

The Power Play: Assessing the Impact of Hosting Global Sporting Events

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Abstract

Background: Nations increasingly utilize international sporting events as tools for enhancing their global influence, yet the relationship between hosting costs and diplomatic benefits remains understudied. Previous research has focused primarily on economic impacts while giving limited attention to broader strategic outcomes. **Aim:** Kelly Fong’s research paper “The Power Play: Assessing the Impact of Hosting Global Sporting Events” examines how host nations leverage mega sporting events to enhance their global standing, analyzing the gap between anticipated outcomes and actual results through Steven Lukes’ three dimensions of power framework. **Methods:** The research employs a mixed-methods approach analyzing four key indicators: 1) image enhancement, using case studies of the 2022 Qatar World Cup and 2018 Russia World Cup; 2) social movement mobilization; 3) diplomatic relationship development; and 4) cybersecurity challenge management, with specific focus on the 2024 Paris Olympics preparations. **Results:** While direct economic benefits prove limited, the analysis reveals that strategic hosting of global sporting events yields significant soft power gains. Host nations demonstrate enhanced diplomatic leverage, though outcomes vary based on pre-existing international relationships and execution effectiveness. Social movements emerge as both challenges and opportunities, while cybersecurity concerns represent an emerging critical factor in event management. **Conclusion:** The findings suggest that mega sporting events serve as effective tools for diplomatic influence when properly leveraged, despite their substantial costs. This research provides a framework for understanding how nations can optimize their hosting strategies to achieve strategic diplomatic objectives while managing associated risks and challenges.

Keywords

Global Sporting Events, Soft Power, Diplomatic Relations, Economic Impact, Social Movements, Image Enhancement, Cybersecurity Challenges, Olympics, FIFA World Cup, Power Dynamics, Cultural Identity, Tourism

Development, Human Rights Advocacy, International Relations, Event Lifecycle, Public Perception

1. Introduction

In recent years, global sporting events have gained immense popularity among nations. From the Olympic Games to the FIFA World Cup, hosting these events has become increasingly popular for countries seeking economic growth, enhanced visibility, and improved infrastructure. In total, the life cycle of a major sporting event can span up to seven to ten years as it incorporates several key phases: the vision and concept, bidding, planning, sourcing and construction, delivery and hosting, and evaluation and legacy. The bidding process for hosting major events, such as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympics, typically begins seven to eight years before the event takes place.

Despite the lengthy preparation required, countries often view these global sporting events as golden opportunities to showcase their unique culture, attract tourism, and promote national pride and international recognition. However, the reality of hosting these large-scale events is not as straightforward or simplistic. In fact, it is often complicated by a myriad of challenges, including financial costs, heightened cyber threats, and the potential for significant negative social impacts on host communities.

This raises a critical question: What are the perceived benefits and actual outcomes for nations hosting major international sporting events?

This paper aims to explore the discrepancies between the anticipated benefits and the real consequences experienced by host nations through a series of indicators. Ultimately, this paper reveals the complexities and implications of such ambitious decisions, leading us to wonder, is hosting global sporting events truly worth it?

From a strictly financial perspective, hosting global sporting events might not make sense. However, if done correctly, these events can increase the amount of power a country has, allowing it to project a positive image on the global stage and improving a nation's international standing and credibility.

2. What Is Power?

Before diving into the cost-benefit analysis, it is essential to explore the multifaceted concept of power, which extends beyond simple notions of control and authority. Steven Lukes, a British political and social theorist, provides a nuanced framework for understanding power through his theory of the "Three Faces of Power," articulated in his work, *Power: A Radical View* (1974). This theory categorizes power into three distinct dimensions: decision-making power, non-decision-making power, and ideological power.

These definitions are straightforward. Decision-making power is the most overt

form of power and is often the most recognized in political and social contexts. It refers to the ability of individuals or groups to make choices that directly affect outcomes. This type of power is exercised in formal settings, such as legislative bodies, corporate boardrooms, or community organizations, where decisions are made that can lead to tangible results. For instance, a government may decide to allocate funds for public health initiatives, thereby directly influencing the health outcomes of its citizens. This form of power is often associated with accountability and transparency, as decisions are typically made in public forums where stakeholders can observe and respond.

Non-decision-making power, on the other hand, operates in more subtle ways. It involves the ability to influence the agenda, shaping what issues are considered and which are sidelined. This form of power is less visible but equally significant, as it sets the parameters within which decision-making occurs. For example, a powerful interest group may lobby to ensure that certain topics are not discussed in political debates, effectively controlling the narrative and limiting public discourse. This power can manifest in various forms, such as media influence, strategic framing of issues, or the ability to mobilize resources to support or oppose specific agendas.

The third dimension, ideological power, encompasses the ability to shape beliefs, values, and perceptions. This form of power is deeply embedded in culture and societal norms, influencing how individuals and groups understand their world and their place within it. Ideological power can be exerted through education, media, religion, and other social institutions that propagate specific ideologies. For instance, nations often engage in soft power strategies, such as hosting major sporting events, to project a favorable image and influence global perceptions. This not only enhances their ideological standing but also fosters a sense of national pride and unity among citizens.

When nations host major sporting events, they often aim to harness both ideological and economic power. The strategic use of soft power through sports can significantly enhance a country's international reputation, allowing it to present a positive image on the global stage. This approach not only improves a nation's standing, but also contributes to its credibility and influence in international relations.

Beyond ideological implications, hosting sporting events generates substantial economic power. These events stimulate local economies by boosting tourism, creating jobs, and improving infrastructure. The influx of visitors leads to increased spending in various sectors, from hospitality to retail, contributing to long-term economic benefits. For example, cities that host the Olympics often experience significant investments in infrastructure, which can yield returns long after the event concludes.

3. History of Global Sporting Events

The concept of sporting events is not new: it has existed since prehistoric times.

Early humans engaged in physical activities that were essential for survival, such as running and wrestling. As societies evolved, these activities became more structured. Ancient civilizations, notably in Greece, established organized competitions. The Olympic Games, first held in Olympia around 776 BC, were among the most prestigious athletic events of the ancient world, fostering camaraderie among Greek city-states and promoting physical prowess and cultural exchange (Alimo, 2023).

The modern era of international sporting events can be traced back to the late 19th century with the revival of the Olympic Games. First held in 1896 in Athens, Greece, the Olympic Games were conceived as a means to promote sports participation and encourage a sense of national identity and pride among the participating countries. The founding father of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, envisioned the Games as a celebration of athletic excellence that would transcend political boundaries and foster international cooperation and understanding (Evans, 2024). Initially, the Games featured 14 nations and attracted about 50,000 spectators. Over the years, the Olympics has expanded significantly, with the Paris 2024 Games hosting athletes from 206 nations and attracting millions of viewers globally (Reilly, 2024). These immense statistics demonstrate how much global sporting events have grown over the years and why they are being increasingly intertwined with international relations.

