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QATAR FIFA WORLD CUP 2022: FACTS, MYTHS AND ISSUES

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- “When Qatar won its bid for the FIFA World Cup 2022, the international community was presented with an opportunity to push for lasting change in a region where change is slow. Stakeholders, including many brands and companies are set to benefit. Football associations and sponsors, must use their leverage to ensure the tournament leaves a positive legacy for worker’s rights in the country. This includes full and effective implementation of the labour reforms and access to remedies for workers who have suffered abuses” [2].
- England striker Harry Kane has said he wants to “shine a light” on human rights issues in Qatar and that he has been talking to fellow international team captains about whether they can make some form of collective protest [3].
- Qatar World Cup 2022 secretary general Hassan Al-Thawadi has stated that “recent criticism of Qatar by managers and players is ill informed and the country is ready to welcome the world” [4].
- Liverpool Manager Jurgen Klopp says that the decision to play the finals there “was just not right” [5].
- Qatar’s Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC) recently stated that: “We commend footballers using their platforms to raise awareness for important matters” “We have committed every effort to ensuring that this World Cup has had a transformative impact on improving lives, especially for those involved in constructing the competition and non-competition venues we’re responsible for” [6].

[1] The Sports Observations Briefing Paper is produced by the University of Edinburgh Academy of Sport (AOS)- Find out [more about the AOS](#). Professor Grant Jarvie is Chair of Sport and the University of Edinburgh and Dr Yujun Xu is with Peking University.

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[3] **BBC Sport** (2022). World Cup 2022: 10 European Football Associations respond to FIFA’S football on focus letter. 6 November 2022. - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63533589> - [accessed 11 November 2022]

[4] **BBC** (2022) Qatar 2022- We are ready to welcome the world 31 March 2022 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/av/football/60945058> - [accessed 9 November 2022].

[5] [6] **BBC Sport** 4 November 2022- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63518615> [accessed 10 November 2022].

Introduction

1. The FIFA Men's World Cup kicked off on 20th November 2022 with the host's match against Ecuador. In December 2010 FIFA had selected Russia and Qatar as hosts of the World Cup for 2018 and 2022. In 2010, Qatar clinched the rights after winning a ballot of FIFA's 22 executive members, nearly all of whom have since been replaced. Then-chairman, Sepp Blatter, supported Qatar's bid, but voted for the USA, and has since stated that FIFA made the wrong decision [8]. "We go to new lands" Blatter said. "The Middle East and the Arabic world have been waiting for a long time. So, I'm a happy President when we talk about the development of football" [9]. Qatar defeated bids from the US, South Korea, Japan and Australia. Qatar was accused of paying FIFA officials £3m (\$3.7m) in bribes to secure their backing but in 2014 Qatar was cleared after a two-year investigation [10]. Qatar won the 2022 election to hold the World Cup by 14 votes to the USA's 8 in the final round. This decision of 2nd December 2010 contributed to the downfall of FIFA at the time and could be viewed as an early legacy from Qatar 2022.

2. It is the first time the event has been held in an Arab country. It is the first time in the 92-year history of the event that a winter world cup is being held. It is the last time that the finals of the men's competition will be played out between 32 teams with new formats coming into play in future events.

3. With a population estimated to be about 2.9 million, Qatar, the smallest host in World Cup history, has been clearing space to cater for an estimated 1.5 million football fans. The tournament is likely to be the most expensive ever. Until now, Russia's hosting of the tournament in 2018 had been the most expensive at a cost of just over \$14 billion US dollars. It is estimated that Qatar has invested \$220 billion in building 7 new

stadiums, 100 new hotels, roads, a new metro system linking the stadiums, a new airport to handle the expected 1,300 daily flights, hospitality centres and shopping malls among other facilities. This is nearly 10 times the cost of hosting Brazil 2014 and Russia 2018 and 64 times the cost of South Africa 2010.

4. This World Cup will have some of the highest ticket prices ever. The most expensive final tickets will cost 5,850 Qatari riyals (£1,179), up 46% from the £807 for the 2018 final in Russia. The cheapest will be available for £513.34. Group matches will start at £58.64 pounds for foreigners, while the opening match starts at £302. Qatari citizens will enjoy a discounted rate of as low as £8 for group matches.

Sport, Soft Power and Qatar

5. The interest in the use of sport for soft power purposes is not new. A plethora of researchers have sought to demonstrate that sport matters because it can (i) create influence and forces of attraction; (ii) develop feel-good factors- albeit only temporarily; (iii) provide access to specific and high net value networks; (iv) create appeal across linguistic and cultural barriers; (v) foster opportunities for conversations between countries and stakeholders that take place around sporting events and overseas visits by sports clubs and sports celebrities: and (vi) gradually move to a position where it can demonstrate normatively and substantively that it can intentionally deliver outcomes that are important to countries, embassies, foreign ministries and a range of national and international stakeholders and coalitions [11].

