

Research Article

Hosting the FIFA World Cup as a Megaevent: Business Opportunities and Human Rights

Rodrigo Almeida Grillo*

University of Miami School of Law, Florida 33146, United States

* Correspondence: rodrigo@sportialaw.com

Abstract: This paper examines the FIFA World Cup as a paradigmatic megaevent situated at the intersection of the biggest business opportunities available and the human rights risk involved. From the tournament's evolution since 1930 and its transformation into a global commercial and geopolitical spectacle, this paper analyzes how hosting nations pursue infrastructure investment, tourism revenue, international prestige and even sportswashing while simultaneously exposing vulnerable populations, local and neighbors, to labor exploitation, forced displacement, and the suppression of civil liberties. Through an examination of recent host countries with available data: South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), Russia (2018), and Qatar (2022), this paper traces how FIFA's contractual authority over host city agreements, hosting countries, sponsorship arrangements, and commercial licensing shapes both the opportunities available to some of the biggest corporations and the burdens held by migrant workers, displaced residents, and small local businesses. The paper further considers the legal and contractual mechanisms, including human rights clauses, force majeure provisions, morals clauses, and material adverse effect clauses, that could reconcile FIFA's commercial imperatives with binding human rights protections. Applying the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, this paper argues that corporate sponsors, broadcasters, and host governments share overlapping obligations to prevent complicity in rights violations. It concludes that future World Cup host agreements must integrate enforceable human rights due diligence and grievance mechanisms if the tournament's economic legacy is to align with, rather than undermine, principles of dignity, equity, and the rule of law.

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1.Introduction

Megaevents are global spectacles that transcend the ordinary boundaries of sport and culture (Black 2023). They are defined not only by their size, but by their symbolic weight and international resonance. Among these events, the FIFA World Cup stands as the most visible and influential event in the world¹, commanding billions of viewers, mobilizing massive investments, and reshaping host nations every four years, across continents and time zones, with the same common passion about representing their countries and winning the ultimate prize of being crowned champions of the world. The World Cup is not merely an athletic competition between the best players, instead it is an international stage where nations perform, states and corporations alike compete for visibility, legitimacy, and financial gain.

The FIFA World Cup is unique because of the centrality of football, herein referred to as soccer, as the world's most popular sport². Since its founding tournament in 1930 in Uruguay³, the World Cup has served as both a sporting competition and a political and economic tool (Fong



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¹ FIFA. 2024. Reports Detail Record Global Audience Figures and Positive Sustainability Outcomes from FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. November 29. <https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/news/reports-detail-record-global-audience-figures-and-positive-sustainability-outcomes-fifa-world-cup-qatar>

² Krasnoff, Lindsay Sarah. 2018. How the Great War Made Soccer the World's Most Popular Sport—and Led to Its First Viral Moment. *The Athletic*, November 16. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/653722/2018/11/16/how-the-great-war-made-soccer-the-worlds-most-popular-sport-and-led-to-its-first-viral-moment/>

³ Cox, Michael. 2025. How Uruguay Won the 1930 World Cup: Home Advantage, Breathing Exercises and a Final of Two Halves. *The Athletic*, March 9. <https://www.nytimes.com/athletic/6181606/2025/03/09/world-cup-winners-uruguay-1930/>

2025). Governments have long recognized the FIFA World Cup as a vehicle for projecting national identity and prestige on a global stage. Hosting or performing well in the tournament allows states to showcase their modernity, infrastructure, and organizational capacity, while also crafting narratives of national unity and pride (Fong 2025). The FIFA World Cup becomes a tool of soft power, enabling countries to enhance their international image and legitimacy through the language of the most popular sport in the world. Political leaders frequently invoke the tournament as evidence of progress or global belonging, using the symbolism of victory or the grandeur of hosting to strengthen domestic authority and international credibility (Fong 2025)..

Businesses, by contrast, have leveraged the World Cup as one of the most powerful platforms for global marketing and consumer engagement⁴⁵. The event's unparalleled audience and passionate fans reach provides multinational corporations with opportunities to build brand loyalty, associate themselves with moments of triumph and emotion, and penetrate emerging markets, consolidating their spot in the biggest stage⁶. Sponsorship deals, advertising campaigns, and product promotions are carefully orchestrated to align corporate identities with the excitement and unity that the tournament evokes^{7,8}. For corporations, the World Cup is not merely an athletic competition, it is a marketplace of global attention where billions of potential consumers are gathered at once.

Fans, meanwhile, have embraced the World Cup as a cultural festival that transcends the boundaries of sport⁹. It is a unique time when diverse people, often divided by language, politics, culture or history, unite around a shared passion for the game. Streets, homes, and public squares become sites of collective celebration where identities are expressed, and cultural exchange occurs. For many, the World Cup represents more than national pride or sporting excellence, but rather it is a ritual of belonging to a global community bound together by the drama and excitement of soccer.

The symbolic power of the World Cup, therefore, extends far beyond the ninety minutes of play on the pitch. It is simultaneously a geopolitical stage, a commercial juggernaut, and a cultural festival. Its significance is measured not only in goals scored or trophies lifted, but in the ways it reshapes perceptions, markets, and societies.

Economically, the FIFA World Cup promises extraordinary rewards¹⁰. It brings infrastructure investment, spikes in tourism revenue^{11,12}, and significant opportunities for both local and global businesses corporations. It functions as an accelerator for multinational corporations in sectors ranging from construction and telecommunications to hospitality and media. At the same time, the World Cup operates as an institution with unparalleled visibility. FIFA itself has transformed from a governing body into a global corporate actor that not only manages sport but also directs flows of capital, sponsorship, branding and, of course, politics across the globe.

Since 1950, when Brazil hosted the first World Cup after World War II, the tournament has taken on the contours of what we now call the "modern" megaevent. Broadcast television, later satellite and digital media, sponsorships, and massive urban investments made the FIFA World Cup more than just a event sport, it became a carefully orchestrated commercial and political event. The scale of the 1950 tournament compared to earlier editions underscores the shift: stadiums like the Maracanã symbolized a national project as much as they symbolized athletic competition. From that point forward, each World Cup carried with it both the promise of modernization and the risks of overreach, but more than 70 years later the goal is the same.

This duality leads to the central tension that runs through the contemporary FIFA World Cup. On one side lies the promise of economic growth, development, and global visibility for the host nation, and on the other lies the persistent risk of human rights violations, ranging from labor exploitation to suppression of dissent and invisibility of a bunch or rights¹³. The World Cup's symbolic and financial appeal makes it a magnet for opportunity, but its demands often place enormous strain on vulnerable populations, to understand this tension is essential for grasping the broader role of megaevents in the global economy and in the evolving landscape of business and human rights.

