

For the Fans or Financial Gain:
How FIFA Lost the Trust of the World's Football Community

An STS Research Paper
presented to the faculty of the
School of Engineering and Applied Science
University of Virginia

by

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March 14, 2024

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In October 2007, Brazil was selected to host the 2014 FIFA World Cup. The Brazilian government invested billions of dollars into building stadiums, neglecting the country's underfunded education and health systems (Conway, 2013). The costs stalled Brazil's vibrant economic growth. In public opinion polls in 2008, 79 percent of respondents favored the event, but by April 2014 polls reported that 55 percent of respondents thought "the event will bring more harm than good to Brazilians" (Antunes, 2014). Maria de Lourdes, a street vendor in Rio de Janeiro, offered a typical perspective: "Brazil, with all its problems, Rio with all its problems – many people still die from hunger while others are spending money on these games" (Antunes, 2014).

The pattern continued at the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar. To prepare, the Qatari government funneled an estimated \$220 billion into Doha, the capital (Lyjak, 2023). Qatar turned to desperate migrant construction workers, primarily South Asians. They were charged high recruitment fees, forcing many into debt bondage (HRW, 2022a). Human Rights Watch, an NGO seeking compensation for the workers, notes that they "made the tournament possible while they faced months of unpaid wages, dangerous working conditions, and unexplained deaths" (HRW, 2023). Since 2010, when Qatar won hosting rights, 6,500 migrant workers have died during construction (Pattison & McIntyre, 2021). Yet FIFA bears primary responsibility. According to Human Rights Watch (2022b), it awarded Qatar hosting "with no human rights due diligence and no set conditions about protections for migrant workers who would be needed to construct the massive infrastructure."

A parallel can be drawn from Qatar to the situation in Brazil, where FIFA also carelessly awarded a country the hosting rights without considering the adverse effects to others. While FIFA claims their mission is to “contribute to a harmonized way forward in the overall interests of football” (FIFA, n.d.), the validity of this statement is challenged by their persistent mercenary behavior, their tendency to enable corruption of host countries, and their misuse of workers.

Review of Research

Researchers have examined FIFA’s disregard for others. For example, Khan (2014) details how a push for a World Cup in Qatar is unethical considering the heat for players and workers. Khan proceeds to discuss how FIFA has been accused of corrupted bidding practices and entertains the idea of FIFA favoring Qatar solely due to their wealthy status. Such behavior hasn’t gone unnoticed as research from Struebing (2018) examines the prosecution of FIFA in 2015. Struebing (2018) explains that the defendants were suspected of RICO violations, more specifically “taking approximately \$150 million in bribes and kickbacks in return for being influenced in the procurement of lucrative media contracts, awarding the right to host the 2010 World Cup, and rigging the 2011 FIFA presidential election.”

While FIFA insists their events help boost local economies, work from Hummel (2018) suggests that “few businesses benefit while high prices and event-specific laws exclude poor citizens.” This idea is backed by Onis (2014), who claims that these mega-events do not remedy economic issues but rather exacerbate them. FIFA paints the picture that hosting the world’s most popular sporting event will bolster local economies when the opposite is true. In the cases of both the 2014 and 2022 World Cup the host countries, while not logistically ideal hosts, enabled FIFA to profit tremendously at the expense of others. A decade ago, Becker (2013) predicted that

without reform, future World Cups would continue to go to countries that cannot host it responsibly. The record since then has proved Becker right, as seen in the events taking place in preparation for both the 2014 and 2022 World Cups.

Literature from Heaston et al. (2020) describes how the inherent corruption of FIFA stems from its transnational organizational governance. Heaston et al. (2020) explore the ways that this form of governance has resulted in the abundance of corruption accusations faced in the last decade and relates it to specific cases involving the 2010, 2014, 2018, and 2022 World Cups.