6. Some or all of these might be applied to Qatar's use of sport and in particular, although not only, the 2022 World Cup. Most countries bidding for major sporting events tend to have nation branding issues to the fore of the bid. For Qatar the hosting of this mega sporting event is much more than nation branding. Qatar has

[7] The only surviving official from the 2010 vote is Hany Abo Rida from Egypt who voted for Qatar.

[8] FIFA's executive committee voted 14-8 for Qatar to host the tournament ahead of the United States 12 years ago, at the same time Russia was awarded the 2018 event. Blatter stated he voted for the United States and blames then-UEFA President Michel Platini for swinging the vote in Qatar's favour. Blatter also stated that FIFA had adjusted the criteria used to select host countries in 2012 after concerns were raised about the treatment of migrant workers building World Cup stadiums in Qatar.

[9] Ziegler, M. (2022). Qatar was a bad choice and I'm responsible for it. The Times Sport. 9 November 2022, p60.

[10] BBC Sport (2014). World Cup enquiry clears Qatar but criticises English FA. 13 November 2014- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/30031405> - [accessed 9 November 2022].

[11] For a recent overview of the relationship and practice of sport, soft power and cultural relations see Jarvie, G (2021). Sport, soft power, and cultural relations. Journal of Global Sports Management. 4 August 2021: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/24704067.2021.1952093>- [accessed 8 November 2022].

spent so much money on the World Cup that its return on investment has to be more than nation branding. It is designed to be part of a much bigger soft power-driven defence and security strategy. The potential payoff for the 12-year PR strategy and numerous lawsuits may only emerge once the tournament kicks off and starts to potentially pay back some dividends.

7. Sport sponsorship has increasingly emerged as a channel through which soft power can be projected, affording nations the opportunity to construct and communicate an image globally through sport [12]. Qatar has employed its state-owned airline to secure prominent global sponsorships with FIFA, FC Barcelona, FC Bayern Munich, and the Asian Games to bring attitudinal and behavioural changes among key target audiences. By engaging with prestigious events and organizations, the airline has sought to establish a premium position with the intention of raising the nation's profile, accentuating its national values and shifting global perceptions of the country [13].

8. The hosting of a World Cup carries with it reputational risk. On any given day sport matters to millions of people around the world. The Olympic Games and the FIFA Men's World Cup are the top two sports events in the world, based upon viewing data. On any given day, sport is used politically and serves political functions. Sport is political and sports administrators working in the world of sport are political. They must be political actors both within the world of sport and outside of the world of sport.

9. Sports administrators could be better trained to equip them to work with 21st century world politics but at the same time world politicians need to better understand the sporting and non-sporting outcomes that sport can deliver.

10. It is factually wrong, a myth, bad faith to suggest that athletes or grassroots sports people have not been successful social and political activists. Activists on

several fronts will rightly use the tournament to shed light on a range of social, political, and economic issues. Football nations and players attending the event will rightly use the event to draw attention and exert pressure for change in Qatar. Footballers and countries willing to give voice to the challenges faced by Qatar have made their voices heard. More will follow.

11. With a citizenry of about 300,000 people Qatar is badly placed to defend itself from military attack, regardless of how much wealth it has to purchase sophisticated arms. Qatar's soft power strategy includes sport, but it also includes the creation of a world class airline, an air traffic hub, the hosting of the most extensive US military base in the Middle East, the sponsoring of high-profile museums and arts events, the acquisition of highly visible estate, and the investment in blue chip companies. The strategy is aimed at ensuring that the country is relevant to the international community. Sport including the acquisition of Paris St Germain, is part of a much broader soft power effort aimed at ensuring that the international community will help the country.

12. An intervention that is aimed at helping the international community view Qatar as being helpful. Including it being a mediator in Middle East foreign policy and conflict resolution. The US thanked the Gulf State for helping with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. It is working with Europe and Great Britain to reduce their dependency upon Russian oil.

13. The positioning of sport as part of a defence strategy, if it is to be effective means that Qatar has to engage with the issues that activists, footballers and football protests raised in the run up to the World Cup and will want to keep alive during the tournament. They include the treatment and conditions of labourers, the place and treatment of LGBT+ communities before, during and post-World Cup, and human rights history. One of the most popular sports events in the

[12] [13] See **Burton, N, Chadwick, S and Widdop, P (2020)**. White Paper: Soft Power Eroded- How Covid-19 Has Undermined Gulf Airlines' Sports Sponsorships- Sport and Entertainment Review- <https://serjournal.com/2020/07/06/white-paper-soft-power-eroded/> [accessed 9 November 2022].

world carries with it the opportunity for political leverage from the day the event is awarded until the day the event is finished. The concern and question is whether Qatar is as receptive to criticism and reform after the cameras and spotlight have moved on.