2. Business Impacts of Hosting the FIFA World Cup

The economic allure of hosting the World Cup is undeniable¹⁴. Host nations invest heavily in infrastructure, justify massive public spending, and try to promote tourism as a long term benefit, and yet these opportunities raise legal issues that must be

⁴ FIFA. n.d. FIFA Partners. <https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/partners>

⁵ Kroll, Sonja. 2018. How the World Cup Can Help Brands Become Champions of Consumer Engagement. *Exchange Wire*, July 16. <https://www.exchangewire.com/blog/2018/07/16/how-the-world-cup-can-help-brands-become-champions-of-consumer-engagement/>

⁶ Inside FIFA. n.d. Adidas. <https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/partners/adidas>

⁷ The Chronicles. 2024. Best Football Commercial Ever. July 10. <https://www.bstn.com/chronicles/the-best-football-commercial-ever/?srsltid=AfmBOoq5nkiSPD0wQ20cD7JqRDxfnXBjCUEHsupShbFd2zKiej6cvCPS>

⁸ Cronin, Brian. 2012. Was Pelé Paid to Tie His Shoes during the 1970 World Cup Final? *Los Angeles Times*, October 15. <https://www.latimes.com/sports/la-xpm-2012-oct-15-la-sp-sn-pele-shoes-world-cup-20121015-story.html>

⁹ Kamau, Mutonga. 2024. How Fans around the World Celebrate the FIFA World Cup. *Cleats*, November. <https://vocal.media/cleats/how-fans-around-the-world-celebrate-the-fifa-world-cup-z7wnh074d>

¹⁰ Mj. 2025. How the FIFA World Cup Became the Biggest Sporting Event. *Daily Faith Living*, April 29. <https://dailyfaithliving.com/fifa-world-cup-global-growth/>

¹¹ Chao, Loretta. 2014. Brazil Welcomes One Million World Cup Tourists. *The Wall Street Journal*, July 15. <https://www.wsj.com/articles/BL-DFB-21836>

¹² TASS Russian News Agency. 2018. More than 5 Million Tourists Visit FIFA World Cup Host Cities in Russia. July 5. <https://tass.com/sports/1012057>

¹³ Ganji, Sarath K. 2022. How Qatar Became a World Leader in Sportswashing. *Journal of Democracy*, November. <https://www.journalofdemocracy.org/how-qatar-became-a-world-leader-in-sportswashing/>

¹⁴ Goaleconomy. 2025. FIFA World Cup 2026 Socioeconomic Impact Analysis. March. https://static.poder360.com.br/2025/04/FIFAWC26_04042025_USA.pdf

examined. Competition law comes into play¹⁵ when FIFA grants exclusive commercial rights for big international corporations that prevent local vendors from selling near stadiums, creating a conflict between global sponsorship contracts and domestic rules designed to promote fair markets, especially for the local community. Similarly, public procurement law is tested when construction contracts are awarded through accelerated procedures over transparency, heightening the risk of corruption and misuse of public funds¹⁶.

Legal questions also arise in the allocation of public resources. Should governments, bound by constitutional duties of fiscal prudence, be allowed to incur billions in debt for stadiums that may become white elephants? Do such expenditures violate principles of intergenerational equity, leaving taxpayers with unsustainable obligations long after FIFA and its sponsors depart? These questions reveal how economic opportunity is inseparable from legal accountability. Also, an immense discussion over human rights issues arises before and after each edition of the World Cup, from infrastructure and constructions issues to “white elephant”¹⁷ stadium that were supposed to attract tourism, to multi corporations creating immense challenges for local business to compete and the aftermath for the local community. All those issues arise as soon as the FIFA Committee, comprised of all its members, decides where the next World Cup will take place. Now, what once was an honor, brings nonstop wave of problems and situations to be dealt. This was especially the case in most of the “moderns” FIFA World Cup editions, highlighted by South Africa (2010), Brazil (2014), Russia (2018) and Qatar (2022). Each of these tournaments exposed a different dimension of tension between FIFA’s ideals and its practices, and how the tournament can place heavy pressure on every party involved.

FIFA continues to promote its message of unity and global celebration, emphasizing that football brings people together. However, in practice, FIFA often operates more like a global corporation focused on commercial interests than an international organization dedicated solely to the sport. This gap between the message and the realities faced by host nations highlights the growing tension between the ideal of the World Cup and all the complex issues that accompany it.

3. Infrastructure Investment and Tourism Revenue

One of the most immediate and visible consequences of hosting the World Cup is the vast investment in infrastructure, pre-tournament. Host countries embark on ambitious projects to construct or renovate stadiums, improve transportation networks, and expand hospitality facilities¹⁸, especially in the most recent editions, where corporate sponsors have takeover the tickets, suites and revenue¹⁹. These investments are justified as long term catalysts for development: airports are upgraded, highways are expanded, and cities undergo modernization projects that might otherwise be politically or financially impossible without the “justification” of a megaevent such as the World Cup to bring financial returns and bring the host nations back on the map of tourism, economic growth and development, or at least that’s what is advertised from the local authorities.

Tourism revenue follows closely behind these infrastructural investments, and it often represents one of the most visible and quantifiable benefits of hosting the World Cup. The tournament draws hundreds of thousands of foreign visitors²⁰ who travel not only to attend matches but also to experience the cultural and natural attractions of the host country. Each visitor generates demand for hotels, restaurants, transportation services, retail shopping, and cultural activities, creating a multiplier effect that spreads across local economies. The hospitality and service industries experience a surge in employment opportunities as temporary jobs are created to meet the influx of national and international guests during the tournament period.

Beyond the immediate financial gains, the World Cup also serves as a powerful promotional tool for long term tourism growth²¹. The global media coverage of the event showcases the landscapes, architecture, and cultural richness of the host nation, often reaching billions of viewers worldwide. This exposure can reposition the host country as a desirable travel destination long after the tournament concludes, permanently altering its place in the global tourism market. Cities that were unknown in international travel circuits may suddenly emerge as hotspots for future tourism, leveraging the visibility and prestige gained during the World Cup.

Moreover, the event encourages the development of new tourist infrastructure, such as airports, hotels, and public transportation systems, that benefits both visitors and residents in the long term. Governments and businesses often use the World Cup as an opportunity to modernize facilities and introduce services that align with international standards, further enhancing the host country’s attractiveness to global travelers.

¹⁵ Heilings, Katie, and Dan Shulak. 2023. Avoiding a ‘Red Card’: 2026 FIFA World Cup Focus of New Joint Competition Law Enforcement Initiative. *Hogan Lovells*, October 13. <https://www.hoganlovells.com/en/publications/avoiding-a-red-card-2026-fifa-world-cup-focus-of-new-joint-competition-law-enforcement-initiative>

¹⁶ Rapoza, Kenneth. 2015. A Year Later, Brazil’s FIFA World Cup Infrastructure Still Not Built. *Forbes*, June 7. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kenrapoza/2015/06/07/a-year-later-brazils-fifa-world-cup-infrastructure-still-not-built/>

¹⁷ Zimbalist, Andrew. 2020. *Circus Maximus: The Economic Gamble Behind Hosting the Olympics and the World Cup*. 3rd ed. Brookings Institution Press.

