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**QATAR HOSTING FIFA WORLD CUP 2022**

**Sports in International Politics**

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Tallinn 2022

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# **INTRODUCTION**

Sports and politics have gone hand in hand since the beginning of time, or at least since the days of the first Olympic Games, where the tradition of Olympic Truce was established to allow safe participation for all athletes and spectators from areas which were otherwise constantly in conflict.

Over time, large sporting events have attracted an ever-increasing public attention and with it the opportunity to use the event for profit, influence and political agendas. And one of the biggest events in the sporting world is the FIFA World Cup.

Geoffrey A. Pigman and J. Simon Rofe (2013) explored the relationship between sports and diplomacy and stated that “nowhere has the diffusion and redistribution of political and economic power in the globalizing world been more visible to the general public and scholars alike than in international sport.” With the sporting events being watched by millions of people, the question is how can organising these events be used to influence those millions and what role does sport play in tackling the numerous challenges of our time.

Sports in International Politics LIFE project explores these links between major sports events and International Relations and the impact and circumstances of a chosen occasion. In this paper, we explore Qatar hosting FIFA World Cup 2022 and how it links to the world systems theory in International Relations.

The authors will give an overview of world-systems theory, that will be followed by an overview of Qatar as a host of the FIFA 2022 World Cup and the issues arisen from reports on labor abuse, human trafficking and other human rights tragedies of Qatar's exploitation of migrant workers. Then follows an analysis of the situation and how it connects to the international relations theory.

The paper has an informative goal for the general public to raise awareness on how decisions are made in choosing the hosts for large sporting events, in whose interest those choices are and how big sporting events can influence international relations and vice versa. The geo-political impact of the event is of interest to the fields of sports and international relations and could be used as part of history or social studies lessons for pupils and students. The topic is also aimed at sports fans, event organisers and politicians.

# **BACKGROUND**

# **FIFA**

FIFA (Fédération Internationale de Football Association) is a non-profit organisation and an international governing body of association football. It is the oldest and largest organisation of its kind. FIFA was founded in 1904 to oversee competitions and games between national teams (FIFA - New World Encyclopedia, n.d.). Fifa’s membership now comprises 211 national associations; Russia was suspended in 2022.

FIFA is responsible for the organisation and governance of football's major international tournaments and applies and enforces the rules of football set by the International Football Association Board, across all FIFA competitions. FIFAs organizational Statutes outline a number of objectives, including providing efforts to ensure it is accessible to everyone, and advocating for integrity and fair play. It also professes to working „with governments, global and regional development agencies, human rights groups, international and local non-profit organisations and former players to promote a fairer, more equal society through football“ (FIFA Official Documents, n.d.). The biggest competition FIFA organises is the World Cup, which was first held in 1930 and the Women's World Cup which commenced in 1991. FIFA Men's World Cup takes place quadrennially with 32 nations competing against each other for the prize. Qatar 2022 is the 22nd world cup (FIFA World CupTM, n.d.).

The host for the competition is chosen by FIFA’s Congress. At first the hosts were chosen and awarded by the Congress, with alternating between the Americas and Europe, but as the choices brought misunderstanding, confusion and controversy, an extensive ballot system is now in place, where any country may bid for a World Cup, provided that their continental confederation has not hosted either of the past two World Cups. While hosting the World Cup is a great honour, it also has its drawbacks. It is a very costly event and there are no guarantees on economic returns. The host must meet strict infrastructure requirements and standards set by FIFA. These include the number and size of the stadiums, number of hotel rooms, criteria for transit, communication, and electrical grids. (The World Cup Effect, 2018).

The hosts for the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cup were chosen together, with the bids entered in 2010 by Australia, England, Indonesia, Japan, Qatar, Russia, South Korea, United States, the joint bid of Spain and Portugal and the joint bid of Belgium and Netherlands. (Macdonald, n.d.). On the 2nd of December 2010 the hosts were announced: Russia for the 2018 FIFA World Cup and Qatar for 2022. According to Evaluation reports on the bids for the 2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups the bid for Qatar highlighted the opportunity to bring the World Cup to the Middle East for the first time, and commits to a carbon-neutral World Cup, through utilisation of environmentally friendly cooling technologies. After the event, modular sections from the stadiums are planned to be used to construct 22 stadiums around the world in developing countries. The bid proposes seven host cities with 12 stadiums within a radius of 60 kilometres. Three of the 12 stadiums would be renovated, and nine would be constructed (Wayback Machine, 2010).