14. The real challenge for Qatar and this 2022 World Cup is essentially on two fronts (i) can Qatar sustain the tournament's value and (ii) is Qatar willing and able to push ahead with social, political, and economic reforms after the activist or spotlight attention has moved on? The outcomes from these two fronts are likely to be the key to answering whether the use of sport in Qatar's soft power strategy has been successful or not. How Qatar manages and enhances its responses and actions to labour, social, ethical and political issues that have followed it since being awarded the event will determine the soft power cost/benefit analysis of whether the tournament has been successful or not.

The Activists Challenge

15. Preparations for the World Cup have been challenged by activists on several fronts. The backlash began immediately after the award of the tournament. The then US President Barack Obama complained that FIFA had made the wrong decision. The European media joined in the protest arguing that the power of gas and oil had bought the World Cup. The Qataris did not fully anticipate the extent of the backlash that unfolded.

16. The treatment of foreign workers has fueled long running headlines concerning the fact that the imported workers who have built the stadiums and infrastructure have endured miserable conditions, low wages, non-payment of salaries, unsafe workplaces. A number of deaths that have occurred.

17. An estimated 30,000 workers from countries such as India, Bangladesh, Nepal and the Philippines have been building facilities including the new stadiums, hotels, roads and expanding the infrastructure of the city in which the final match will take place. In February 2021, the Guardian reported that 6,500 workers had died in Qatar since it won its World Cup bid. The Qatar

Government responded by saying the figure was misleading and that between 2014 and 2020, there were 37 deaths among labourers at World Cup stadium construction sites, only three of which were "work-related. International Labour Organization (ILO) research found 50 work related deaths across Qatar in 2020, 506 sever injuries and 37,000 injuries that were reported as mild to moderate [14].

18. While the number of deaths directly involved in stadium construction during the 12-year construction phase has been contested, it is not contested that deaths have occurred in the construction of the stadiums.

19. Human rights groups have been calling for a commitment to a remedy fund to reimburse workers who have suffered abuse. Amnesty International have also reiterated its call on football's world governing body FIFA to establish a compensation fund for abused migrant labourers. Amnesty has suggested that the compensation fund should be worth at least £350m - equal to the amount due to be awarded in prize money at the event. FIFA deputy secretary general Alasdair Bell told a Council of Europe session on labour rights in Qatar that compensation is "certainly something that we're interested in progressing" [15].

20. FIFA has indicated that it was in positive ongoing dialogue with the ILO, The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the Qatar authorities on initiatives that will benefit migrant workers after the World Cup has finished. The Head of the ILO office in Qatar has stated that "everyone agrees the work is not yet done" [16].

21. As a form of social engagement, sport participation is a fundamental human right supported by many international and national policies, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), UNESCO's Kazan Action Plan, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Qatar Law No. 2 of 2004 in Respect of

[14] [16] Kerr, S and Acharya, P (2022). Qatar struggles to shift focus away from workers' rights. The Financial Times Weekend. 5/6 November 2022, p6.

[15] Roan, D (2022). World Cup 2022: Amnesty urges hosts to continue reforms after tournament. BBC Sport 22 October - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63321973> [accessed 10 November 2022].

People with Special Needs, and the 2019 Doha Declaration. Qatar, like every state, has an obligation to take proactive and appropriate measures to ensure that people with disabilities (PWDs) participate in all aspects of society on an equitable basis [17]. The rights of PWDs are emphasized in the Qatar National Vision 2030, and in the first (2011–2016) and second (2018–2022) Qatar National Development Strategy. Although Qatar has taken important steps to promote and protect the rights of PWDs, challenges continue to persist, and PWDs remain under-represented in all forms of cultural life, including sport [18].

22. In contrast opposition to LGBT+ rights is deeply engrained in Qatar and other Muslim societies. The challenge for activists will be to sustain long-term strategies but also broaden the focus from just Qatar to include other Gulf states interested in using sport as a soft power tool to attract events, provide profile, create influence.

23. When announcing the England squad for the World Cup on the 10th of November England Manager Gareth Southgate was asked about LGBT+ and human rights in Qatar. He replied:

"We stand for inclusivity and that is important for all our supporters and we understand that. If it wasn't for the strength of that community, we wouldn't be Women's European Champions. With Iran, it's a political situation that I don't know enough about and I can't comment with enough authority to give you a view [19]."

