to win the bid. From round 1, Qatar was the favored country to win, receiving 11 of the 12 votes in the first round. Of interest is the fact that in the 2nd round, Qatar got 10 votes, one less than in the first round. At the end, four rounds were needed to select a winner. Qatar got 14 votes. If there were no switching of votes between the third and fourth round, then the 5 votes of the eliminating country in the third round went 3 to Qatar and 2 to the US.

Table 2. *Voting for the Countries to Host the 2022 Football World Cup*

Country	Round	1	2	3	4
Qatar		11	10	11	14
United States		3	5	6	8
South Korea		4	5	5	
Japan		3	2		
Australia		1			
Total Votes		22	22	22	22

Source: FIFA

<https://web.archive.org/web/20101206011341/http://www.fifa.com/worldcup/russia2018/media/newsid=1344971/index.html>.

In total, eight stadiums were used for the games of the 2022 WFC. All were located in five cities. Table 3 reports the city, the name of the stadium and the capacity of each stadium. All but one stadium (Stadium 974) will remain as a WFC legacy to be used from various national clubs as well as hosting international games. The average capacity of the stadiums used was 44,089 with the smallest stadium being the Stadium 974 with a capacity of 44,089, and the largest the Lusail Stadium with a capacity of 88,966 seats.

According to FIFA,⁷ three million people attended the games in 2022. The stadium capacity was 95% filled on average during the games. One million spectators came from 140 different countries to watch the 64 games of the WFC. The top fifteen countries by ticket holder were: Qatar, USA, Saudi Arabia, England, Mexico, UAE, Argentina, India, France, Brazil, Germany, Canada, Kuwait, Australia and Spain.

Nations participated in the WFC primarily because of the prestige. Sports have always been used as a soft diplomacy tool. On the other hand, players have an additional incentive apart from the pride of representing their country; they also increase the value of their football capital in the international market for players. All players are playing professional football and some of them play at the top leagues in the world which pay high salaries for the players. A world cup is like a big fair where players, especially the young players who are unknown and their skills have not been tested, to showcase their abilities and by doing so increase their monetary value. Apart from these important political and economic effects of hosting a world cup, FIFA has established a system of prize money for all 32

⁷<https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-ticketing-and-hospitality>.

national teams that participate in the tournament. Some of these funds go to the players as well. Table 4 reports the prize money according to the ranking of the teams after all games have been played.

Table 3. *The Sports Infrastructure (Stadiums)*

	City	Stadium	Capacity
1	Lusail	Lusail Stadium	88,966
2	Al Khor	Al Bayt Stadium	68,895
3	Al Rayyan	Khalifa International Stadium	45,857
4	Al Rayyan	Ahmad bin Ali Stadium	45,032
5	Al Rayyan	Education City Stadium	44,667
6	Doha	Al Thumama Stadium	44,400
7	Doha	Stadium 974	44,089
8	Al Wakrah	Al Janoub Stadium	44,325
		Average	53,279
		Minimum	44,089
		Maximum	88,966

Source: FIFA.

Table 4. *FIFA Prize Money (in Millions of US\$)*

	Teams	Per Team Prize	Total	Share	Preparation Costs Paid by FIFA	Total Preparation Costs	Total Amount Paid
Champions	1	42	42	9.5%	1.5	1.5	43.5
Runners-up	1	30	30	6.8%	1.5	1.5	31.5
Third Place	1	27	27	6.1%	1.5	1.5	28.5
Fourth Place	1	25	25	5.7%	1.5	1.5	26.5
5th-8th place	4	17	68	15.5%	1.5	6	74
9th-16th place	8	13	104	23.6%	1.5	12	116
17th-32nd place	16	9	144	32.7%	1.5	24	168
Total	32	23.29	440	100%		48	488

The winner of the world cup gets \$42 million USD which accounts for the 9.5% of the total \$440 million USD of the FIFA prize money. The runner-up gets \$30 million USD or 6.8% of the total. The third place winner got \$27 million USD or 6.1% of the total amount and the fourth placed team \$25 million USD or 5.7%.

In concluding this section, Qatar was well prepared for the games. It had shown long before the WFC games that they were able to organize world class sports events successfully that attracted the interest of billions of people around the world.

If one was to judge Qatar from the strict criteria of organizing the games, Qatar did a very good job and set the foundation for organizing many more mega sporting events in the future. This will offer an opportunity to portray this small Middle Eastern, Muslim country in the Gulf that stands out in world affairs. This is demonstrated by the number of media outlets from all over the world which received accreditations to cover the games. The extent of media coverage is discussed in the following section of this paper.