As these events have grown in scale and prestige, recent decades have seen a notable trend where authoritarian regimes show significantly greater readiness for massive investment to host major sports events. This is the emerging pattern behind recent host selections: Qatar's \$220 billion investment in the 2022 World Cup, Russia hosting the 2018 World Cup, China hosting the 2008 and 2022 Olympics, and Saudi Arabia aggressively pursuing various sporting events, including the 2034 World Cup bid. Democratic countries also more frequently encounter greater public scrutiny of the costs, with active citizens and media questioning the huge public investment. For instance, several major democratic cities have withdrawn their bids to host the Olympics in 2022 and 2024 due to civic uproar over costs that include Boston, Hamburg, and Rome (Kassens-Noor & John Laueremann, 2024). The authoritarian government, however, can commit vast amounts of resources with fewer changes occurring accountability or domestic resistance. These events are seen by the regimes as opportunities to flex national muscles and, therefore, legitimize their governance on the international scene; hence, high costs are strategic investments in international prestige, rather than primarily economic ventures.

This shift in hosting patterns reflects a broader evolution of how the Olympic Games and other major sporting events have been utilized throughout history. In the decades that followed, the Olympic Games continued to evolve, growing in scale and global influence. Subsequent host cities began to view the Olympics as an opportunity to showcase their nation's cultural heritage, technological prowess, and economic might to a worldwide audience (McBride, Berman, & Manno,

2024). The 1936 Berlin Olympics, for example, were used by the Nazi regime to promote an image of Aryan supremacy, illustrating how political agendas could intertwine with sporting events (Rowe). This politicization of sports has continued, with nations often using these platforms to assert dominance and project soft power. Major sporting events now serve as critical tools for enhancing a country's global standing, with countries competing fiercely to host events like the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

The 20th century marked a significant transformation in the nature of sports. The rise of professional leagues and the commercialization of sports led to an explosion in global participation and viewership. Events like the FIFA World Cup and the Olympics became not just athletic competitions but also major entertainment spectacles, generating substantial economic benefits. The global sports market, which was valued at approximately \$487 billion in 2022, is projected to grow to over \$623 billion by 2027, reflecting the immense financial clout of international sports (Preuss, 2006).

Today, global sporting events are not merely about athletic and entertainment purposes; they are deeply intertwined with issues of identity, politics, and economics. They provide a platform for social movements and have been used to promote values such as equality and diversity. Nelson Mandela famously noted that "sport has the power to change the world," emphasizing its potential to unite people across cultural and political divides (Guttmann & Rowe, 2024). As these events have grown exponentially in scale, reach, and influence, they now serve as crucial platforms for nations to assert their dominance, project soft power, and bolster their international standing. Hosting of major sporting events has become a coveted prize, with countries vying to secure the right to stage these spectacles as a means to achieve a wide range of strategic objectives, from economic development to enhanced global visibility and influence.

4. How Do We Measure the Impact?

It's relatively easy to perform an economic analysis of hosting a world sporting event. We can use numbers to measure impact—how much did a sports event generate? What was the expenditure within the economy as a direct result of these events? How many goods and services were purchased to serve spectators? Analysts can quantify direct spending, such as ticket sales, accommodation, and food expenditures, to assess the overall economic contribution. Methods like economic impact assessments evaluate these expenditures, providing a clear picture of the financial benefits generated by the event.

In contrast, measuring ideological power is more complex. Surveys and polls can gauge shifts in public perception, while media analysis can reveal the extent of coverage and public engagement with the event. Local resident attitude surveys are also crucial in understanding how such events influence community sentiment. Although these measures may not yield immediate or clear-cut results, they provide valuable insights into the long-term ideological effects of hosting major

sporting events.

Throughout this paper, ideological and economic power will be discussed to help gain a comprehensive understanding of how nations leverage power to achieve their goals on the global stage, highlighting their significance in shaping national and international dynamics.

5. Indicators

There are four indicators being used to determine whether hosting global sporting events is valuable in the way that it generates economic and social benefits.

The first indicator is the expectation that hosting a global sporting event helps present a strong image of a country. Many countries seek to host global sporting events as they believe that they will showcase their unique culture, attract tourism, and foster national pride and international recognition, thus allowing a country to present a strong image of itself on the global stage. Countries often achieve this economically through constructing grand stadiums or culturally through promoting traditions.

This section of the paper will dive deeper into two case studies: the Qatar World Cup in 2022 and the Russia World Cup in 2018. We will examine multiple factors, such as how much of the international community attended relative to previous events, and use public opinion surveys from Statista Consumer Insights to analyze if the event changed prevailing perceptions about host countries and economic strengths through stadium size, ticket sales, and local businesses. Overall, this analysis will help determine if hosting a sporting event improved their economy culturally through tourism and its long-term impact.

The second indicator is the reality that hosting global sporting events leads to much protest and advocacy, which can be either positive or negative. Much of the time, a country that hosts a global sporting event is controversial among people worldwide. For example, some were cautious about Qatar hosting the 2022 World Cup or Saudi Arabia hosting the 2024 Esports tournament. Protests tend to occur through boycotts and social media abuse in response to these controversies regarding limited human rights. On the other hand, these conditions can also promote advocacy for human rights.

This section of the paper will dive into numerous examples from the Qatar and Russia World Cup, the 2023 New Zealand Women's World Cup, the Esports tournament, and the 1968 Olympics in Mexico City to determine how protests and advocacy play a role in these tournaments. We will also analyze the Mega Sporting Events platform and its efforts to fully embrace and operationalize human rights duties and responsibilities.

The third indicator is the expectation that hosting a global sporting event can show symbolic efforts that facilitate diplomatic engagement between countries. Countries will often use their shared interest in sports and the festive atmosphere of these significant competitions to build connections and progress on international issues. Some valuable examples are the "ping-pong diplomacy" event in

1970 and symbolic efforts from nations in the 2014 and 2018 Winter Olympics serve as valuable examples of this. Besides, hosting major sporting events is also a strategic way for emerging nations to project a positive image and enhance their soft power. This involves showcasing their organizational capabilities, promoting shared values like fair play and unity, and communicating their identity and aspirations to the world.

The fourth and final indicator is the reality that hosting global sporting events can be interrupted by cyber threats. Especially in the past few years, as our digital world has become increasingly interconnected, the risk of cyber threats plays a huge role in a country's power. This section of the paper will dive deeper into the 2024 Paris Olympics as a key example, as this was a large-scale event that risked cyber threats. We will observe how cyber threats affected the hosting of the Olympics and the ways the Paris government had to cope with it. Besides the Paris Olympics, we will take a more universal stance to look at recent IT outages and how they disrupt the hosting of major sporting events.