FIFA's Mercenary Behavior

FIFA has faced many accusations of corruption involving the departure from ethics and law in pursuit of personal financial gain. The frequency of accusations and findings from the resulting investigations have created a strong association between FIFA and corruption that contributes to FIFA being viewed in a negative light.

The corruption surfaced in 2015, when the US Department of Justice indicted several top executives, leading to a raid on a hotel in Zurich and the arrest of seven FIFA executives (BBC, 2015). In addition, the US indicted 14 current and former FIFA officials and associates on charges of “rampant, systemic, and deep-rooted corruption” according to the FBI (BBC, 2015). While the indictments and arrests began in 2015, it was a culmination of events that date back to the early 2000s. In 2004, South Africa was awarded hosting rights for the 2010 World Cup, but subsequently it was alleged that “\$10m was sent by South Africa, through FIFA, to [a FIFA official] as payback for him and two other then FIFA executive committee members backing South Africa in the 2004 vote” (Smith, 2015). The accusations surrounding this voting process marked the start of a common distrust in the World Cup voting process. Beyond this, FIFA also

has been accused of using bribery to influence sports marketers. Attorney General Loretta E. Lynch spoke on this in 2015: “[high ranking FIFA officials] used their positions of trust within their respective organizations to solicit bribes from sports marketers in exchange for the commercial rights to their soccer tournaments. They did this over and over, year after year, tournament after tournament” (Office of Public Affairs, 2015). These instances highlight a side of FIFA that values profit over ethics.

Another form of corruption is more abstract than the examples of bribery that plague FIFA’s history. As the leading world football organization, FIFA takes on the role of ensuring that their tournaments can be orchestrated in a smooth manner, but the 2014 World Cup shows the beginning of their inability to do so. By selecting Brazil to host, FIFA placed an inexplicable burden on the country in exchange for the profits they reap from each World Cup. Upon some simple investigation of Brazil in the decade before the 2014 World Cup there are signs that they were not a suitable host country. Measured between the years of 2005-2013, Brazil had a Gini coefficient of 52.7 meaning that there is severe income inequality in the country (Statista, 2023). For those in Brazil on the poor side, many were desperate for work making them susceptible to horrific working conditions and hours, especially with a lack of oversight from FIFA. In alignment with FIFA’s standards, Brazil began construction of the twelve new stadiums and, according to a non-governmental organization by the name of Answering the Cry of the Poor (ANCOP), displaced about 250,000 of Brazil’s poorest citizens to make room (Ling, 2014). When considering the monetary gain FIFA accumulates from the World Cup, the concept of the organization overlooking potential “red flags” in a host country becomes a potential reality.

This concept is furthered by the situation in Qatar. It was no secret that Qatar would have to outsource labor for the massive amount of infrastructure development and general

construction they would have to undertake in preparation for the 2022 World Cup. The feasibility of safely relocating, sheltering, and paying these workers is something that anyone can question. FIFA failed to lend a hand in protecting the migrant workers that sacrificed so much to make the event possible, allowing FIFA to profit. The situation was worsened by FIFA's lack of response in an attempt to remedy the situation. Tirana Hassan, an executive director at Human Rights Watch, had this to say about the situation: "FIFA's egregious whitewashing of serious abuses against migrant workers in Qatar is both a global embarrassment and a sinister tactic to escape its human rights responsibility to compensate thousands of workers who faced abuse and the families of those who died to make this World Cup possible" (Human Rights Watch, 2022c). The consideration of Qatar being an unsuitable host was overlooked as the primary focus was the immense profit to be made. Ms. Hassan went on to say, "FIFA continued to cash in on billions of dollars in revenue but refuses to offer a single cent for the families of migrant workers who died or those workers who were cheated out of their wages" (Humans Rights Watch, 2022c). This statement sums up the continuation of FIFA's mercenary behavior in relation to the 2022 World Cup.

FIFA's Enablement of Government Corruption

From a superficial viewpoint, hosting a World Cup can seem an extreme honor. One that will bolster the host's economy and bring excitement to the citizens of the country. While in select cases this can be true, recent history shows that the opposite has become increasingly common.