24. When asked if the team would be focussing solely on football the response was:

"I think that's highly unlikely. We have always spoken about issues that we think should always be spoken about" [20]"Contrary to one or two observations we have spoken about the human rights challenges and been very clear on that. We would also like to focus primarily on the focus for every player, coach and everyone travelling" [21]...."It's a carnival of football and you don't want that to be diminished by everything going on, but we recognise that we will be in that situation" [22]."

25. Homosexual acts are illegal in Qatar because they are seen as immoral under Islamic Sharia law. Punishments include fines and prison sentences. Qatar's World Cup organisers have repeatedly stated that "everyone is welcome" and claim no one will be discriminated against [23]. Qatar 2022 chief executive Nasser al Khater insists the government will not change its laws on homosexuality and has asked visitors to "respect our culture" [24].

26. Khalid Salman one of the Qatari ambassadors for the World Cup provided an insight into not just the cultural scale of the issue but the reputational damage that can be amplified. In an interview with ZDF, a German public broadcaster he said that homosexuality was "damage in the mind" [25], and LGBT+ people attending the tournament should "accept our rules" [26]. Bayern Munich midfielder and German international Leon Goretzka said former Qatar player Khalid Salman was "from another millennium". Bayern Munich fans unfurled a banner in protest at Salman's views during their 6-1 win over Werder Bremen. German Minister for Sport Nancy Faeser condemned Salman's comments, branding them as "awful" [27]. It remains to be seen whether the safety of LGBT+ football fans will be guaranteed at the World Cup. Salman's comments that Qatar's religion and culture "will not change" seem to contrast the claims made by the FA on increased tolerance [28].

27. The activist's challenge is in part to bear in mind that pressure is needed and should be maintained. There is also the need for sustained dialogue and a long-term process of engagement because as one commentator pointed out "this is not social change at the stroke of a pen. It is social change that touches on things that are deeply engrained in society" [29]. The same commentator went on to argue "that you have a government that is really walking a tight rope between what is a very conservative society and what are the demands it has to meet with regard to the World Cup" [30]... "the moment you turn it into an issue you are really putting the LGBT+ community at risk" [31].

[17] [18] AlHarahsheh S, Neves J, Swart K, Shaban S, Hudaib A, Legg D, Dubon M, Webbhorn N, Fagher K, DeLuca S, Derman W, Blauwet C. (2022). Making sports accessible for all: The time to act is now. Doha, Qatar: World Innovation Summit.

[19] [20] [21] [22] BBC Sport (2022). World Cup 2022: FIFA 'optimistic' to ask teams to concentrate on football - Gareth Southgate. BBC Sport 10 November 2022. - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63588664> [accessed 11 November 2022].

[23] [24] BBC Sport (2022). World Cup Finals: Why is Qatar 2022 controversial? BBC Sport 8 November 2022- <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/61635340> - [accessed 10 November 2022].

[25] [26] Moody, O (2022). Homosexuality is a damage in the mind, says Qatar World Cup envoy. The Times, 9 November 2022, p28.

[27] [28] Conrad, A. (2022). 'From another millennium': German ace 'speechless' over WC ambassador's 'awful' remark. Fox News: 10 November 2022. <https://www.foxsports.com.au/football/damage-in-the-mind-world-cup-ambassador-slammed-for-shock-homosexuality-remark/news-story/ab68c9e3602ffdb5a03df6a7a498f22f> [accessed 11 November 2022].

[29] [30] [31] Dorsey, J. (2022). Footballing for soft power- a conversation with James Corbett. 23 October 2022- <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/footballing-for-soft-power-a-conversation-with-james-corbett/> [accessed 10 November 2022].

The Qatari Response and Challenge

28. Some of the other Gulf countries have remained relatively closed to researchers and journalists seeking to engage with research about sports mega-events, legacies and other areas of interest. One assertion has been that the reporters who have engaged with Qatar have done so far too late in the process. The Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp indicated as much when asking where where the journalists during the run up to the bidding process prior to 2010? [32]

29. The implication being that the media only recently put in the necessary resources to cover issues and engage fully with Qatar. Furthermore, the slow response to fully engage on social issues meant that they were only really amplified after the award of the tournament rather than the build up and during of the bidding process.

30. The fact that a degree of engagement has taken place and has been facilitated by Qatar compares favourably with the access given to data about sports events in other parts of the Gulf. Change that may not have been so fast without the advent of the World Cup. The increased rate of engagement is arguably part of the legacy of this World Cup depending on the degree to which it is sustained post World Cup. In engaging with its critics Qatar has set a standard and is arguably the first Gulf state to do so. Engagement has given human rights groups and trade unions access to the country. This was relatively unprecedented in a region where local activists are often behind bars or worse.