# **Qatar**

Qatar is an independent emirate on a small desert peninsula on the west coast of the Persian Gulf. It was under British patronage until its independence in 1971. Qatar has one of the world’s largest reserves of petroleum and natural gas and employs large numbers of foreign workers in its production process. Because of its oil wealth, the country’s residents enjoy a high standard of living and a well-established system of social services. (Qatar | History, Population, Flag, Map, & Facts | Britannica, n.d.). Qatar has a population of 2.9 million people. Qatari citizens, however, constitute only a small portion - roughly one-ninth - of the total population today. Economic growth beginning in the 1970s created an economy dependent on foreign workers - mostly from Pakistan, India, and Iran - who now far outnumber nationals (About Qatar, n.d.).

In Qatar, education is free but not compulsory for all citizens between the ages of 6 and 16. Qatar spends generously on education and has one of the highest per-pupil expenditures in the world. The universities offer programs such as premedical and medical studies, business administration, chemical, electrical, and mechanical engineering, journalism, and fine arts. The government also provides adult education classes in schools and centres throughout the country, with an emphasis on increasing adult literacy. About four-fifths of the country’s population is literate, with roughly equal proportions of males and females (Qatar | History, Population, Flag, Map, & Facts | Britannica, n.d.).

The era of oil-supremacy, although permitting rapid development and accelerated progress, has also brought with it some challenges to the Qatari education system - citizens have come to depend on the social services and welfare provisions of a benevolent state. “When schooling is free in an educational system that provides everything from buildings to books, and when there are comfortable jobs to be had upon completion of studies, the expectation of many younger citizens is that they will be able to continue a lifestyle of ease as did their parents. But in an era of dwindling Qatari oil reserves and a larger population, such expectations are unrealistic. Settling into a well-paying job with little actual work involved is an option that many of the younger generation in Arab Gulf states may never realize” (Qatar - Educational System—Overview, n.d.). Such a socialisation into the welfare state mentality and the mismatch between schools and training institutions with the actual needs of the labour market may also partly explain the overwhelming reliance on expatriate labour in the Arab Gulf countries. (Al Muftah, 2007).

# **Controversies**

The awarding of the 2022 FIFA World Cup to Qatar created a number of concerns and controversies regarding both Qatar's suitability as a host country and the fairness of the FIFA bidding process. Problems such as Qatar's limited football history, the high expected cost, the local climate, Qatar's human rights record and numerous allegations of bribery between the Qatar bid committee and FIFA members and executives have been highlighted. (14 Reasons the Qatar World Cup Is Going to Be a Disaster, n.d.)

Human rights issues that have arisen are the treatment of migrant workers, slavery allegations and deaths and the question of LGBT fans. There is also the controversy over changing the time of the competition from summer to winter, which clashes with local leagues. The main controversy is about the treatment of workers hired to build the infrastructure for the Cup. Human Rights Watch alleges that the Kafala system (system used to monitor migrant laborers, working primarily in the construction and domestic sectors in Gulf Cooperation Council member states and a few neighbouring countries) leaves migrant workers vulnerable to systematic abuse. The workers may not change jobs or even leave the country without their sponsor's permission, the workers are forced to stay by denying them promised salaries and withholding necessary worker ID permits, rendering them illegal aliens. Qatar’s extreme climate, combined with excessive and physically strenuous working hours are the main questions regarding the safety of working conditions in Qatar. (Qatar, 2021). Official statistics show that 15,021 non-Qataris have died in the country between 2010 and 2019. This does not equate to the number of migrant workers who have died because of working conditions, as it includes people of all ages, occupations and causes and Qatar has failed to investigate the causes. The government data also does not indicate how many workers have died in preparation for the World Cup. Qatar’s Supreme Committee on Delivery and Legacy says that 35 workers on World Cup projects they oversee have died since 2015, but there is no estimate of how many workers have died on other infrastructure projects linked to the delivery of the tournament. (Qatar, 2021) The Guardian estimates that 6,500 migrant workers have died in Qatar since the World Cup was awarded (Pattisson et al., 2021).