Overall, these four indicators will give us a bigger picture of the anticipated benefits and outcomes of hosting global sporting events to analyze that, economically, hosting these events might not be beneficial, but if done correctly, they can increase the amount of power a country has. This allows it to project a positive image on the global stage and improve a nation's international standing and credibility, thus explaining why countries are willing to risk spending so much money on hosting these events despite all the anticipated consequences.

5.1. Indicator 1: Image

The first indicator we will consider is whether or not hosting a global sporting event improves the image of a country—starting with the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

The FIFA World Cup has mainly been hosted in South America and Europe. However, in 2022, FIFA's decision to host the World Cup in Qatar, a tiny Gulf state with a limited soccer pedigree, generated significant international scrutiny and controversy (Ahmed, 2024). The country's poor human rights record and harsh working conditions for migrant laborers became a substantial source of political tension, with many individuals and organizations using the global platform to voice their concerns and opposition. With that said, this could be seen as a way for FIFA to expand its global outreach of the World Cup and add to the diversification of host countries. Before the World Cup, individuals had limited knowledge of Qatar, but now, this event has presented this country to the international community.

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar provided the country with a significant opportunity to showcase itself on the global stage and potentially improve its international reputation. With an estimated 1.2 million visitors arriving in the country, the event attracted a large portion of the international community (FIFA World Cup 2022—Statistics & Facts, 2024). This increased exposure and attendance compared

to previous World Cups could have helped change prevailing perceptions about Qatar. However, these statistics are much lower than the average number of attendance at previous World Cups, such as the 2010 World Cup in South Africa and the 2006 World Cup in Germany, which averaged over three million visitors. Although this may not directly correlate with Qatar's poor human rights—in fact, it could be regarding Qatar's location—it does open up questions of why individuals decided not to attend, which will be explored further in indicator two.

Public opinion surveys from Statista Consumer Insights in key markets such as England and Germany suggest mixed results in terms of how hosting the World Cup improved Qatar's reputation. To ensure data reliability and representation, these surveys conducted stratified random sampling with 2500 adults in England and 2300 in Germany, maintaining proportional representation across age groups. Bias control measures included neutral question wording, surveys in native languages, and sampling during both peak and non-peak event periods. In England, 34% of respondents agreed that hosting the World Cup boosted Qatar's reputation, while 28% disagreed. In Germany, the numbers were even more negative, with only 19% agreeing that the event improved Qatar's standing and 43% disagreeing (Statista Consumer Insights, 2018). These findings indicate that the World Cup did not decisively shift public opinion in a positive direction for Qatar.

Economically, Qatar's massive \$220 billion investment, which was taken from official government reports, to host the World Cup showcased the country's substantial economic resources to execute a thorough global event—seen as an effort for Qatar to demonstrate its economic power. The construction of seven new stadiums and significant infrastructure like a new metro system demonstrated Qatar's engineering and project management capabilities on a grand scale. Around 322 million US dollars were budgeted towards operational expenses for the event. This includes ticketing, which cost 41 million US dollars to organize. This helped project an image of Qatar as an economically powerful and technologically advanced nation capable of taking on large-scale endeavors.

While the overall investment was enormous, the direct financial benefits for Qatar appear more modest. FIFA is expected to generate around \$7.5 billion in revenue, while Qatar itself is only projected to receive \$1.56 billion, primarily from increased tourism and business travel. These projections are both taken from official FIFA financial reports. According to Qatar's Government Communications Office, the country aims to attract over 3 million visitors annually by 2026 as part of its tourism strategy, though specific long-term revenue projections are not publicly available (Qatar National Vision 2030, n.d.). The country has invested heavily in tourism infrastructure, including the expansion of Hamad International Airport and numerous new hotels, but with total World Cup-related spending reaching \$220 billion compared to projected returns of less than 2% of that investment. The data suggests that the primary motivations for Qatar to host the World Cup may have been more about global prestige and soft power projection than immediate economic gain.

The long-term economic impact of hosting the World Cup also remains uncertain. Qatar's GDP is forecast to increase by 27.6% between 2024 - 2029, by a total of 67.6 billion US dollars, and the economic contribution of tourism is projected to grow by 35.8% during that period. In 2029, Qatar's GDP is estimated to reach 312.26 billion US dollars (Statista Research Department, 2022). While positive, these figures do not fully suggest a transformative boost to Qatar's economy and global standing. (Figure 1)

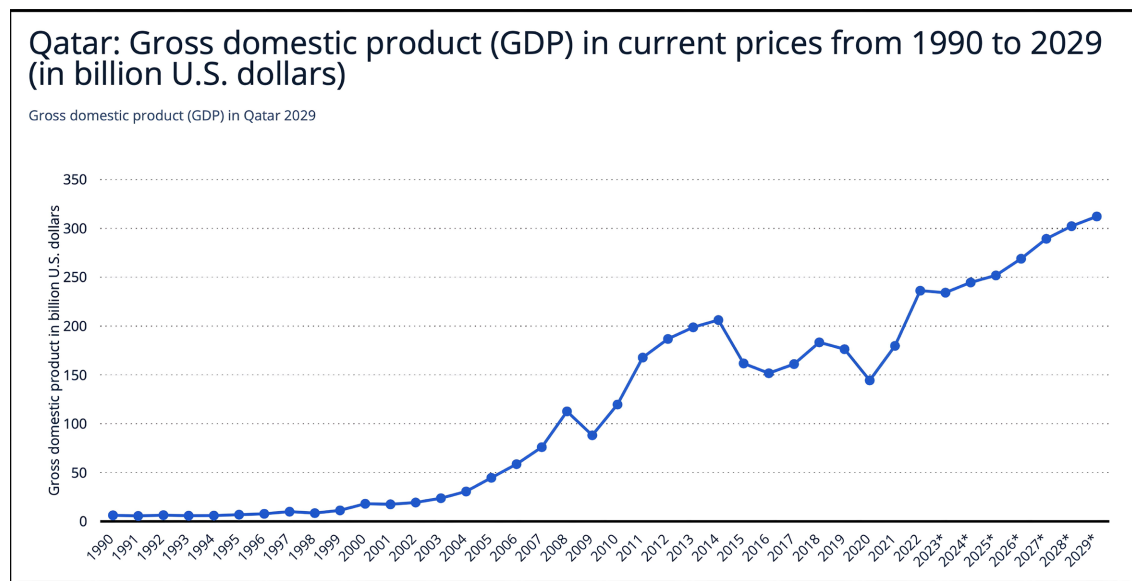


Figure 1. Qatar's estimated GDP (Statista Research Department, 2022).

Culturally, the World Cup exposure allowed Qatar to showcase its unique identity to global audiences. The construction of 36 new hotels and additional infrastructure—stadiums and transportation systems—also had an impact on the country's urban landscape. However, the broader cultural influence and whether it improved perceptions of Qatar as a more "tolerable society" is unclear based on the limited public opinion data provided.