31. There is no doubt that the spotlight has helped to bring about reforms. Even the harshest critics agree that the scrutiny of Qatar's human rights record has delivered change, including the dismantling of the Kafala sponsorship system [33]. It has established the region's first minimum wage, set up tribunals to facilitate better access to justice, established the unpaid wages compensation fund and legislated to regulate conditions for live-in domestic staff [34].

32. The Supreme Committee for Delivery and Legacy (SC) has had to ensure that all new stadiums and training sites will be accessible for disabled people and people with limited mobility. FIFA's accessibility requirements were a mandatory part of the planning process. Audio descriptive commentary is available within the stadiums in Arabic and to fans across the globe in Arabic and English through a dedicated mobile application [35]. Sensory rooms will be operational at Al Bayt, Lusail and Education City allowing fans to watch matches in quieter spaces. Accessibility requirements have gone beyond tournament sites and events and are delivered across all physical infrastructure, public transport and services in Qatar.

33. Qatar 2022 has been presented as the most accessible for people with disabilities (PWD) in the history of international tournaments [36]. The Minister for Social Development and Family announced the willingness to host the 4th World Summit on Disability in 2028 in cooperation with the International Disability Alliance [37]. This is an opportunity to check progress in sustaining accessibility post World Cup. The World Innovation and Health Summit held in Qatar each year and funded by Qatar openly reported in 2022 that "if you see injustice or inequitable treatment of people with disabilities, be an ally and speak up" [38].

34. Generation Amazing is a human and social legacy programme of the 2022 World Cup. The group hosts an annual youth festival to engage and inspire young people to be agents of social change [39].

35. Mental health has been identified as a top-ranking social issue facing young people in the region and organisations offering mental health services are promoted during the festival. The Generation Amazing Community Club in Lusail, opened in the run up to World Cup, offers mental health and wellbeing lessons [40].

[32] **BBC Sport (2022)**. Qatar 2022: Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says players and managers are 'not politicians'. BBC Sport 4 November. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63518615> [accessed 11 November 2022].

[33] [34] **Kerr, S and Acharya, P (2022)**. Qatar struggles to shift focus away from workers' rights. The Financial Times Weekend. 5/6 November 2022, p6.

[35] **Egypt Today (2022)**. Accessibility takes centre stage as countdown to Qatar 2022 continues. 7 November <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/8/120455/Accessibility-takes-centre-stage-as-countdown-to-Qatar-2022-continues> [accessed 11 November 2022].

[36] [37] **Ataula S.** Qatar ready to receive fans with disabilities during World Cup 2022. The Peninsula Newspaper. 28 June 2022. Available at: <https://thepeninsulaqatar.com/article/28/06/2022/qatar-ready-to-receive-fans-with-disabilities-during-world-cup-2022> [Accessed 10 November 2022].

[38] **AlHarahsheh S, Neves J, Swart K, Shaban S, Hudaib A, Legg D, Dubon M, Webborn N, Fagher K, DeLuca S, Derman W, Blauwet C. (2022)**. Making sports accessible for all: The time to act is now. Doha, Qatar: World Innovation Summit.

[39] [40] [41] **Reid, C, Grant, L, Jarvie, G, Kerr, G, Brockett, C, Morris, J, Banda, D, Murray, A, Almuhammad, M, Tamminen, K, Reardon, C and Simpson, K (2022)**. Sport for mental health: a global strengths-based change system. Doha, Qatar. World Innovation Summit for Health.

36. Generation Amazing have included in their mental health activities and offerings support for refugees fleeing from Afghanistan. Airlifted in 2021 by the State of Qatar, evacuees have been housed in facilities constructed to host delegates for the FIFA World Cup. At the request of Qatar's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Generation Amazing and Maktaba's Children's Library (Qatar) set up a nursery. With the evacuee community co-created sport and leisure activities to address mental, social, emotional and physical health needs of those fleeing from Afghanistan [41].

37. The Centre for Sport and Human rights partnered with FIFA to deliver trained Human Rights volunteers for Qatar 2022 World Cup [42]. A pilot programme was developed, launched and monitored during the FIFA Arab Cup of 2021. The Qatar 2022 volunteers programme was launched in March 2022 with the aim of recruiting 96 volunteers and 10 team leaders whose job it will be/was to monitor and report any human rights violations observed or reported during the World Cup [43]. Having a cohort with human rights training engaging with fans, workers and security staff around stadiums is innovative and a model that should be used in both this event and future events to build and diversify the community of people engaged in sport and human rights.