¹⁸ BBC Sport. 2022. 2022 World Cup: The Numbers Which Make the Qatar Event So Different. November 18. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/63118686>

¹⁹ TASS Russian News Agency. 2017. Most Moscow Hotel Reservations for the FIFA 2018 World Cup Made by Fans from US, China, Mexico. November 3. <https://tass.com/sports/974036>

²⁰ Junior, Darce. 2015. Mais de 6.4 Milhões de Turistas Estrangeiros Visitaram o Brasil em 2014. *Brazilian Tourism Government Agency*, July 8. <https://www.gov.br/turismo/pt-br/assuntos/noticias/mais-de-6c4-milhoes-de-turistas-estrangeiros-visitaram-o-brasil-em-2014>

²¹ Gulf Magazine. n.d. Qatar Hospitality Industry Thrives with Post-World Cup Growth. <https://gulfmagazine.co/qatar-hospitality-industry-thrives-with/>

At the same time, however, the tourism boom is not without its challenges. Short-term increases in prices for accommodation, transportation, and basic services can exclude local populations from fully participating in the event²². Smaller local businesses may struggle to compete with multinational hotel chains or FIFA-sanctioned vendors that dominate official fan zones. In many cases, FIFA itself imposes strict parameters on who is allowed to sell goods and services within the commercial zones surrounding stadiums and official venues. Only approved vendors who meet FIFA's licensing requirements, often global brands with deep financial resources, are granted access to these highly profitable spaces. This regulatory framework effectively sidelines local entrepreneurs and small-scale vendors who cannot afford the high costs of compliance or sponsorship fees.

These restrictions complicate the narrative of universal benefit and reveal how tourism gains can be unevenly distributed. While international corporations enjoy exclusive rights to market and sell products within the most visible areas of the World Cup, across multiple cities, fan zones dedicated for the event, local businesses are relegated to the margins, missing the chance to capitalize on the massive influx of visitors. The resulting imbalance underscores the broader critique that the World Cup, while celebrated as a global festival, often prioritizes the interests of multinational partners over those of the very communities that host the event. Nevertheless, tourism remains one of the most enduring promises of hosting the World Cup. By attracting global attention and stimulating both immediate and long term visitor flows, the tournament transforms not only stadiums and cities but also the very way the world perceives the host nation.

4. The Commercial Role of Multinational Corporations

Multinational corporations play a central role in shaping the business landscape of the World Cup. Global brands in sectors such as sportswear, beverages, hospitality, and telecommunications invest heavily in sponsorships and marketing campaigns tied to the tournament.

Media corporations benefit from broadcasting rights that reach record-breaking audiences²³, as the World Cup becomes not only a sporting contest but a media spectacle, where advertising slots are some of the most valuable in the world. The tournament also creates opportunities for innovation in broadcasting and digital engagement, with new platforms being tested and global fan bases monetized. For corporations, association with the World Cup offers unrivaled exposure, but it also requires navigating complex reputational risks.

5. The Legacy Effect on Local Economies

The so-called "legacy effect" is one of the most contested aspects of hosting the World Cup. Proponents argue that the investments made for the event continue to yield benefits long after the tournament ends. Improved infrastructure, new stadiums, and enhanced international visibility can contribute to long term economic growth. Moreover, the development of sports facilities can foster local sporting culture and community engagement.

Critics, however, highlight that many legacies are less positive and, in some cases, deeply problematic. The most visible example is the phenomenon of so-called "white elephant" stadiums²⁴, massive facilities constructed at great expense for the World Cup that later become underutilized or abandoned altogether. These stadiums require high levels of maintenance and generate limited revenue once the tournament is over, leaving local governments saddled with costly assets that provide little ongoing benefit to communities. In several past host nations, stadiums have become symbols not of progress but of waste and mismanagement, with clear reminders of the short lived nature of megaevent-driven development²⁵. The real question when selecting the host cities FIFA faces is a real debate, local government and host nations usually push for certain cities to get the investment, and FIFA has to deal with the logistics of travelling, structure to receive the teams and guarantee a certain level of experience for the fans.

The financial consequences of these projects often extend beyond the stadiums themselves. Public debt incurred to finance the extensive infrastructure demanded by FIFA such as highways, airports, and urban redevelopment can burden host nations for decades. Taxpayers are left to shoulder the costs of loans and bond issuances that were justified by promises of long-term economic growth, but those promises often fail to materialize. The opportunity cost is significant: funds dedicated to megaevent infrastructure could have been invested in pressing social needs such as education, healthcare, or affordable housing.

For small businesses, the legacy is equally uneven. While there may be a temporary surge in demand during the tournament, the benefits are often fleeting. Multinational corporations and FIFA's official partners dominate the major commercial contracts, from stadium concessions to global advertising campaigns. FIFA's stringent sponsorship and licensing rules frequently limit the ability of local entrepreneurs to capitalize on the event, creating a commercial environment where small vendors are systematically excluded. As a result, the tournament's economic rewards are concentrated among a few powerful actors, while the long-term gains for local businesses remain minimal.

Thus, the legacy of the World Cup is far from uniformly positive²⁶. In many cases, the promised benefits of modernization, job creation, and global visibility are outweighed by long-term financial and social costs. The uneven distribution of these outcomes underscores the tension between the celebratory rhetoric surrounding megaevents and the lived realities of the communities that

²² Graham, Bryan Armen. 2025. A World Cup Preying on Fomo: FIFA's 2026 Ticket Scheme is a Late-Capitalist Hellscape. *The Guardian*, October 11. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/oct/11/fifa-2026-world-cup-tickets-dynamic-pricing-nft-resale>

²³ FIFA. n.d. FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Global Engagement & Audience Report (Executive Summary). <https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/audience-reports/qatar-2022/total-media-engagement>

²⁴ Vickery, Tim. 2014. World Cup 2014: Will Stadiums Become White Elephants? *BBC Sport*, February 17. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/26223651>

²⁵ Catlin, Saylor. 2023. Sport's 'White Elephants.' *McGill Daily*, January 16. <https://www.mcgilldaily.com/2023/01/sports-white-elephants/>

²⁶ Church, Ben. 2023. A Year On from Qatar 2022, What's the Legacy of a World Cup Like No Other? *CNN Sports*, December 18. <https://edition.cnn.com/2023/12/18/sport/world-cup-qatar-2022-legacy-spt-intl>

host them. What is marketed as a legacy of progress can, for many, become a legacy of debt, exclusion, and missed opportunities (Jung 2022) ²⁷.

6. The Aftermath and Impacts on Local Communities

The aftermath of hosting the World Cup often reveals deep tensions between national aspirations and local realities. On the surface, national governments, FIFA, and international corporations may declare the event a resounding success, pointing to global visibility, short-term economic boosts, and the prestige of having staged one of the world's most watched spectacles. Yet beneath this narrative, local communities frequently grapple with a far more sobering reality marked by displacement, debt, and unmet promises²⁸. Families evicted to make way for stadiums or urban redevelopment projects often receive inadequate compensation or relocation support, leading to long-term social and economic disruption. Communities that once expected modernization and new opportunities instead confront higher costs of living and reduced access to affordable housing.

Small vendors also face exclusion from the very celebrations taking place in their own cities. FIFA's strict licensing and sponsorship rules often limit commercial activity in designated zones around stadiums and fan areas to officially sanctioned partners, which are typically large multinational corporations. Local entrepreneurs, who might otherwise benefit from the influx of international visitors, are pushed to the margins, excluded from the prime spaces of consumer activity. This not only denies them the economic opportunities promised by the event but also creates resentment as global brands profit disproportionately at the expense of local participation.