Overall, the evidence suggests that while the 2022 World Cup provided Qatar with significant global exposure, it did not decisively improve the country's international image or reputation in the eyes of the public. The massive investment and logistical achievements were not matched by commensurate gains in public opinion or economic benefits.

Similarly, the 2018 World Cup in Russia had similar results. It had a strong attendance, with over 3 million tickets sold, which demonstrated Russia's ability to host a successful event. This number was taken from official FIFA attendance records.

However, similar to Qatar, Russia has been a country with a controversial image throughout history. There have been numerous reports that members of Russia's security forces committed human rights abuse, and more recently, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and committed numerous war crimes and other

atrocities and abuses (US Department of State, 2022). According to a public opinion survey conducted by Statista, 53% of Germans believed that hosting the World Cup would be beneficial for Russia. This suggests that despite its human rights record, from the perspective of a major European country, hosting the world cup could have a huge positive impact on Russia's image.

Economically, Russia allocated \$627 million for the local organization of the World Cup, and the total investment budget amounted to over \$1.9 billion (Statista Research Department, 2018). This significant investment—which is far less than Qatar's—indicates that Russia viewed the World Cup as an opportunity to drive economic development and infrastructure improvements, as they were willing to allocate a great deal of their budget to plan a successful event.

However, the long-term economic impact appears more modest. Russia's GDP was around \$1.66 trillion in 2018, then increased to \$2.27 trillion in 2022, but is projected to decrease to \$2.21 trillion by 2029 (Statista Research Department, 2018). This suggests that the World Cup's direct economic benefits may have been limited or short-lived. With that said, as shown in the graph below, Russia's GDP has fluctuated throughout the past few decades, suggesting that numerous factors accounted for Russia's decrease in GDP, other than the World Cup itself. (Figure 2)

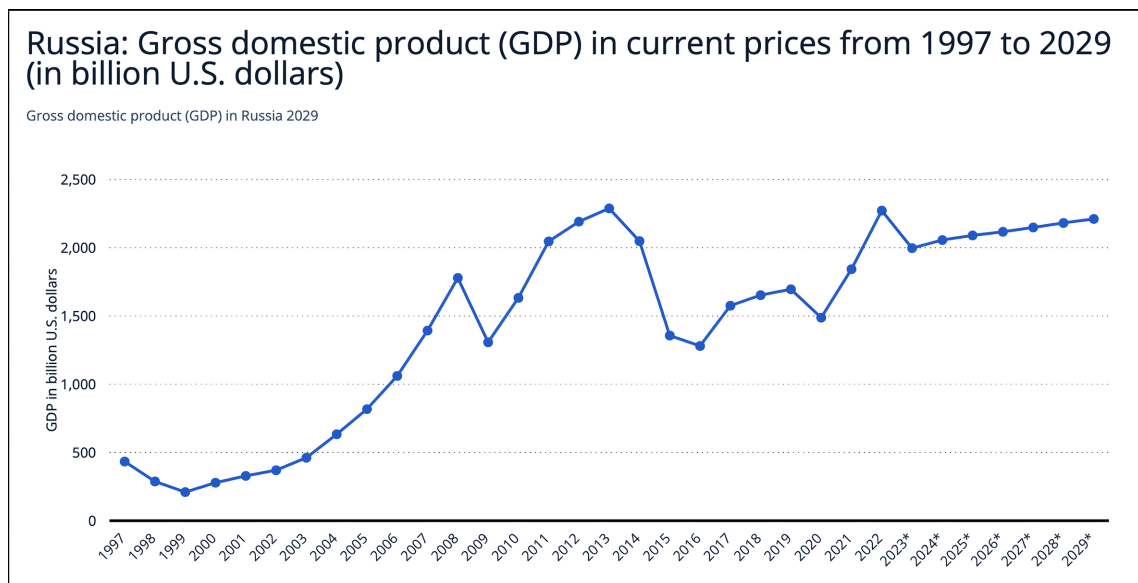


Figure 2. Russia's estimated GDP (Statista Research Department, 2018).

Hosting the World Cup likely had a positive cultural impact, as it allowed Russia to showcase its history, traditions, and hospitality on a global stage. For example, Russia's strategic placement of the eleven cities hosting the games served a purpose in cultural diplomacy. While fans expected major cities like Moscow and St. Petersburg to host the games, places like Saransk and Kaliningrad were more surprising (Geohistory, 2018). Hosting games in these smaller and more remote cities attracted international visitors to gain a wider view of Russia's current state—the booming capital and smaller provincial towns. The event also likely increased

tourism, though the statistics provided do not quantify the long-term impact of tourism.

Overall, the 2018 World Cup in Russia appears to have had a mixed impact. It demonstrated Russia's ability to host a successful global event and generated some positive international perception. However, the long-term economic benefits seem more modest, with GDP projections indicating limited sustained growth. The cultural and tourism impacts are less clear from the data provided. Russia likely viewed the World Cup as an opportunity to enhance its global image, but the extent to which it achieved this goal is difficult to determine conclusively.

The case studies of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and the 2018 World Cup in Russia suggest that hosting global sporting events can provide countries with the opportunity to project a stronger image and increase their global influence, but the actual economic and reputational benefits may be more limited.

Both Qatar and Russia invested heavily in infrastructure and event organization, with Qatar spending \$220 billion US dollars and Russia allocating over \$1.9 billion. However, in both cases, FIFA is expected to keep a large majority of the revenue. Instead, these countries use these events as a way to aim for long-term economic gains through tourism and infrastructure development. Qatar's GDP is projected to increase significantly in the coming years, while Russia's GDP is expected to decrease slightly. While there is potential for economic growth, the benefits are not guaranteed.

Public opinion on the social impact of hosting the World Cup was mixed. In both countries, some people believed the event would improve their country's image and tolerance, while others were skeptical. However, the events did provide opportunities for cultural exchange and tourism, showing that the social impact is complex and can be both positive and negative, depending on the country's context and how the event is managed.

These case studies illustrate that while hosting global sporting events can provide countries with an opportunity to project a stronger international image and increase their global influence, the actual reputational and economic benefits may be more limited than the initial investment and logistical achievements might suggest. Countries may view these events as a means of enhancing their soft power and global standing, but the long-term impacts are often more nuanced and difficult to measure conclusively.

In summary, the evidence suggests that hosting global sporting events can increase a country's power and present a stronger image, but not necessarily lead to significant economic improvements. The primary motivations appear to be more about global prestige and soft power projection rather than immediate financial gains.

5.2. Indicator 2: Protests

The second indicator we will consider is the reality that hosting global sporting events leads to much protest and advocacy, which can be either positive or negative.