# **2. WORLD-SYSTEM THEORY & QATAR**

In International Relations, theories are something that can be used to make sense of the world by looking at it from different perspectives, or so-called lenses, which allow us to simplify our image of the complex world and make it more clear (McGlinchey et al., 2017). One of these theories is called World Systems Theory, which Immanuel Wallerstein was first to articulate in his landmark publication The Rise and Future Demise of the World Capitalist System: Concepts for Comparative Analysis published in 1974 (Martínez-Vela, 2001). As mentioned, these theories can be used as lenses to look at the world and World Systems Theory does this by looking at the dynamics of the “Capitalist World Economy as a total Social System” (Martínez-Vela, 2001, p. 1). In less vague terms, according to this theory there exists a power hierarchy in the world, in which the core is constituted by the developed countries that exploit and dominate over the countries that are less developed and belong to the periphery (Chase-Dunn & Grimes, 1995). According to Chase-Dunn & Grimes (1995), this world system is not only economic but also political and social, and it is socially structured and reproduced. As mentioned, the core countries take advantage of periphery countries, however, the roles in the hierarchy are not set in stone. Although the system reproduces itself, in some cases mobility between the core-periphery axis is possible in both directions, from core to periphery and vice versa and even between them, which is called semiperiphery as it shares attributes from both periphery and core (Chase-Dunn & Grimes (1995).

But how can Qatar hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup be seen through this lens? Qatar, like its other gulf neighbours, is characterized by a presence of petroleum resources and impetus toward rapid economic development and a capital surplus status (El Mallakh, 2015). Also, Gulf states have relied on workers from foreign countries to channel the wealth from oil into economic development projects, which is also applicable to Qatar, a state which has heavily relied on the efforts of migrants from South Asia and the middle east to fulfil the needs of its construction and domestic worker sectors (Ganji, 2016). One of these projects has been the construction of stadiums but also other buildings for the upcoming World Cup. These workers are coming to Qatar in a search of better job opportunities as the result of the economic shortcomings at home, one of the examples being Nepal, where widespread unemployment and poverty work as a motivator in a search for job in the Gulf states, such as Qatar (Ganji, 2016). Throughout the project treatment of these workers has not been appropriate, as their rights as workers but also human rights have been violated (Ganji, 2016).

Qatar relies almost entirely on about two million migrants, who make up ninety-five percent of the country’s workforce in sectors ranging from construction to services to domestic work. Qatar’s migrant workers come predominantly from India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Kenya, and the Philippines (Human Rights Watch, 2021). Over the past decade, Amnesty International and others have shown how the system is trapping migrant workers into a cycle of exploitation. The factors of exploitation are reported to include high level of worker debt due to illegal and unethical recruitment practices, late and non-payment of wages, prohibition of trade unions, and the failure to enforce labour laws and penalize employers who abuse their workers (Amnesty International, 2021). According to a researcher at Human Rights Watch, they have urged the Qatari authorities to investigate unexpected or unexplained deaths among young and healthy migrant workers and to make such data publicly available. Unfortunately, Qatar has refused to make public any meaningful data on migrant worker deaths, and heat regulations designed to protect workers from the dangers of extreme heat and humidity are still woefully inadequate (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

Before applying World Systems theory to our research concerning the World Cup 2022 we need to understand more about Qatar’s economic situation and especially its history. Before the emergence of petrol-based industry, Qatar was a poor pearl diving country. The exploration of oil and gas fields began in 1939. In 1973, revenues from oil production increased drastically and Qatar moved from being one of the poorest countries in the world to one of the richest (Sorkhabi, 2021). In 1970, its GDP per capita was just $2,755 but in 2019 it was already $62,276 (The World Bank, 2022). Comparing the GDP per capita with countries the workers in Qatar are mostly from; Nepal ($1,194), Bangladesh ($1,855), Pakistan ($1,288), India ($2,100), Sri Lanka ($3,852) we can see a trend here (The World Bank, 2022). Even looking at Human Development Index and comparing the rankings we can notice the differences in human development. Qatar ranked 45, Sri Lanka ranked 72, India ranked 131, Pakistan ranked 154, Bangladesh ranked 133, and Nepal ranked 132 (United Nations Development Programme, 2022). The HDI suggests that Qatar has the upper hand not only in GDP but also in Human Development Index. Looking at Qatar’s history as a poor country and later a rich nation with huge oil reserves the development has been rapid and a large number of its workers come from countries that are less developed. When this is combined with the fact that human rights violations have been reported during stadium buildings and other construction sites before the World Cup 2022, it poses a question of whether Qatar has moved in the core-periphery axis to a position of an exploiter, a core state? The exploitation of workers that come from periphery countries where they face economic shortcomings at home would seem to suggest so, in addition to Qatar's development as a country.