Residents may further find that the highly publicized urban improvements do not translate into long-term affordability or accessibility, because the new transportation lines may connect stadiums and tourist centers but always bypassing working-class neighborhoods. Public spaces redesigned for international visitors may prioritize aesthetics over the daily needs of residents. The result is a profound disconnect between the image of progress projected to the world and the lived experiences of those who must adapt to the post-event landscape.

In sum, the World Cup creates undeniable business opportunities and can temporarily elevate a nation's global standing, but it also leaves behind uneven and contested outcomes. The tension between opportunity and burden reflects the broader contradictions of megaevents as engines of both growth and inequality. For every story of international acclaim or corporate success, there are parallel stories of local communities bearing costs that far outweigh the benefits. These contradictions call into question not whether megaevents produce legacies, but rather whose legacies they serve and at what price they are achieved.

7. Human Rights Risks in Megaevents – Labor Rights and Migrant Workers

One of the most visible and troubling human rights concerns associated with hosting the FIFA World Cup involves the treatment of migrant workers²⁹. The reliance on vast pools of foreign labor to construct stadiums, transportation networks, hotels, and related infrastructure has become a defining feature of modern megaevents. These workers often work under conditions that would likely constitute violations of domestic labor law and international human rights norms³⁰. Common patterns include wage theft, excessive work hours without adequate rest, exposure to unsafe worksites lacking protective equipment, and restrictions on freedom of movement through coercive employment arrangements³¹. In several host nations, sponsorship or visa systems have created near total dependency on employers, preventing workers from changing jobs or leaving the country without permission, conditions that closely resemble forced labor. Such systemic practices raise not only ethical but legal questions about the extent to which both states and FIFA bear responsibility under international law for the exploitation of labor³².

The problem sits at the intersection of state obligations and corporate accountability. Host nations are bound by fundamental principles of international labor law, including those articulated through the International Labor Organization's core conventions on forced labor, association, and the right to just and favorable conditions of work. Yet in many cases, states either fail to implement these standards or selectively enforce them to meet the commercial and political demands of FIFA. The legal argument extends beyond state responsibility: it implicates FIFA as a transnational private regulator that imposes strict contractual conditions on host countries but omits enforceable labor safeguards. By exercising extensive control over the organization, timing, and commercial framework of the event, FIFA effectively participates in the governance structure that permits or perpetuates labor abuses. This raises the question of whether FIFA's conduct could satisfy the emerging doctrine of corporate complicity in human rights violations. Under this framework, an entity that knowingly benefits from or contributes to exploitative practices, even indirectly, may bear shared legal and moral responsibility for the resulting harm.

²⁷ Jung, Hoyoon. 2022. Contested Racial Democracy: The 2014 World Cup, the 2016 Olympics, and the Emergence of Civic Nationalism in Brazil. *Sage Open* 12:1-13. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/21582440221079840>

²⁸ Knijnik, Jorge, and Ramón Spaaij. 2014. Cultural and Political Legacy of the World Cup: Where to Now? *The Conversation*, July 14. <https://theconversation.com/cultural-and-political-legacies-of-the-world-cup-where-to-now-28965>

²⁹ FIFA. 2017. Human Rights Policy. May. <https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/1a876c66a3f0498d/original/kr05dqyhwr1uhqy2lh6r-pdf.pdf>

³⁰ BBC. 2022. World Cup 2022: How Has Qatar Treated Foreign Workers? November 9. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-60867042>

³¹ Amnesty International. 2016. Qatar: Abuse of World Cup Workers Exposed. March 31. <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/qatar-abuse-of-world-cup-workers-exposed>

³² Amnesty International. 2016. The Ugly Side of the Beautiful Game: Exploitation of Migrant Workers on a Qatar 2022 World Cup Site. *Amnesty International*, Index No. MDE 22/3548/2016, March.

The imbalance of power among FIFA, host states, and laborers deepens the legal complexity. National governments, eager to deliver projects on time and maintain global prestige, frequently subordinate domestic labor protections to economic expediency³³. FIFA, operating as a global monopoly over international football, holds the contractual leverage to demand compliance with its operational standards yet largely avoids legal accountability for their consequences. Migrant workers, meanwhile, lack effective representation and access to judicial remedies. The result is a structural vacuum in which no actor assumes full responsibility for upholding basic human rights. The absence of an enforceable transnational mechanism to monitor labor conditions leaves affected workers trapped within a framework that prioritizes profit and efficiency over legality and human dignity.

Legally, the issue compels reconsideration of how international law conceptualizes responsibility in multi-actor contexts. Traditional doctrines that separate state and private obligations are inadequate in governing complex global enterprises such as the World Cup. Modern human rights discourse increasingly recognizes that private entities engaged in activities with transnational reach must respect fundamental labor rights regardless of state enforcement. The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights³⁴ articulate this evolving norm, asserting that corporate actors have an independent duty to avoid contributing to human rights harms. In the case of the World Cup, FIFA's ability to dictate the terms of hosting agreements suggests a corresponding duty to ensure that the rights of workers constructing its facilities are meaningfully protected.

The legal implications extend to remedies and enforcement. Where domestic mechanisms fail, international and regional human rights bodies have limited jurisdiction to compel compliance, and affected workers often lack standing or resources to pursue transnational claims. This deficiency underscores the need for binding contractual clauses and monitoring mechanisms embedded within host agreements. A legally enforceable framework that conditions FIFA's approval of projects on verified compliance with labor standards could create accountability where moral appeals alone have failed.

In conclusion, the systemic exploitation of migrant workers in World Cup host countries reveals the limitations of existing legal frameworks governing megaevents. The issue is not simply moral but structural and legal, implicating both sovereign and private actors in a web of shared responsibility. Until enforceable labor protections and access to remedies are integrated into the legal architecture of the World Cup, the tournament will continue to embody a paradox: a celebration of global unity built upon practices that violate the very principles of human rights it purports to inspire.

8. Housing and Displacement

Housing rights represent another critical dimension of the legal and human rights challenges that emerge when nations prepare to host the FIFA World Cup. The transformation of entire cities into global showcases of modernity, infrastructure, and efficiency is often portrayed as a symbol of national progress, yet these projects carry profound implications for the right to adequate housing. Massive urban redevelopment, encompassing stadiums, highways, transportation hubs, hotels, and entertainment zones frequently comes at the direct expense of low-income communities. Legally, this pattern of forced eviction, displacement, and speculative rent inflation raises the question of whether host governments violate both their domestic constitutional obligations and their international commitments to protect the housing rights of their citizens.

The consequences of these displacements extend far beyond individual households. Forced relocation disrupts social networks, community cohesion, and access to schools, health care, and employment, making families uprooted for the sake of new roads, temporary structures for the event, or hotels often find themselves in peripheral areas with inferior public services, leading to long-term social and economic marginalization. This dynamic deepens pre-existing inequalities, as the most vulnerable populations are forced to sacrifice stability so that governments and businesses can meet FIFA's demands for world-class facilities.