Both the Qatar and Russia World Cups faced substantial criticism from the international community due to their human rights records, raising questions about the value of hosting global sporting events despite the associated risks. Public sentiment in countries like England and Germany showed a notable willingness to boycott the events, with 19% and 31%, respectively, supporting such actions for Qatar and 49% of Indians advocating for a boycott of the Russia World Cup (Statista Consumer Insights, 2018). This backlash highlights a growing concern over whether the prestige and potential benefits of hosting these events outweigh the ethical implications.

Public opinion, particularly in Europe, reflects significant opposition to hosting events in nations with questionable human rights practices. While individual fans may consider boycotting, there is often less support for national teams to do the same, indicating a complex relationship between personal beliefs and collective action. Despite the protests, both World Cups proceeded, suggesting that public opinion alone may not be sufficient to instigate meaningful change in host country policies.

The decision by Qatar to host the 2022 World Cup was seen as an attempt to diversify its economy, showcase its culture and hospitality, and enhance its international influence beyond its status as a significant energy exporter. Consequently, its poor human rights record discouraged many from attending. Rishi Madlani, co-chair of Pride in Football, said, “As we got closer to the tournament, you could see people getting really conflicted. It’s been so heartbreaking...in any other situation, if the country was gender minority friendly, I’d be out there [but] I don’t feel comfortable going” (Ronald, 2022). This illustrates the tension between the desire to participate in a global event and the ethical concerns surrounding the host nation.

These tensions manifested in measurable effects on both host nations’ reputations and commercial outcomes. For Qatar, public perception data showed a decline in reputation scores across Western markets during the tournament 2022. This, in turn, translated into commercial impacts, with notable acts including an action by German sportswear company Hummel to deliberately tone down its logo on Denmark’s World Cup kit in protest, while several major European cities, including Paris and London, canceled public viewing events (Sky Sports, 2022).

Russia’s 2018 World Cup also went through similar problems, though with different regional variations. Nation brand value estimates for the same period indicated that Russia’s international reputation suffered during this period. However, visitor numbers indicated a limited effect on actual attendance for Russia, which hosted more than 5 million visitors during the tournament, exceeding its target. Interestingly, the attendance from Asian and South American markets was significantly higher than projections, which compensated for the low European turnout (Inside FIFA, 2018).

Both cases illustrate how reputational impacts, in fact, were most pronounced in Western markets, whereas the relations with Global South nations remained

stable or showed an improvement, suggesting that human rights protests have geographically segmented influences on the soft power outcomes.

Despite this resistance, many use these conditions as an opportunity to use the global stage to make political statements or protests. One of the most famous examples occurred at the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. During the medal ceremony for the men's 200-meter race, American athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos raised their black-gloved fists in the air as a symbol of the Black Power movement (Burke, 2023). This gesture exemplifies how sporting events can become powerful symbols for social movements, as the iconic gesture brought attention to the civil rights struggle.

A more recent example is the Esports World Cup tournament, which was held in Saudi Arabia from July 3, 2024 to August 25, 2024. Like Qatar, Saudi Arabia has a history of poor human rights, and the game has a record-breaking prize pool of over \$60 million (Church, 2024). However, the event has caused division and concern in the industry, as many are concerned about Saudi Arabia's involvement. Many are worried that the tournament's link to Saudi Arabia is a case of sports-washing, a concept involving nations using high-profile sporting events to project a favorable image of their country worldwide, often drawing attention away from alleged wrongdoing. Regardless, in an interview with Fox News, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said, "Well, if sportswashing is going to increase my GDP by one percent, then I will continue doing sportswashing" (Church, 2024). This practice of "sportswashing" raises ethical concerns about the role of sports in international relations.

The Esports tournament has divided players, streamers, and fans due to Saudi Arabia's stance on gender minority rights. While the Esports World Cup Foundation CEO Ralf Reichert reassures gender minority fans and players traveling to the event by saying "everyone is welcome" and no one will be discriminated against, many top Esports teams and players have refused to participate. On the other hand, Team Liquid, one of the world's biggest Esports teams, decided to show up and wear pride colors to use this contest as a platform to show their support for gender minority people (Rogers, 2024).

The protest against the mistreatment of gender minority individuals in Saudi Arabia demonstrates how global sporting events can spark debate and push for social change. The controversy surrounding Saudi Arabia's human rights record led to boycotts and public statements from players and teams showcasing the potential for sporting events to become platforms for advocacy. It was a significant platform for athletes and officials to use the global stage to make political statements and protests.

To address the ongoing human rights challenges in host countries, initiatives like the Mega Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights (MSE) have emerged. This platform is a coalition comprising international and intergovernmental organizations, governments, sports governing bodies, athletes, unions, sponsors, broadcasters, and civil society groups. Its primary mission is to ensure that all stakeholders involved in organizing mega-sporting events (MSEs) fully acknowledge

and implement their human rights obligations throughout the event lifecycle.

The MSE Platform is dedicated to developing comprehensive, consistent, and accountable strategies for managing social risks and mitigating adverse human rights impacts associated with MSEs. It aims to dismantle barriers to knowledge transfer and best practices across various sports traditions and events. Through collective action, the platform seeks to raise awareness, foster innovation, advocate for change, educate stakeholders, and amplify the voices of those most affected by human rights violations.

Governance of the MSE Platform is facilitated by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee, which includes over 20 organizations representing diverse sectors such as government, intergovernmental bodies, sports federations, sponsors, broadcasters, trade unions, and civil society. This collaborative effort underscores the importance of a unified approach to uphold human rights within the realm of mega-sporting events, ensuring that these occasions not only celebrate athletic achievement but also respect and promote human dignity.

The emergence of initiatives like the Mega Sporting Events Platform for Human Rights (MSE) reflects a growing recognition of the need to address human rights concerns in the context of global sporting events. This coalition aims to ensure that stakeholders acknowledge and fulfill their human rights obligations throughout the event lifecycle. By promoting comprehensive strategies to manage social risks, the MSE Platform seeks to enhance accountability and foster a culture of respect for human dignity in the world of sports.

In conclusion, while hosting global sporting events can offer significant economic and social benefits, the associated risks—particularly concerning human rights—cannot be overlooked. The ongoing debates and protests surrounding these events indicate that their value is increasingly being measured not only by economic gains but also by the ethical implications of hosting in countries with poor human rights records. As the landscape of global sports evolves, it will be crucial for stakeholders to balance the allure of hosting with the responsibility to promote and protect human rights.

5.3. Indicator 3: Symbolic Efforts

The third indicator we will consider is the expectation that hosting global sporting events can show symbolic efforts that facilitate diplomatic engagement between countries, analyzing how soft power plays a role in this.

Global sporting events can serve as significant platforms for countries to engage in symbolic efforts that enhance their soft power and diplomatic relationships. Countries will often use their shared interest in sports and the atmosphere of these significant competitions to project their values, culture, and political aspirations on the global space. The expectation that hosting such events can facilitate diplomatic engagement is grounded in the understanding that sports transcend cultural and political boundaries, fostering connections among people.