The Extent of Global Media Coverage of the 2022 WFC

According to FIFA,⁸ the 2022 WFC received unprecedented media coverage. FIFA issued 18,000 accredited media positions to cover the FIFA events in Qatar (Table 5). It accepted media accreditation applications from various media outlets from many different countries and provided licensing rights for all types of media: TV, radio, mobile and internet. Table 5 reports the breakdown of the media accreditations in terms of total written media, photographers, total Non-Right Holders (NRH) journalists and camera operators.

Table 5. *FIFA Media Accreditations*

Accreditations issued	18,000
Written media	
International journalists	1,765
Domestic journalists	69
Total written media	1,834
International photographers	726
Domestic photographers	33
Total photographers	759
Non-Rights Holders (NRH)	
International NRH journalists	168
Domestic NRH journalists	87
Total NRH journalists	255
International NRH camera operators	77
Domestic NRH camera operators	30
Total NRH camera operators	107

Source: FIFA.

Table 6 provides aggregated information on the number of countries and territories by continent. In total, the media from 225 countries and territories were licensed by FIFA to cover the world football cup in Qatar. African and European countries and territories accounted for 50% of the total, equally distributed between the two continents.

However, Africa comes first in the number of media licenses with 34% of them coming from African countries and territories. This is an indication of the great dispersion of the coverage in terms of countries and of course, language. Second in the license category comes the continents of Americas which accounted for 25% of the total number of licenses issued by FIFA. Third comes Europe with 22%. Asia and Oceania accounted for 12% and 7% of the total media licenses respectively.

⁸<https://www.fifa.com/fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-commercial/media-coverage>.

Table 6. Media Rights Licensees per Continent

Continent	Number of Countries/ Territories	Percentage	Licenses	Percentage
Africa	56	25%	249	34%
Americas	50	22%	183	25%
Asia	42	19%	84	12%
Europe	56	25%	158	22%
Oceania	21	9%	52	7%
Total	225	100%	726	100%

Table 7 breaks down the media licenses by the means of media: TV, Radio, Mobile and internet. Africa tops the list in all four means. It accounted for 29% of TV licenses, 34% of radio, 30% of mobile and 29% of internet.

Table 7. Media Rights Licensees per Means

Continent	TV	%	Radio	%	Mobile	%	Internet	%
Africa	163	29%	190	34%	151	30%	150	29%
Americas	131	24%	151	27%	116	23%	129	25%
Asia	83	15%	58	10%	61	12%	61	12%
Europe	129	23%	133	24%	129	25%	131	25%
Oceania	50	9%	25	4%	50	10%	50	10%
Total	556	100%	557	100%	507	100%	521	100%

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

Summarizing this evidence, the WFC was well covered by all means of communication (TV, radio, mobile and internet), which were almost equally distributed across the globe if one takes into consideration the population of each regional continent. This shows that the WFC attracts the interest of the international community of spectators making it an easy channel for the host country to send non-sports related messages as well (e.g., advertising). Whether Qatar has achieved this non-sports objective is the subject of a different research focus. What is certain is that Qatar now has the sports infrastructure and the managerial capability of organizing mega sports events which can be used to attract future sports and non-sports events.

Conclusions

Qatar organized the 2022 WFC for the first time in the winter months of the northern hemisphere. As far as the sports infrastructures (which is not discussed in this paper here but very important as well to consider the hospitality/tourism infrastructure) and the management of the events, there is very little that can be said for criticism. At the end of the events, the international media had to admit that the games were well organized.

However, international mega sports events are not only sports. The host country may leverage them as a soft diplomacy tool and the term “sportswashing” is used to describe a process by which a country exploits such events to cover up

for its negative record on domestic issues such as the treatment of all kinds of minorities.

Qatar received many such criticisms by the international mass media. However, I do not think that this will affect the long-term legacy of the 2022 WFC. Qatar is a new player in the organization of mega sports events representing a new culture, the Arab, a new area, the Middle East, and a new religion, the Muslims, which had not previously had the opportunity to organize a mega event such as the WFC before.

Additionally, FIFA is more than satisfied because its mission to promote football all around the globe has been accomplished by including a new geographical area and culture in the game. Qatar opened a completely new market for FIFA. With or without bribes, a pure cost-benefit analysis on behalf of FIFA would have pointed out Qatar as the best candidate to organize a WFC. If one judges from the overall results, FIFA has been vindicated in giving the organization of the 2022 WFC to Qatar.

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