Under the legal framework of international human rights law, the right to adequate housing is not merely aspirational; it is a binding obligation. States that host the World Cup are often parties to instruments that articulate this right, which encompasses security of tenure, protection from forced eviction, and access to essential services. When governments authorize evictions without due process or adequate compensation to meet FIFA's infrastructural demands, they risk breaching these duties. The issue extends beyond procedural fairness: it implicates the principle of proportionality, requiring that state measures interfering with individual rights pursue a legitimate aim, use the least restrictive means, and ensure that the social cost does not outweigh the public benefit. In the context of megaevents, however, this balance is routinely distorted. Authorities justify sweeping redevelopment on grounds of modernization and global visibility, while the social and economic burden falls disproportionately on the poor, who are least equipped to challenge such actions legally or politically³⁵.

The domestic legal implications are equally significant. Most host countries possess constitutional or statutory protections against arbitrary expropriation and guarantee compensation for property taken for public purposes. Yet, in practice, many displacements connected to the World Cup occur through administrative decrees or informal coercion, circumventing judicial oversight. Residents of informal settlements, those living without formal title but often with long-standing occupancy rights, are especially vulnerable because domestic property regimes tend to exclude them from legal recognition. Their lack of formal tenure provides governments with a pretext to clear entire neighborhoods under the guise of urban beautification, despite the substantive human rights principle that tenure insecurity should not justify homelessness or deprivation. The resulting legal paradox is striking projects

³³ Pattison, Pete, and Niamh McIntyre. 2021. Revealed: 6,500 Migrant Workers Have Died in Qatar since World Cup Awarded. *The Guardian*, February 23. <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2021/feb/23/revealed-migrant-worker-deaths-qatar-fifa-world-cup-2022>

³⁴ UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. n.d. Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: Implementing the United Nations 'Protect, Respect and Remedy' Framework. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/720245?ln=es&v=pdf>

³⁵ Graeff, Billy, and Richard Giulianotti. 2025. Global Sport Mega-Events and Local Community Impacts: The Case of Housing and Redevelopment in Porto Alegre at the 2014 Men's World Cup Finals in Brazil." *Sport in Society* 28: 1197. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2024.2424562>

undertaken in the name of national advancement frequently rely on the systematic weakening of the rule of law and the selective suspension of rights.

From a broader perspective, the legal debate surrounding forced evictions in megaevents also touches on the state's duty to ensure equality and non-discrimination. When redevelopment primarily benefits private investors, international sponsors, and middle-class consumers while displacing marginalized populations, the state's role shifts from guarantor of rights to facilitator of inequality. Courts in various jurisdictions have grappled with whether such actions constitute indirect discrimination, policies that appear neutral but disproportionately harm specific social groups. In the case of World Cup host cities, urban clearance projects often target informal or minority communities, revealing a pattern of structural bias that contradicts the principles of equal protection enshrined in both domestic constitutions and international covenants.³⁶

At a normative level, the legal significance of these displacements extends beyond property law. Housing is not simply a commodity but a foundation of human dignity, social stability, and participation in civic life. When governments privilege global image over the lived realities of their people, they erode the legitimacy of their own democratic institutions, making FIFA's role in this process not to be ignored. By conditioning host selection on ambitious infrastructure requirements without parallel human rights safeguards, FIFA indirectly incentivizes policies that prioritize aesthetics and efficiency over legality inclusion.

The challenge, therefore, is to construct a legal framework that reconciles urban development with the protection of housing rights. This requires enforceable provisions in host city contracts mandating compliance with human rights standards, transparent relocation procedures, and independent oversight mechanisms capable of holding both states and private actors accountable. Without such safeguards, the law remains subordinate to spectacle, and the notion of progress becomes inseparable from exclusion.

In conclusion, the widespread displacement associated with World Cup preparations reveals that megaevent-driven urban transformation often serves as a façade for inequality rather than an instrument of inclusive development. Legally, it exposes the tension between state sovereignty, private influence, and the fundamental right to housing. The forced eviction of marginalized communities to make room for global celebration stands as a stark reminder that modernization without legal accountability undermines both the rule of law and the moral legitimacy of the event itself. Unless future tournaments embed binding protections within their legal frameworks, the World Cup will continue to symbolize not only unity and achievement but also the systematic erasure of the very people it claims to inspire.

9. Policing and Protest Rights

The hosting of the FIFA World Cup places exceptional strain on fundamental civil liberties, particularly the rights to protest and freedom of assembly³⁷. These rights form the cornerstone of participatory democracy and are protected in nearly every constitutional system as well as under international law. In the context of megaevents, they are often treated as negotiable. In preparation for the tournament, host governments routinely adopt extraordinary policing and surveillance measures under the guise of ensuring public order and security. These policies, ranging from heightened surveillance technology and militarized policing to blanket restrictions on demonstrations are legally justified as temporary and necessary responses to the demands of global visibility³⁸. However, they frequently exceed legitimate security objectives and serve a broader political function: the preservation of an idealized national image for the global audience. The central question is whether such restrictions, well-intentioned in rhetoric, can be reconciled with the constitutional and international guarantees designed to protect dissent and democratic participation.

The suppression of protest is particularly troubling given that megaevents frequently provoke genuine grievances. Communities affected by displacement, corruption, wage theft, or the misuse of public funds often turn to protest as their primary means of expressing dissatisfaction. In Brazil's 2014 World Cup, for example, tens of thousands took to the streets to object to billions spent on stadiums while schools and hospitals remained underfunded³⁹. The government's response was marked by militarized policing, tear gas, and mass arrests, which drew criticism from international observers. Similarly, in South Africa 2010 World Cup, workers and informal traders protesting poor labor conditions and exclusion from economic opportunities were met with harsh crackdowns designed to ensure that visitors would not witness unrest⁴⁰. Even in Russia's 2018 World Cup, strict laws on assembly and sweeping surveillance powers limited the ability of citizens to gather or voice dissenting opinions, reflecting a broader pattern of using megaevents to legitimize authoritarian practices.