Sports diplomacy has evolved as a strategic tool for nations to strengthen their

international relations. By utilizing the universal appeal of sports, countries can engage in dialogue and build relationships that might otherwise be difficult due to political tensions. The festive atmosphere surrounding global sporting events often provides a conducive environment for informal discussions and negotiations.

One of the most famous examples of sports diplomacy occurred in the 1970s when the United States and China engaged in a diplomatic opening through a series of table tennis exchanges called “ping-pong diplomacy.” In April 1971, a US table tennis team visited China, becoming some of the first Americans to visit the country in decades ([National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2021](#)). This trip started the “ping-pong diplomacy” and laid the groundwork for establishing official diplomatic relations. When the US team arrived in China, they were welcomed by Premier Zhou Enlai, who personally greeted each player. Beyond the table tennis matches, the Chinese gave the US team a tour of the famous Chinese landmarks and banquets, introducing them to Chinese culture and cuisine. The 1971 table tennis trip represented a historic thaw in U.S.-China relations and laid the groundwork for normalizing diplomatic ties between the two countries.

Similarly, the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang provided a platform for North and South Korea to present a united front. Athletes from both nations marched together under the Korean Unification flag, symbolizing a moment of reconciliation and escalating tensions. This act was not merely ceremonial; it represented a significant diplomatic gesture aimed at easing hostilities and fostering dialogue between the two nations, showcasing how sporting events can serve as catalysts for peace. ([Figure 3](#)) The 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics also allowed South Korean President Moon Jae-in to engage in shuttle diplomacy, in which he met with North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and US Vice President Mike Pence to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula ([BBC, 2018](#)). Although sports diplomacy did not resolve underlying regional tensions between North and South Korea, there was a significant improvement in North-South relations compared to previous years ([BBC, 2018](#)). Global sporting events also serve as venues for formal diplomatic negotiations. For example, the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi allowed Western leaders and Russian President Vladimir Putin to discuss the Ukraine crisis.



Figure 3. 2018 Olympics—Chung Guam Hwang of North Korea and Yunjong Won of South Korea held a joint flag during the opening ceremony. Sean M. Haffey/Getty images.

What Is Soft Power?

In the 1980s, political scientist Joseph Nye Jr. created the term soft power, defining it as a country's ability to influence others without resorting to coercive pressure. This could entail a country projecting its values, ideals, and culture across borders to foster goodwill and strengthen partnerships (Council on Foreign Relations). Soft power can even originate outside of government in forms through media and major industries.

Hosting global sporting events enhances a country's soft power by projecting an image of stability, cultural richness, and global engagement. The ability to host such events signals to the international community that a nation is capable of managing significant logistical and security challenges, thereby enhancing its reputation on the world stage. For instance, Qatar's hosting of the 2022 FIFA World Cup was aimed at reshaping international perceptions of the country, showcasing its capacity to host large-scale events and its commitment to global sports.

These events often serve as powerful tools for political leaders to strengthen their domestic authority and international standing through several mechanisms. First, they generate nationalist sentiment and social cohesion, with leaders positioning themselves as champions of national achievement. This was evident during Russia's 2018 World Cup, where Putin's approval ratings increased amid heightened patriotic displays (Soares e Castro, 2018). Second, the massive infrastructure development and economic benefits serve to justify governance decisions, with construction projects providing visible evidence of "progress" under leadership. Qatar's ruling Al Thani family, for example, effectively showcased the nation's rapid development through World Cup preparations (Al-Kubaisi, 2024). Finally, successful hosting demonstrates administrative competence, providing leaders with invaluable access to global political and business elites while generating media coverage focused on modernization narratives.

Measuring the effectiveness of soft power gained through hosting global sporting events presents unique challenges, particularly in cases like Qatar and Russia. Traditional metrics include analyzing changes in international tourism numbers, tracking foreign direct investment flows before and after the event, monitoring international media coverage sentiment, and studying diplomatic engagement levels. Public opinion surveys, while valuable, often reveal mixed results—as seen in the earlier discussion of Qatar's modest improvements in global perception despite its massive investment. These measurements suggest that while sporting events can enhance soft power, the effects are often temporary and heavily influenced by broader geopolitical contexts and the host nation's subsequent actions on the international stage.

However, where the point of change in any public opinion correlates with the soft power outcomes becomes very tricky to establish. For example, the negative perception of Qatar in Germany after the 2022 World Cup translated into more tangible effects across different sectors, such as German businesses showing less interest in Qatar-based investments, lesser participation by both countries in various

cultural exchange programs, and a general decline in tourism bookings coming from German markets in the months following the tournament (Statista Research Department, 2022). However, these have also varied widely among regions and industries, as some Middle Eastern and Asian markets have actually increased their level of engagement with Qatar during this period. Such regional variation in public opinion and its economic consequences shows how soft power gains or losses often operate within specific geographical and cultural contexts rather than uniformly across the global stage. This, however, is the problem: how to quantify such subtle effects, since negative public sentiment in one region can well be offset by positive developments in others, making overall soft power assessment a complex calculus of competing metrics and regional variations. This pattern does suggest that sports mega-events should have their effectiveness in building soft power assessed on a region-by-region basis rather than by using global metrics alone.

In Dr. Jon Grix and Professor Donna Lee's "*Soft Power, Sports Mega-Events and Emerging States: The Lure of the Politics of Attraction*" (Grix & Donna, 2013), they explore the strategic motivations behind large developing countries hosting major sporting events, such as the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup.

The paper highlights a major shift in the global landscape where developing countries like Brazil, China, and South Africa are increasingly hosting major sporting events—as seen in Qatar. This trend signifies that developing countries are growing agency and influence in international relations, moving away from the historical dominance of wealthy nations in this area.

Grix and Lee argue that hosting sports mega-events serves as a form of public diplomacy, allowing these nations to project a positive image and enhance their soft power. By showcasing their ability to organize such events, these states aim to gain international credibility and status, while also promoting shared values associated with sports, such as fair play and unity.

However, while the potential benefits of hosting mega-events are significant, Grix and Lee also acknowledge the risks involved, such as the possibility of negative international attention, as seen in cases like the Bahrain Formula 1 races, where protests highlighted political issues. Thus, the authors call for a broader understanding of the role of sports in international relations, emphasizing that the strategic use of sports mega-events reflects a new dimension of power dynamics among emerging states. They argue incorporating sports into the mainstream of international relations to fully appreciate its implications for global politics.

Building on the analysis by Grix and Lee, such sporting events have been used explicitly as political tools in complex interactions between different forms of power. The dimensions of power, especially ideological, economic, and decision-making authority, each reinforcing yet also creating tensions in challenging host nations' goals.