38. Qatar has invited security forces from Turkey, Pakistan, Morocco and Britain as well as advisors from the FBI and France to develop its own security capabilities both on the ground as well as online [44]. A positive safe fan experience is an important factor in the battle for hearts and minds if Qatar is looking to influence the court of public opinion in USA, Europe and Britain. In other words, those countries that could come to support Qatar militarily given that it is not likely to be China or Russia. A positive World Cup experience, even successfully hosting a World Cup is a small piece in a bigger foreign policy jigsaw puzzle to make the country relevant while trying to influence how communities might be attracted to Qatar. This is a

strategy that could backfire but has more chance of success once the football starts and if the tournament is completed without major incidents that might add to the reputational risk associated with hosting major events. A strategy that depends on how Qatar handles the very issues that activists are seeking to capitalise upon and keep key messages alive while the world is watching.

39. This part of the soft power strategy that has travelled a controversial journey but has survived ineffective attempts to remove the World Cups from both Russia and Qatar following allegations of an irregular bidding process. As early as June 2015 FIFA announced that it had no legal grounds to strip Russia and Qatar of the 2018 and 2022 events.

40. Qatar is also responding to competition within the Gulf from the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Egypt as the sole or preeminent sports hub of the Middle East. A struggle that goes beyond football. Qatar is also responding to the claim that it is too small or has no history in sport to be awarded the World Cup. Bidding rules for the World Cup do not stipulate size of country or amount of money that can be spent on bids or the requirement to have a stellar sporting history, however you define such an idea.

41. For activists to focus upon this fails to acknowledge the bidding rules for competitions but perhaps more importantly allows Qatar to position itself as a victim. The reality is that Qatar won its first regional football tournament in 1992; owns Paris St Germain the French football club; has won numerous regional Asian, Middle Eastern Golf Tournaments; has spent more money than any other country on bidding and preparing for the FIFA World Cup; made its debut at the 1996 Paralympic Games and has participated in every games since then; competed first in the 1984 Olympic Games; hosted the Asian Games in 2006 and will do so again in 2030; cricket is the second most popular sport in Qatar and the 2024 World Aquatic Championships are to be held in Doha.

[42] [43] Centre for Sport and Human Rights (2022). Centre and FIFA partner to deliver human rights volunteers for FIFA World Cup 2022. Centre for Sport and Human Rights. 30 June 2022. <https://sporhumanrights.org/news/centre-and-fifa-partner-to-deliver-human-rights-volunteers-for-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022> [accessed 10 November 2022].

[44] Dorsey, J. (2022). Footballing for soft power- a conversation with James Corbett. 23 October 2022. <https://blogs.timesofisrael.com/footballing-for-soft-power-a-conversation-with-james-corbett/> [accessed 10 November 2022].

42. One thing that Qatar could do that both human rights groups and labour groups have been calling for, is to fully compensate workers who have suffered injuries or for the families of those who have died on World Cup related projects. Compensation that would include coverage of the recruitment fees to get workers to Qatar. Furthermore, if Qatar were to compensate workers who had suffered injuries or death on construction sites across the country it would be a further signal of a willingness to change. Qatar could afford to develop an independently administered restitution fund. For a country that is trying to win the PR narrative, support its own soft power strategy and gain trust from those it is trying to influence, the cost of implementing such a scheme would surely be less than the cost of the reputational damage of not actioning such a recommendation.

The Football Challenge

43. The football challenge that is Qatar 2022 has and is being played out in several forms of which the following are but a few examples.

44. First, in October 2022 the Australia Socceroos collectively released a video raising concerns about the suffering of migrant workers and the “inability of LGBT+I people in Qatar to love the person that they choose” [45]. It is the first time a collective players voice has been heard in the build-up to the tournament. The video was released accompanied by an open letter from the players union Professional Footballers Australia along with a statement from Football Australia. All involved talked of human rights and workers welfare concerns in Qatar. The players acknowledged that addressing these issues is not easy but that they “stand with Fifpro, the Building and Wood Workers International and the International Trade Union Confederation, seeking to embed reforms and establish a lasting legacy in Qatar” [46]. The players were critical of the event being awarded to Qatar, while acknowledging the highest level of

assurances provided by HH Amir of Qatar and the President of FIFA that all fans would be welcome and safe and asked for the openness and reform to continue beyond the tournament.

45. Second, there is the football shirt challenge. Australia is in Group D alongside world champions France, as well as Denmark and Tunisia. Group opponents Denmark have protested human rights abuses in the middle east state [47]. The Danish Football Federation (DBU) asked if its players could wear shirts with the words “Human Rights for All”. The request has been rejected by FIFA who requested all 32 qualifying teams to focus on football, a move that has been criticised by footballers as well as human rights groups. DBU Director Jakob Jensen added “We don't think there's any politics in it. We think that the human rights are universal, and we stand by this view” [48].