Those rights to protest and freedom of assembly are not absolute but subject to narrowly tailored limitations. International human rights law permits restrictions only when they are lawful, necessary in a democratic society, and proportionate to a legitimate aim. The burden lies with the state to demonstrate that limitations on these freedoms serve genuine security needs rather than political convenience. During the World Cup, this burden is often neglected. Instead, restrictions are applied broadly, frequently without individualized justification, and implemented through emergency decrees or special security laws that bypass ordinary procedural safeguards. The principle of proportionality, a foundational concept in both international and constitutional jurisprudence, is often violated when governments respond to peaceful dissent with militarized force or when surveillance powers are exercised without judicial oversight. In such circumstances, the law becomes a tool of suppression rather than protection, eroding

³⁶ Misoczky de Oliveira, Clarice, and Maria Ceci Misoczky. 2014. Urban Entrepreneurialism in FIFA World Cup Host Cities: The Case of Porto Alegre. *UFBA*, September 30. <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/4006/400647450007/html/>

³⁷ Davies, Wyre. 2014. Brazilian Anti-World Cup Protests Hit São Paulo and Rio. *BBC*, May 16. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27423404>

³⁸ Amnesty International. 2025. Russia 2018: Why Human Rights Matter at the World Cup. April 1. <https://www.amnesty.org.uk/russia-2018-why-human-rights-matter-world-cup>

³⁹ Watts, Jonathan. 2014. Anti-World Cup Protests across Brazil. *The Guardian*, May 16. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/16/anti-world-cup-protests-across-brazil>

⁴⁰ Hytner, David. 2010. World Cup 2010: Riot Police Break Up Steward's Protest. *The Guardian*, June 14. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2010/jun/14/world-cup-2010-riot-stewards>

the very democratic values it is meant to uphold. The tension between the state's duty to maintain security and the individual's right to protest reflects a deeper legal dilemma: how to balance collective safety against political freedom (Jain 2023)⁴¹ in moments of heightened global scrutiny. Constitutional systems generally require that any restriction on assembly must be content-neutral and time-bound, ensuring that expression critical of government policy receives the same protection as expression in its support, but in the context of the World Cup, enforcement of these principles often collapses under political pressure. Host governments, driven by the desire to present a polished international image, engage in what may be termed "preventive repression", the preemptive silencing of dissent before it can materialize. Such actions amount to an abuse of emergency powers, transforming temporary security measures into mechanisms of political control⁴². The resulting legal precedent is dangerous: the normalization of extraordinary policing undermines the rule of law and blurs the boundary between exceptional and ordinary governance.

As the suppression of protest amplifies rather than mitigates social unrest. From a normative perspective, this contradiction exposes the fragility of human rights frameworks when confronted by the political and commercial imperatives of global megaevents. The right to protest, intended to serve as a mechanism of accountability, is transformed into a casualty of public relations management.

In conclusion, the policing of protest during the World Cup illustrates how the law can be manipulated to prioritize image over justice. The invocation of security to silence dissent undermines the core democratic principles embedded in both constitutional and international law. When governments, in collaboration with powerful private actors such as FIFA, impose sweeping restrictions on civil liberties to preserve spectacle, they convert sport from a space of unity into a vehicle of control. The true legacy of such practices is not measured in trophies or infrastructure but in the lasting damage to civic freedom and the rule of law. Without legal reforms that explicitly safeguard protest rights in the context of megaevents, the World Cup risks becoming an enduring symbol of how easily states can trade liberty for visibility under the banner of global celebration.

10. Legal and Contractual Frameworks

The legal architecture underpinning the FIFA World Cup extends beyond sports governance and into the realm of contractual regulation. Host city agreements, sponsorship contracts, and ancillary commercial arrangements define not only the rights of FIFA and multinational sponsors but also the obligations of host governments toward their populations⁴³. The inclusion and design of specific contractual clauses, particularly human rights provisions, force majeure protections, morals clauses, and material adverse effect clauses can significantly influence whether the tournament's legacy aligns with the principles of fairness, accountability, and sustainability⁴⁴. Properly drafted, these clauses can transform the World Cup from a source of controversy into an instrument of lawful and inclusive development.

Human rights clauses in host city contracts represent the most direct mechanism for aligning megaevent governance with the principles of international law. Historically, FIFA's contracts have prioritized commercial and branding protections over social obligations. However, recent advocacy from civil society and international organizations has led to the gradual inclusion of human rights language, signaling an acknowledgment that legal obligations extend beyond the pitch⁴⁵. A well-drafted human rights clause could require the host government to comply with international labor standards, environmental regulations, and non-discrimination commitments throughout the planning and execution of the event. For local governments, such clauses provide both a shield and a tool. As a shield, they establish clear obligations that can be invoked to resist pressure from FIFA or contractors to accelerate projects at the expense of human rights protections. As a tool, they create a contractual mandate for transparency, allowing local authorities to demand that private developers, suppliers, and subcontractors adhere to recognized standards of fair labor and environmental compliance.

In practice, a local government could utilize a human rights clause to ensure that public procurement contracts for stadiums or transport infrastructure include fair wage requirements and safe working conditions for laborers, most of whom are often temporary or migrant workers. Similarly, small local businesses could rely on the same contractual framework to challenge exclusionary practices imposed by FIFA's commercial zoning rules. A clause mandating equitable participation or protection from economic displacement could empower local vendors to assert their right to operate within designated fan zones or markets, ensuring they are not overshadowed by multinational sponsors. The clause could also establish an alternative dispute resolution mechanism, such as independent arbitration or an ombudsman, that provides accessible redress for individuals or small enterprises affected by breaches. Such provisions would operationalize human rights principles, transforming them from abstract commitments into enforceable obligations that directly benefit host communities.

⁴¹ Jain, Shubhan. 2023. Resistance and Reform as Responses to Human Rights Criticism: Relativism at FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022. *German Law Journal* 24(9):1691-1702. <https://doi.org/10.1017/glj.2023.119>

⁴² Villah Dan-Azumi, David. n.d. "Security in Sports Mega Events and the Implications for Human Rights: The Case of the US, 2026 FIFA World Cup. *Event Rights*. <https://eventrights.net/2023/10/26/security-in-sports-mega-events-and-the-implications-for-human-rights-the-case-of-the-us-2026-fifa-world-cup/>

⁴³ Cremaschi, Maria L. n.d. "Special Regulations for the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022." *Spanish Business Council*. <https://www.spanishbusinesscouncil.ae/normativa-legal-para-fifa-world-cup/>

⁴⁴ Clarke, Mark, Jonathan Brierley, and Conor Mc Stravick. 2025. Evidencing Force Majeure, Material Adverse Change and Changed Circumstances. *Global Arbitration Review*, September 9. <https://globalarbitrationreview.com/guide/the-guide-evidence-in-international-arbitration/3rd-edition/article/evidencing-force-majeure-material-adverse-change-and-changed-circumstances>

⁴⁵ Heerd, Daniela, and Shubhan Jain. n.d. Designing Megaevents That Do Not Violate Human Rights. *CEF*. <https://www.eventsandfestivals.org/designing-mega-events-that-do-not-violate-human-rights>

The effectiveness of these clauses, however, depends not merely on their inclusion but on their enforceability⁴⁶. Without independent monitoring and defined penalties for non-compliance, even the most comprehensive human rights clause risks becoming a symbolic gesture. Therefore, legal drafting must include mechanisms for oversight, periodic reporting, and public accountability. Enforcement can also be incentivized through financial structures, for example, conditioning a portion of FIFA's disbursements or corporate sponsorship revenues on demonstrable adherence to labor and human rights standards. Through these methods, local governments and small businesses are not passive observers but active beneficiaries of the legal framework.

Force majeure, morals, and material adverse effect (MAE) clauses, while traditionally viewed as corporate risk management tools, can also serve as instruments of accountability and protection for local stakeholders when drafted with foresight. A force majeure clause typically excuses non-performance due to unforeseen events such as natural disasters, pandemics, or political unrest. For local governments, an expanded force majeure provision could protect against penalties when delays or disruptions arise from implementing lawful human rights measures, for instance, temporarily halting construction to investigate labor abuses or environmental violations. In this sense, the clause can empower governments to act in compliance with their human rights obligations without fear of breaching their contractual commitments to FIFA or its partners.