Ideological power operates through the host nation, shaping narratives and projecting certain values. Hosting the 2022 World Cup, Qatar tried to present a view of itself both as modern and cosmopolitan, yet traditional in its cultural values.

On occasion, this ideological positioning cut across economic imperatives, as Western corporate sponsors and media organizations called for certain cultural accommodations. In Russia, messaging for the 2018 World Cup focused on Russian strength and capability, while it also needed to convey openness to international investment and tourism.

In these events, economic power is both a means and an end. The host nations must show significant financial capability to host and stage these tournaments; often this involves massive infrastructure investment. An estimated \$200 billion spend by Qatar on the World Cup was at once a flexing of economic muscle and an attempt to augment it by encouraging further foreign investment and tourism. But this economic leverage also tends to generate tensions with decision-making power, as international sporting bodies and corporate sponsors may impose conditions on host nations that compromise their sovereignty.

Decision-making power is most complicated in these contexts. Even though host nations retain formal authority over the operations of events, they are under pressure from a number of directions, including international sporting organizations, corporate sponsors, participating nations, domestic constituencies, global media, and civil society organizations. These power dynamics often result in paradoxical situations. For example, the economic power required to host these events can simultaneously result in increased international scrutiny and criticism, undermining the ideological benefits being sought. The exercise of decision-making authority in a manner that reinforces domestic political legitimacy might go against international expectations and economic interests.

In conclusion, global sporting events serve as powerful instruments for countries to engage in symbolic efforts that enhance their diplomatic ties and soft power. Through historical examples of sports diplomacy and the potential for formal negotiations during these events, it is evident that sports can transcend political barriers, fostering dialogue and understanding among nations. As countries continue to leverage the appeal of sports, the role of sports diplomacy in shaping international relations will likely grow, reflecting the intricate connections between culture, politics, and global engagement.

5.4. Indicator 4: Cyber Threats

The fourth and final indicator is one that has become increasingly important recently, and that is the reality that hosting global sporting events can be interrupted by cyber threats.

But first, what are cyber threats?

We can dissect this word into two: cyber and threats. Cyber is a prefix that means “computer” or “computer network.” Threats are statements of an intention to inflict pain, injury, damage, or other hostile action on someone in retribution for something done or not done. Thus, a cyber threat is a malicious act that seeks to damage data, steal data, or disrupt digital life in general.

As the digital world has become increasingly interconnected, the risk of cyber

threats plays a huge role in a country's power. There are multiple different types of cyber threats, including ticket scams, targeting organizations to disrupt operations and steal sensitive data, overwhelming systems with traffic to disrupt online services, and using cyber attacks to spread propaganda. Due to the large audience and financial transactions associated with sports events, it makes them attractive targets for cybercriminals. Cyber attacks on sports events have dramatically increased, with a 20-fold rise in Olympic attacks from 2012 to 2021, culminating in 4.4 billion attacks during the Tokyo Games (Hadrian, 2024). In fact, 70% of sporting organizations experience at least one cyberattack annually (Check Point Team, 2024).

The first case study we will dive into is the 2024 Paris Olympics, which recently concluded in August.

Before the event took place, the French government described the 2024 Paris Olympics as an event facing an “unprecedented level of threat.” Vincent Strubel, the director general of ANSSI, stated that there would not be Games without attacks but also noted that those attacks must be limited by advanced cybersecurity protocol (Sangfor, 2024). In other words, he states that while the attacks are inevitable, advanced cybersecurity protocols are essential to limit their impact.

To combat this, the French government estimated that revenue from cybersecurity services in France would increase by US \$94 million in 2024 as a result of the Olympic Games (Paris 2024 Olympics Cybersecurity, 2024). ANSSI—the National Cybersecurity Agency of France—is a national service created under the authority of the French Prime Minister and attached to the General Secretariat for Defence and National Security in preparation for the Olympics. The organization is responsible for managing the strategy for the prevention of cyberattacks at the Games. These immense and costly efforts demonstrate the risk that cyber threats were and how that affected a host country's economic impact as they had to spend more on these extensive measures.

The Paris 2024 Olympics was anticipated to attract various malicious cyber actors, including state-sponsored hackers, organized crime groups, and hacktivists. These actors may seek to exploit the event for financial gain, political visibility, or to undermine the prestige of the Games.

Research indicates a substantial surge in darknet activity, with an 80% - 90% increase observed between the second half of 2023 and the first half of 2024 (Mascelino, 2024). IDC—International Data Corporation—predicts that the Paris Olympics will experience the largest number of threats and the most complex threat landscape compared to previous Olympic Games. The event's extensive digital infrastructure, which includes ticketing, broadcasting, and logistical systems, creates a vast attack surface for cybercriminals.

The cybersecurity risks associated with the Paris 2024 Olympics are varied and include:

- Financial Fraud: Cybercriminals are likely to target tourists and fans with scams related to tickets, promotions, and everyday services.

- DDoS Attacks: Attackers may disrupt websites, ticketing systems, and online services by overwhelming them with traffic.
- Espionage: Threat actors might spy on athletes, VIPs, and other influential individuals to gain strategic information.
- Misinformation Campaigns: Cybercriminals could spread propaganda or disrupt ceremonies to undermine the integrity of the Games.
- Infrastructure Vulnerabilities: The interconnected nature of the Games means that disruptions could extend beyond the event itself, affecting transportation, hospitality, and financial networks in Paris.

With that said, the Paris 2024 Olympics is expected to generate significant economic activity, estimated at €11 billion in the Île-de-France region ([International Olympic Committee, 2024a](#); [International Olympic Committee, 2024b](#)). However, successful cyberattacks could lead to financial losses not only for the organizers but also for local businesses and international sponsors. As mentioned above, the initial spending on cybersecurity measures reflects a loss in economic impact, as the government had to spend more than previously anticipated.

The reputation of France as a host nation is at stake. Cyberattacks that disrupt the Games could tarnish the image of the country on a global stage, affecting its soft power and international standing. The Olympics are a showcase of national pride, and any successful attack could be perceived as a failure of the host nation's security apparatus, undermining public confidence in government institutions.

The cyber threats to the Paris Olympics extend beyond the event itself, highlighting vulnerabilities in national infrastructure. As cybercriminals increasingly target critical services—such as transportation, telecommunications, and financial systems—the potential for widespread disruption grows. This interconnectedness means that a successful attack could have cascading effects, limiting the country's ability to respond effectively to crises and potentially destabilizing key sectors of the economy.

The Paris 2024 Olympics exemplify the intersection of sport, technology, and national security. As the event approaches, the unprecedented level of cyber threats poses significant risks that could disrupt operations and damage the reputation of France. The reliance on advanced technology and interconnected systems creates vulnerabilities that cybercriminals are eager to exploit. Therefore, it is crucial for the French government and organizing bodies to implement robust cybersecurity measures to protect the integrity of the Games and, by extension, the power and prestige of the nation. The lessons learned from the Paris Olympics will likely shape future approaches to cybersecurity in major global events, underscoring the need for vigilance in an increasingly digital world.