# **3. RESPONSE**

Although human rights abuses and the postponement of the tournament from summer to winter have been questioned in Qatar, it is now unlikely that FIFA will ban the World Cup in Qatar. The tournament was awarded to Qatar in a free selection of FIFA delegates, therefore the relocation of the competition at this late stage would be unprecedented even with many voices calling for the move (Miller 2014). Due to the reported use of inhumane practices such as ill-treatment of foreign labourers, the big organisations involved in football should be more vocal on this difficult subject.

The president of the German Football Association, Reinhard Grindel stated in June 2017 that “the football associations of the world should conclude that major tournaments cannot be held in countries which actively support terrorism’’ (WELT 2017). He added that the German Football Association would talk with UEFA and the Cabinet of Germany to evaluate whether to boycott the tournament in Qatar in 2022. The call to boycott Qatar 2022 World Cup has been echoed by influencers but FIFA has remained quiet on this issue. The pressure on FIFA and Qatar to answer these troubling questions has been highlighted also by sports journalists, who are fighting against using popular mega-events to wash their global reputation, shield from criticism and divert the attention to less uncomfortable issues. Human Rights Watch monitors human rights abuses around the world and has extended a helping hand by preparing questions that journalists should ask the FIFA and Qatar authorities. Questions about the protection of women's rights, the unfair treatment of LGBTQ + communities, the fair payment of migrant workers and why the Qatari government has not published official statistics on the deaths of migrant workers. (Ahmed 2022). Norwegian football official Lisa Klaveness at the FIFA Congress in Doha added her voice to the protesters with several ethical issues: “There is no room for employers who do not secure the freedom and safety of World Cup workers. No room for hosts that cannot legally guarantee the safety and respect of LGBTQ+ people coming to this theatre of dreams" (Ahmed 2022). If homosexuality is illegal in Qatar, how is the safety of LGBTQ+ fans or even players guaranteed - in all likelihood, at least one openly gay footballer will be taking to the field in Qatar (Miller 2014).

FIFAs response to these controversies and questions has been to “embrace its responsibility to respect human rights across its operations and relationships and to recognise its obligation to uphold the inherent dignity and equal rights of everyone affected by its activities”. This responsibility is enshrined in article 3 of the FIFA Statutes, which states that “FIFA is committed to respecting all internationally recognised human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights.” This commitment is also elaborated in FIFA’s Human Rights Policy which outlines FIFA’s approach to the policy’s implementation in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights. Since 2016, FIFA has taken steps to embed respect for human rights across the organisation’s operations and relationships by building a strategic programme, that includes “integrating human rights requirements into the bidding processes for competitions and as a factor in the subsequent selection of the hosts; developing event-specific human rights risk assessments and risk mitigation strategies covering topics such as labour rights, anti-discrimination, press freedom and freedom of expression” (Human Rights & Anti-Discrimination, n.d.). According to FIFA, Qatar has since implemented these recommendations to improve the situation of migrant workers and will continue to do so (FIFA to Discuss Workers Situation in Qatar with Amnesty International, n.d.).

Qatar has also expressed their commitment to continued cooperation with the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism in implementing tailored, global programmes to fight terrorism, including by “securing major sporting events and promoting sport and its values as a tool to prevent violent extremism” (United Nations 2022).

# **4. CONCLUSIONS**

Despite all the issues, unanswered questions, and ethical debates, the FIFA 2022 World Cup will take place in Qatar. In part, this is a historic and exciting moment for the world of football and to the region, but it also has many negative aspects. There are individuals who are not in favour of the World Cup in Qatar, including ordinary citizens, athletes, and large organisations. Many are not in favour of the use of migrant and slave labour in Qatar, although without two million migrant workers, the 2022 World Cup in Qatar would not be possible (Amnesty International). FIFA has acknowledged the issues but has not deemed them serious enough for resignations. At the same time, all responsibility does not lie solely with Qatar as a state – the companies of Qatar and the world should not take advantage of the mistakes of the government's workforce system. In addition, FIFA must take further steps and should be held responsible for ensuring that the World Cup is conducted in a manner consistent with human rights and make use of the powers available to them.

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