For small local businesses, similar protections could ensure flexibility and fairness in their own agreements with event organizers or sponsors. If a vendor's operations are disrupted due to protest activity, public health measures, or other circumstances beyond their control, a force majeure clause could safeguard them from financial liability or contract termination. Properly applied, this clause transforms from a corporate shield into a community safeguard, ensuring that unforeseen disruptions do not disproportionately burden smaller economic actors.

Morals clauses introduce a different dimension of accountability. These provisions allow contracting parties, often sponsors or broadcasters, to terminate or suspend their involvement if the event becomes tainted by scandal, corruption, or human rights abuses. From the perspective of local governance, a well drafted morals clause could be used proactively: it can empower cities to demand ethical conduct from FIFA and its contractors by linking continued cooperation to the observance of integrity and transparency standards. For example, a local government could negotiate the right to suspend cooperation if FIFA or a major sponsor is credibly accused of labor exploitation or environmental harm. This shifts the moral responsibility from abstract rhetoric to contractual leverage. In addition, morals clauses tied to the protection of workers or environmental sustainability can generate positive incentives for local enterprises that prioritize compliance and community welfare, rewarding responsible business practices within the broader economic network.

Material adverse effect clauses, known as MAE, provide another potential avenue for promoting equity and resilience. These provisions allow parties to renegotiate or terminate agreements when unexpected changes significantly alter the value or feasibility of a contract, their application in the World Cup context could extend to social and economic conditions. For instance, if widespread displacement or labor unrest leads to public backlash or operational obstacles, local governments could invoke an MAE clause to renegotiate terms with FIFA or contractors, ensuring that resources are redirected toward remediation and community support. For small businesses, an MAE clause could mitigate losses resulting from policy shifts or market disruptions linked to the event, such as abrupt zoning changes or restrictions on commercial activity by granting a right to compensation or contract modification.

Together, these clauses illustrate how private legal instruments can be repurposed to advance public interests. Their potential lies not in their traditional corporate functions but in their adaptability as tools of local empowerment. Each clause, when framed through a rights-based lens, can protect local economies, promote accountability, and uphold the social contract between host governments and their citizens.

Finally, the question of remedies remains crucial. Victims of rights violations arising from the World Cup whether displaced residents, exploited workers, or excluded entrepreneurs face significant legal obstacles. Domestic remedies may be inaccessible due to political interference or procedural barriers, while international mechanisms, though symbolically powerful, often lack enforcement capacity in each host country. Contracts must embed accessible grievance procedures and independent review mechanisms capable of providing timely relief. Civil society participation should be institutionalized within these frameworks, ensuring transparency and inclusivity. Moreover, international sports law bodies could condition event hosting rights on demonstrable compliance with human rights commitments, thereby aligning commercial incentives with legal responsibility.

In conclusion, the integration of human rights clauses, force majeure provisions, morals clauses, and MAE clauses into the legal framework of the FIFA World Cup represents not merely a contractual innovation but a shift in governance philosophy. Each clause, if drafted and enforced with precision, can function as a bridge between global commerce and local justice. For governments, they offer a means to uphold sovereignty and protect citizens without jeopardizing participation in the global event. For small businesses, they provide tools to safeguard operations, demand fairness, and share in the tournament's economic opportunities. Ultimately, transforming these contractual instruments into vehicles of accountability is essential to ensuring that the World Cup's legal legacy reflects not exploitation and exclusion, but equity, integrity, and the rule of law.⁴⁷

11. Corporate Responsibility and Human Rights Due Diligence

The corporate ecosystem surrounding the FIFA World Cup plays an indispensable role in both its success and its controversy. Sponsors, broadcasters, and corporate partners collectively provide the financial infrastructure that sustains the tournament's global reach. Their investments enable the construction of venues, the execution of large-scale marketing campaigns, and the broadcasting that brings the event into billions of homes worldwide (Rook, Shubham, and Daniela 2023). Under emerging norms of international business and human rights law, corporations that profit from megaevents must ensure that their involvement neither contributes to

⁴⁶ Biscoe, Alisson. 2024. What Is the Human Rights Playbook. *Centre for Sports & Human Rights*, June 4. <https://www.sporhumanrights.org/humanrightsplaybook>

⁴⁷ Moore, Andrew. 2025. FIFA World Cup: Can It Leave behind a Positive and Lasting Human Rights Legacy? *NC State University*, July 29. <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2025/07/fifa-world-cup-human-rights-legacy/>

nor benefits from human rights violations. The question is no longer whether private actors have a responsibility, but how far that responsibility extends and what mechanisms are necessary to enforce it.

Sponsors in particular face reputational risks if they are seen as complicit in labor exploitation, displacement, or suppression of dissent. Broadcasters also play a role in shaping public perception, as their coverage can either highlight or obscure human rights concerns. Corporate partners must therefore adopt proactive strategies for monitoring, advocacy, and engagement with stakeholders.

As corporate actors engaged in the World Cup occupy a unique position: they are not formal parties to the host government agreements yet exercise significant influence over both the event's structure and its public legitimacy. Sponsors face increasing exposure under the doctrine of corporate complicity, which extends liability to entities that knowingly contribute to or benefit from violations of fundamental rights. When corporations continue to fund or promote an event amid credible reports of human rights violations they risk being viewed as complicit in those abuses. This complicity can carry not only reputational consequences but potential legal ones under national laws that incorporate human rights standards into corporate governance. Broadcasters, too, bear responsibility beyond neutrality. By controlling how the event is represented to the global public, they can either amplify awareness of rights issues or obscure them through selective coverage. In doing so, they shape not only perception but accountability itself.

The proactive fulfillment of corporate responsibility thus demands more than symbolic adherence to ethical codes. Companies must implement operational human rights due diligence, systematic processes that identify, prevent, and mitigate potential harms throughout their involvement in the event. This duty requires assessing the human rights risks associated with supply chains, sponsorship arrangements, and local partnerships. For instance, a sponsor sourcing material for stadium construction must ensure that contractors comply with fair labor standards. A broadcaster negotiating media rights in host countries with restrictive censorship laws must consider whether its presence reinforces or challenges the suppression of free expression. Through these examples, it becomes clear that corporate responsibility in the context of the World Cup extends beyond compliance, but also encompasses a duty to use influence constructively to promote reform.

The United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs) provide the foundational framework for understanding these obligations. Adopted as a global standard for corporate accountability, the UNGPs rest on three interrelated pillars: the duty of states to protect human rights, the responsibility of businesses to respect human rights, and the necessity of access to remedy for victims of abuse. Applying these principles to the World Cup underscores a shared responsibility between states and corporations (Sethi 2014). While host governments must ensure adequate regulation and enforcement, corporate partners must exercise human rights due diligence throughout the lifecycle of the event. This involves not only identifying risks but also engaging directly with affected communities, civil society, and local suppliers to develop preventive measures. In legal terms, due diligence has evolved from a voluntary ethical practice into an emerging duty of care, increasingly codified in domestic legislation, such as mandatory corporate sustainability laws in Europe.