46. Third, there is the football climate challenge. At the time of the finals, the temperature in Qatar is usually around 25C (77F). Had the competition been held in June and July, as usual, matches would have been played in temperatures exceeding 40C, and possibly reaching 50C. Qatar initially proposed hosting the finals during the summer in air-conditioned enclosed stadiums, but the plan was rejected. It is the first time that the World Cup has been held in the Winter. It is not the first time the tournament has been played in high temperature countries. To help accommodate the tournament, European football calendars have been disrupted if not halted.

47. Fourth, is the football activist challenge and the contribution of footballers who have a social and political conscience about being asked to play in this context and circumstance. No one should be surprised by the recent leadership provided by footballers and other sports stars on a whole host of issues. While often actively discouraged from critical comments

[45] [46] May, N and Hytner M, (2022). Socceroos make collective statement to speak out about Qatar's human rights record. The Guardian 22 October 2022: 22.50 BST online: See also BBC Sport 27 October. World Cup 2022: Australia players criticise human rights record of hosts Qatar in video. - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63407407> [accessed 11 November 2022].

[47] [48] Foster, M, (2022). FIFA forbids Danish men's soccer team from wearing pro-human rights shirts at Qatar World Cup. CNN 11 November : 5.28 AM EST - <https://edition.cnn.com/2022/11/11/football/fifa-danish-soccer-world-cup-qatar-spt-intl/index.html> [accessed 11 November 2022].

many footballers take their responsibility to represent communities very seriously. The social and political activism of athletes, including footballers, is catapulting on to the international stage and articulating and giving voice to social and political challenges. The voices of ordinary people are making a difference and while the wealth of some contemporary football stars may set them apart, they are part of a new wave of activism. Many players in the national squads have championed social causes and they will be playing at this World Cup.

48. Peaceful protests have been planned by some players, while England's Harry Kane and nine other captains of European teams will be wearing 'One Love' armbands to promote diversity and inclusion [49]. England defender Lotte Wubben-Moy says she will not be watching the men's 2022 World Cup because it is in Qatar [50]. [Baroness Sue Campbell, the Football Association's director of women's football, said she has "massive respect" for players speaking out \[51\]. She went on "Progress has been made in Qatar, but there's an awful lot more to do. I think it's a difficult one for us or any country to sit in judgement on another. We have our own issues" \[52\].](#) To date Ten European football associations including those of England and Wales say "human rights are universal and apply everywhere". While written diplomatically, this front is a robust and defiant response to FIFA'S remarkable 'stick to football' letter which took the FA and the FAW by surprise, dismayed many in the sport, and which was widely condemned by human rights groups and LGBT+ campaigners [53].

49. Fifth is the challenge of the activist or organisation using football and the event to deliver a message. Most mega football events provide opportunities for activists and organisations to deliver key political messages through football. Qatari officials stopped a protest

staged by British LGBT rights campaigner Peter Tatchell [54]. Mr Tatchell said he was "arrested and detained on the kerbside" following his one-man protest challenging the country's treatment of LGBT people ahead of the World Cup. He said he was later released and is now heading back to the UK. The Qatari government said authorities asked someone to move but claims of an arrest were "completely false". Speaking on BBC Radio 4's programme *The World Tonight* he said he and his colleague "were not free to leave" nor "free to continue the protest" [55]. Mr Tatchell took similar action when the 2018 World Cup was hosted in Russia. He said this 2022 stance had been the first public LGBT rights protest to take place in a Gulf state [56].

50. Finally, least we forget, there is the genuine football challenge on the pitch. If no South American team manages to win the 2022 World Cup, it will be the continent's longest title drought. Uruguay (1930, 1950), Brazil (1958, 1962, 1970, 1994, and 2002), and Argentina (1978, 1986) have all previously won a FIFA World Cup. The previous record was 20 years between 1950 and 1970. With Brazil having last won the World Cup in 2002, this is South America's last chance to avoid a new record.

51. Organisations, footballers, governing bodies, governments have the extraordinary opportunity to engage with international and national audiences and fans through football in particular and the World Cup in general. Football is a genuine pillar of connectivity. Football has significant international reach and is part of a United Nations mandated offensive to use sport to enable the 2030 sustainable development goals. Football at both local and global levels is delivering both sporting and non-sporting outcomes through football and should get more credit from politicians for doing this.

[49] [53] **BBC Sport (2022)**. World Cup 2022: 10 European Football Associations respond to FIFA'S football on focus letter. 6 November 2022. - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63533589> - [accessed 11 November 2022].