Brazil is known to be a football capital of the world, but it wasn't long before even the nation who lives for the sport started to show some resistance to hosting. In 2013, over 200,000

citizens gathered in the streets of the Brazil's largest cities in protest of the government spending and increased taxation that resulted from World Cup preparation costs (Conway, 2013). In the words of Graciela Caçador, a 28-year-old saleswoman protesting in São Paulo, "For many years the government has been feeding corruption. People are demonstrating against the system. They spent billions of dollars building stadiums and nothing on education and health" (Conway, 2013). In the São Paulo protests the citizens aimed to voice their discontent with paying increased taxes for "inadequate government services" (Conway, 2013). Vinicius de Assis, a fellow São Paulo local, echoes the resentment from Ms. Caçador in saying, "We are demanding more respect to the population. They are building these overpriced stadiums and are not worrying about the situation of their own people" (Conway, 2013). The costliest of the twelve stadiums was the Mane Garrincha stadium, racking up a bill of around \$900 million, and Brazilian critics refer to it as "the poster child for out-of-control spending and mismanagement, or worse" (CBS News, 2014). It's easy to place the blame on the Brazilian government, who is at fault to a certain degree, but through FIFA awarding an inadequate country with the hosting rights they enabled this allocation of money away from what the people need.

As mentioned previously, FIFA has an extensive history of accepting and issuing bribes. Chuck Blazer, former high-ranking FIFA official, admitted to such activity: "Beginning in or around 2004 and continuing through 2011, I and others on the FIFA executive committee agreed to accept bribes in conjunction with the selection of South Africa as the host nation for the 2010 World Cup" (France 24, 2015). While bribery in itself is highly unethical and illegal, the precedent that this set for the world of football was more severe. An indictment of FIFA confirmed that FIFA vice president Jack Warner received over \$5 million in bribes from Russia to help secure them hosting rights for the 2018 World Cup (Gonzalez, 2020). Following this, the

same indictment found that three South American FIFA members received bribes to vote for Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup (Gonzalez, 2020). The amount of bribery involved in securing hosting rights saw a great increase following the example set by the 2010 World Cup. FIFA's nature concerning bribery helped give way to corruption in governments who aimed to secure the hosting rights for the highly coveted event. Looking forward, there was some reform to the voting process in hopes of eliminating corruption, but Domenico Scala, head of FIFA's independent audit and compliance committee stated that "there can be no 100-percent guarantee, there is always a risk when you have national and monetary interests" (Bart, 2015). This suggests that the existence of the World Cup as it stands will always tend to enable corrupt behavior.

Tragic Misuse of Workers

To host a World Cup requires a tremendous amount of preparation that inevitably places a large burden on the host country and the construction workers. Often, the amount of development in the relatively short amount of time required by FIFA results in hasty work schedules, subjecting workers to unsafe conditions. The continuation of World Cup related misuse of workers creates an ethical dilemma of if the events are worth the suffering and lives of those who make it happen.

In preparation for the 2014 World Cup, Brazilian construction workers, tasked with building the twelve, new stadiums, commonly faced 84-hour work weeks in dangerous conditions leading to eight deaths (BBC, 2014). This degree of overexertion can make workers more prone to dangerous accidents which the family of Marcleudo Del Melo Ferraira, a Brazilian construction worker, claims attributed to his work-related death (Libcom.org, 2013). Antonio de Sousa Ramalho, former president of the Sintracon-SP Civil Construction Workers Union of São

Paulo, vocalizes the workers concerns by saying, “The construction workers are among the poorest in Brazil and are often not aware of their rights. And the world soccer body FIFA has never shown any concern about the workers” (Karlsson, 2014). In São Paulo, two construction workers were killed by a crane that collapsed and fell onto them, and it was later found that the daughter of one of the deceased men reported her father saying he was convinced that he would have a serious accident and die at work (Libcom.org, 2013). These incidents collectively suggest that FIFA’s unfeasible expectations fall onto the construction workers in the form of inadequate working environments and inhumane expectations.