Applying these principles to the World Cup means that sponsors and partners must go beyond symbolic statements and implement robust due diligence processes. This involves assessing risks, engaging with stakeholders, and addressing harms when they occur. The UNGPs provide a roadmap for integrating human rights into the business strategies that drive megaevents. In other words, actually spending money, time and personal dedicated for this.

To operationalize the UNGPs in the context of megaevents, corporate partners can integrate human rights impact assessments into their project planning, condition sponsorship agreements on compliance with labor and environmental standards and establish transparent reporting mechanisms⁴⁸. These actions create a form of contractual governance where corporate accountability complements state responsibility. Moreover, incorporating human rights metrics into corporate performance indicators aligns ethical conduct with business interests, reducing litigation and reputational risks while enhancing long-term sustainability. The shift from passive compliance to active stewardship reflects the broader transformation of corporate law: the recognition that profitability and human dignity are not mutually exclusive but interdependent in the globalized economy.

12. Case Studies

Case studies from recent tournaments highlight both progress and persistent shortcomings in this regard. In the lead-up to Qatar's 2022 World Cup, several multinational sponsors faced public pressure to address reports of labor exploitation and heat-related worker deaths. Some engaged in private dialogue with FIFA and host authorities, advocating for improved worker welfare standards. Others, however, chose silence, prioritizing market access and brand exposure over moral responsibility. In contrast, during Brazil's 2014 tournament, certain sponsors publicly acknowledged the legitimacy of protest movements against government overspending, signaling a nascent recognition that brand integrity is inseparable from human rights credibility. These examples reveal that reputational risk, when coupled with public scrutiny, can serve as an informal enforcement mechanism, one that compels corporations to act where formal law remains weak. Yet reliance on reputational incentives alone is insufficient. Without legal frameworks mandating transparency, even the most well-intentioned corporate actors may retreat to minimal compliance when faced with financial or political pressures.

A common concern among investors and policymakers is that heightened human rights regulation could deter private investment. However, evidence suggests the opposite: clear and enforceable standards reduce uncertainty, foster investor confidence, and create level playing fields. Transparent bidding processes, independent oversight bodies, and binding contractual clauses incorporating human rights safeguards can ensure that participation in the World Cup remains both profitable and principled. By embedding accountability within the governance structure of the event, states and corporations can prevent the recurring cycle of exploitation and scandal that has marred past tournaments.

⁴⁸ Holmes, John. 2022. Qatar: Rights Abuses Stain FIFA World Cup. *Human Rights Watch*, November 14. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2022/11/14/qatar-rights-abuses-stain-fifa-world-cup>

13. The Role of Civil Society, Media, and International Organizations

Civil society organizations play a critical role in holding both governments and corporations accountable. Through research, advocacy, and grassroots mobilization, they expose abuses and demand reforms. Media coverage amplifies these efforts by bringing human rights issues into global consciousness. International organizations, including human rights bodies and sporting federations, add further legitimacy to these concerns.

Practical strategies include mandating that all public contracts related to the World Cup undergo human rights impact assessments, requiring FIFA to publish compliance reports verified by third-party auditors, and establishing grievance mechanisms accessible to workers, residents, and small businesses. Corporate sponsors can further reinforce these measures by conditioning their participation on adherence to specific human rights benchmarks. For local economies, these mechanisms introduce much-needed predictability: businesses can operate under clear legal frameworks, investors can assess risk accurately, and affected communities can access remedies without relying on political discretion. The law thus becomes not a constraint on commerce but a guarantor of its legitimacy.

Together, these actors form a counterbalance to the powerful commercial interests driving the World Cup. Their involvement ensures that rights are not marginalized in the pursuit of profit.

14. The Debate on Sponsors: Withdraw or Push for Change

A central debate is whether sponsors should withdraw from the World Cup when credible abuses emerge or whether they should remain engaged and push for change. Withdrawal may send a powerful message but risks abandoning victims and ceding influence. Continued engagement, if coupled with strong advocacy and conditionality, can create pressure for reform⁴⁹.

The choice ultimately reflects broader questions about the role of business in society. Sponsors must weigh their responsibilities not only to shareholders but also to stakeholders affected by their decisions. The debate illustrates the complex interplay between commerce, ethics, and global sport.

Ultimately, the reconciliation of business and human rights in the context of the FIFA World Cup requires a shift in how both states and corporations understand responsibility. Economic growth and human rights protection are not opposing goals but two sides of the same legal and moral coin. By institutionalizing accountability, the World Cup can evolve from a recurring source of controversy into a model of ethical globalization, into an event that celebrates not only athletic excellence but also the shared values of justice and respect.

15. Conclusion

The FIFA World Cup embodies both the promise and the peril of megaevents. As the world's most visible sporting tournament, it generates extraordinary business opportunities while also posing profound human rights challenges. The tension between profit and rights is not incidental; it is central to the structure of the event. Standardized global frameworks for human rights in megaevents are urgently needed, they could frame and should integrate contractual obligations, corporate due diligence, and enforceable monitoring mechanisms. The goal is not to deter investment but to ensure that investment aligns with respect for human dignity. At the same time, the World Cup offers a unique opportunity for businesses to lead in rights-respecting practices, they can transform the narrative of megaevents by embracing transparency, accountability, and ethical responsibility instead of being complicit in abuses, they can become catalysts for positive change targeting economic growth with human rights protection, future hosts can truly embody the spirit of global unity that the tournament aspires to represent. The FIFA World Cup epitomizes the paradox of modern globalization: a single event capable of uniting billions through sport while simultaneously exposing the fault lines of inequality, exploitation, and governance failure. This paper has explored how the tournament's complex legal architecture spanning state contracts, corporate sponsorships, and transnational human rights norms creates both extraordinary opportunities and profound responsibilities, for all of those involved directly and indirectly. The analysis of labor rights reveals how the promise of progress can coexist with systemic abuse when enforcement mechanisms are weak and accountability diffuse. The discussion of housing and displacement illustrates how constitutional and international guarantees can be undermined by the drive for spectacle. The examination of protest rights demonstrates the fragility of civil liberties when image management eclipses democratic participation, lastly the study of contractual mechanisms, from human rights clauses to morals and material adverse effect provisions, shows that private law, when properly drafted and enforced, can serve as a powerful vehicle for public justice and enforceability of rights. The path forward demands a shift. Hosting the World Cup should no longer be viewed solely as an exercise in economic ambition or global prestige. It must be treated as a legal and moral undertaking that tests a nation's commitment to equality, transparency, and the rule of law. By embedding human rights protections, enforceable contractual clauses, and corporate due diligence obligations into the fabric of event governance, FIFA can transform the World Cup into a genuine platform for ethical globalization. Only then can the tournament's enduring legacy reflect not the exclusion and exploitation of the vulnerable, but the realization of a more equitable and dignified vision of global sport.

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⁴⁹ Gregory, Sean. 2015. Major FIFA Sponsors Don't Want to Talk about Qatar, Either. *TIME*, May 29. <https://time.com/3900357/fifa-sponsors-coke-visa-adidas>

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