[50] [51] [52] **BBC Sport (2022)**. World Cup 2022: Lotte Wubben-Moy 'won't be watching' tournament with Qatar hosting. 8 November 2022. - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sport/football/63552662> - [accessed 11 November 2022].

[[54] [55] [56] **Andersson, J (2022)**. Qatar officials stop LGBT activist Peter Tatchell protest. BBC News 25 October - <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-63389409> - [accessed 11 November 2022].

52. In recent years, the worlds of football and international affairs have spectacularly collided. making It is clear that football stakeholders need to have strategic communications plans, if not football diplomacy and cultural relations building plans in place as part of their executive communications and external storytelling assets. This is currently being played out over the question of Qatar and the FIFA 2022 World Cup.

53. The football challenge that surrounds this World Cup takes several different forms but at its core is a clash of values and a struggle to define the lasting narrative or story attached to Qatar 2022. According to some Arab commentators the challenge for Qatar is one of reconciling tradition with gradual social transformation as it seeks to create influence, attraction. and security. The challenge for the West is more complex as different countries take different stances while needing to access Qatar's oil and satisfying the electorate at home that the principles of democracy and rights are upheld.

54. What then are some of the lessons that might be learned from Qatar 2022 now? First, is that sport in different forms is a key plank in the struggle for power and influence in the gulf. Second, that Saudi Arabia and Qatar are both using sport to exert influence internationally through the ownership of football clubs, the hosting of major events and the use of broadcast networks such as Al-Jazeera, the first independent news channel in the Arab world. Third, LGBT+ and human rights groups have learned that this is a long process and that pressure is needed and should be maintained. Fourth, the West jumping up and down about change not happening fast enough might be counter productive. Tools for facilitating engagement after the tournament is finished are needed and sport is one of those tools. Fifth, that for Qatar the long-term fraught journey is more likely to be considered a success once the football starts and it manages to maintain the reputational value of the tournament and continue to progress reforms post-world cup. Sixth,

for FIFA with Saudi Arabia in partnership with Egypt seeking to bid for future tournaments, lessons from the Qatar need to learned. One of these being that values are more important than chasing money. Seven, that hosting a World Cup can help to influence change. Finally, given the popularity, scale and reach of football and the existence of a contemporary and growing army of socially and politically minded footballers and football organizations should suggest that football and footballers can and should be valued as non-state actors that can carry key messages and with training could be even more powerful advocates if not diplomats in the making.

Concluding Observations

55. The popularity, scale and reach of football make it a powerful tool. Across the world, states are increasingly coming to the realization that football and major sporting events should feature in their international and cultural relations toolkits. The universal appeal of football and major events offers a means through which a state can explore the cultivation of new relations, including those between estranged states. It can be employed to share or amplify the state's values with other countries. They can be used to enhance its international brand with a view to leveraging new political and economic opportunities such as development, peace, security, trade and tourism goals.

56. At the same time there's a growing emphasis and opportunity on the football world playing an increased role in civic and human rights advocacy to encourage action across a range of issues. The football world meeting the international relations and diplomatic worlds, is a growing field of engagement. An engagement that is trying to build both a better football world and a better world through football.

57. Sport, and in this case football, remains an active part of a complex long-term soft power strategy aimed at enabling security and defence for a wealthy country that

does not have the military means to defend itself. Having invested heavily in this event Qatar needs this event to be a success and once the football starts the chances of Qatar viewing the event as soft power success story are likely to increase. In many ways the award of the event, resulting from the FIFA decision of 2010, was the start of a soft power success story for Qatar but it has been a rocky road and Qatar needs to continue to advance reforms post-world cup.

58. The aim of Qatar National Vision 2030 is to balance steps towards modernisation with the preservation of tradition. The real concern is that once the spotlight moves on the authorities may roll back on reforms. To sustain and advance reputational value gained from hosting the tournament Qatar should push on with reform even if the activists gaze moves on. In the meantime, those socially and politically active footballers have done much more than play football, we should thank them for it. It won't be the football community that enables further change in Qatar, but they have contributed.

59. The awarding of the World Cup has influenced change and reform in Qatar. Human rights screening of the bidding process for future events has been strengthened. Should future events go to the place with the lowest risk possible? Qatar won the soft power battle when FIFA awarded the tournament to Qatar in 2010.

60. England and Wales were placed in the toughest group in Qatar – it was the only group where every team was in the world's top 20 based upon FIFA rankings of October 2022, the month before the World Cup kicked off. 32 teams qualified, many of whom were outside of the top 32 teams in terms of ranking. 7 of the qualifying teams were outside of the top 32 ranked teams in the world making it the lowest number in the 32 team era.

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