One can claim that the accidents that occurred in Brazil stem from the fact that they’re still a developing nation who may lack access to proper equipment and highly skilled laborers, but similar events unfolded in Russia during preparation for the 2018 World Cup. Ambet Yuson, General Secretary of Building and Wood Workers’ International (BWI), spoke on the issue, saying “Twenty-one construction workers died on stadium building sites during the preparations for the 2018 FIFA World Cup Russia. These were tragedies that could have been averted if safety and health conditions were strictly enforced” (ETUI, 2018). A worker, stationed near the Zenit arena, described his unsatisfactory living conditions: “Worker live in wagons or dormitories at the site, with up to 40 men sharing one toilet and shower” (Jones, 2015). FIFA put an inspection system in place in attempt to manage working conditions, but the BWI said “their reports merely enumerated the number of cases of non-compliance addressed by the contractors while failing to analyze the inspection report sufficiently and compel construction companies to fully implement the recommendations from the inspections” (ETUI, 2018). In addition to the issues concerning working conditions, those that were lucky enough to remain unharmed still faced extremely low or unpaid wages. A 47-year-old worker from Uzbekistan shared his frustration in saying that

“Everyone has hold-ups now. I haven’t gotten my wages for the third month in a row. We’re taking out credit from relatives and friends in St. Petersburg to send home money for our family and kids” (Jones, 2015). FIFA’s repeated negligence to intervene in the worker mistreatment they identified themselves has led many to believe that they can no longer be trusted to orchestrate the World Cup. This idea is emulated in the words Jane Buchanan, Human Rights Watch’s associate Europe and Central Asia director, who said, “Construction workers on World Cup stadiums face exploitation and abuse, and FIFA has not yet shown that it can effectively monitor, prevent, and remedy these issues” (Reuters, 2017).

The most recent, and perhaps the most severe, case of worker mistreatment involving FIFA involves the use of migrant workers in transforming Doha, Qatar into a World Cup site. Due to a lack of workforce in Qatar, labor was outsourced primarily from South Asia where many were desperate to find ways to support their families. Lavanya Maraveni, wife to the late Ramulu Maraveni who died working in Qatar, said his job “was hard work and continuous, but he continued to work for our children’s future” (Masih et al., 2022). Masih et al. (2022) also reported that Mr. Maraveni had fainted a few weeks before his death, but it was written off as low blood pressure. His eventual death was attributed to heart failure from natural causes, a commonality at the time which human rights groups believe took advantage of Qatari law to hide the true death toll that resulted from World Cup construction related incidents. Similar to the situation in Russia, FIFA failed to conduct meaningful investigations that could’ve prevented the deaths of many workers (Page & Worden, 2022).

In the cases of the 2014, 2018, and 2022 World Cups a pattern of negligence is seen on FIFA’s part that defies the trust that their fans impart in them as an organization. If the same

reluctance to sufficiently monitor worker well-being is repeated on three occasions, it's fair to question what will happen next time.

Conclusion

Many people and organizations who set out on a specific mission lose sight of what was once foundational to them, betraying those who enabled their success in the first place. It's a sad reality that these same people and organizations are quickly willing to do so when presented with an opportunity to turn a profit. The course of events taken by FIFA in the past couple decades indicates their abandonment from the mission they set out to accomplish, letting down their biggest fans. It's unacceptable to place material interest before ethics, especially when involving the lives of other human beings. Being that the World Cup has repeatedly been plagued by corruption and worker mistreatment, there is much to be done if this global spectacle is to be preserved. It's important to explore ways to pull the organizations that facilitate the event back to the grounds on which they were created. After all, what value does an organization hold if it fails to prioritize the mission it was founded on?

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