Additionally, cyber threats extend beyond the Olympic Games themselves. In July of 2024, a CrowdStrike update caused a massive IT outage, crashing millions of Windows systems. According to BBC, Microsoft estimated that the CrowdStrike update outage affected 8.5 million Windows devices.

This affected numerous broadcasting channels such as NBC News, MSNBC, Sky News, ABC, and SBS, which had to use backup options. Airports were affected, too,

with numerous flights and operations being disrupted. Here is a list of some of the airports affected:

- London Heathrow
- Berlin Brandenburg
- Amsterdam Airport Schiphol
- Budapest Airport
- Sydney Airport
- Singapore's Changi Airport
- Hong Kong Airport
- Narita Airport in Japan
- Prague Airport in Czechia
- Melbourne Airport in Australia
- Zurich Airport in Switzerland

This wide list of airports from numerous countries demonstrates how widespread the effect of this IT Outage was, which raises concerns for our future, as sporting events can't be hosted when interruptions like this occur. The Olympics' reliance on interconnected systems, from ticketing to broadcasting, creates a network of potential vulnerabilities. The delays and disruptions caused by the outage demonstrate the potential for cyberattacks to significantly impact event operations. The Paris Olympics organizers said that the outage affected their computer systems, and the arrival of some delegations, uniforms, and accreditations were delayed.

In short, cyber threats have become a critical factor in determining the power and prestige of nations hosting global sporting events. As the digital world continues to evolve, it is crucial for host nations to prioritize cybersecurity measures and work collaboratively with event organizers, security agencies, and international partners to mitigate these risks. The lessons learned from the Paris Olympics will likely shape future approaches to cybersecurity in major global events, underscoring the need for vigilance in an increasingly interconnected world.

6. Results

Now that we've analyzed these four indicators that effect the amount of power countries gain from hosting global sporting events, what does this all mean?

It's been clear that hosting global sporting events is often seen as a way for countries to increase their power and influence on the international stage. However, the reality is that there are many factors that can go wrong, and the expected benefits may not always materialize.

From the first indicator, image, we saw that one of the primary reasons countries bid to host global sporting events is to improve their international image and reputation. While these events provide an opportunity for cultural exchange and tourism, the social impact is complex and can be both positive and negative, depending on the country's context and how the event is managed.

In the second indicator, protests, we see that hosting global sporting events

often leads to protests and advocacy from the international community, particularly when the host country has a poor human rights record. However, these events can also serve as platforms for athletes and officials to make political statements and protests, as seen in the 1968 Olympics and the recent Esports World Cup in Saudi Arabia.

This backlash highlights the ethical implications of hosting events in countries with questionable human rights practices. Despite the protests, the events proceeded, suggesting that public sentiment alone may not suffice to effect change in host country policies. However, these events also provided platforms for athletes and activists to voice their concerns, illustrating the dual nature of such gatherings as both celebratory and contentious.

From the third indicator, symbolic efforts, we know that global sporting events can serve as significant platforms for countries to engage in symbolic efforts that enhance their soft power and diplomatic relationships. However, while sports diplomacy can serve as a catalyst for peace, it does not always resolve underlying regional tensions, as seen in the case of North and South Korea.

Lastly, from the fourth indicator, cyber threats, we learn that as the digital world becomes more prominent in our daily lives, the risk of cyber threats increases, especially for major sporting events, due to the size and broadcasting of websites. To combat this, host countries have had to spend a large portion of their budget on cyber security, which takes away from their economic impact. This disparity between expenditure and economic gain raises questions about the sustainability of such investments and whether the anticipated benefits justify the costs.

The interactions between the four indicators—image, protests, symbolic efforts, and cyber threats—reveal complex connections that define the overall impact of hosting global sporting events. Cyber threats, in particular, have emerged as the most influential factor in the other three dimensions. Successful cyber-attacks that disrupt events can severely effect the image of the host nation and undermine its objective of soft power. For example, the extensive cybersecurity measures associated with the 2024 Paris Olympics not only required additional expenses but also generated anxiety about real disruptions that could impact France's reputation for organizational efficiency. In fact, cyberattacks could increase protest movements, creating a broad platform for protesters to raise any issue that could be disruptive via this channel. Another interesting relationship exists between symbolic efforts and image, where countries' attempts to use sporting events as a diplomatic platform can be negated by negative public perception, much of which is driven by protests or cyber incidents that undermine such diplomatic overtures. This has been the case with Qatar's 2022 World Cup, where efforts at sports diplomacy were constantly overshadowed by human rights concerns that raced across digital channels. In this way, the ability to host major sporting events successfully is increasingly a function of managing these interrelated challenges holistically rather than in isolation. Countries have to consider how strengthening cybersecurity not only protects operations but also safeguards their broader diplomatic and reputational

objectives.

The analysis of the four indicators reveals a complex interplay between host countries' expectations and the realities of hosting global sporting events. This multifaceted relationship underscores the challenges and potential pitfalls that countries face when seeking to enhance their power and global standing through such events.

7. Conclusion

The examination of the overall impact of hosting global sporting events, particularly through the lens of the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar and the 2018 World Cup in Russia, reveals several key takeaways that address the complexities surrounding the expectations of host countries. While these events are often perceived as opportunities to enhance national image, economic growth, and diplomatic relations, the reality is that the outcomes can be far more nuanced and sometimes disappointing.

Both Qatar and Russia aimed to improve their international image through these high-profile events. However, public opinion data indicates that the desired shift in perception was not achieved. For instance, only 34% of respondents in England believed that the World Cup improved Qatar's reputation, while in Germany, the figure was even lower at 19%.

This suggests that while hosting such events can increase visibility, it does not guarantee a positive transformation in how the country is viewed globally.

The significant protests surrounding both World Cups highlight the ethical implications of hosting events in countries with poor human rights records. The willingness of the public in nations like England and Germany to support boycotts illustrates a growing awareness and concern regarding the human rights practices of host countries. This dynamic complicates the narrative of prestige and soft power, as the backlash can overshadow the intended benefits of hosting.

Hosting global sporting events provides a platform for nations to engage in symbolic diplomacy. Historical instances, such as "ping-pong diplomacy" between the US and China, demonstrate how sports can transcend political boundaries and foster dialogue. The 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics further exemplified this as North and South Korea marched together, symbolizing a moment of reconciliation. However, while these events can facilitate engagement, they do not always lead to lasting resolutions of underlying tensions.

The economic impact of hosting global sporting events is often overstated. Qatar's investment of \$220 billion for the World Cup yielded modest returns, with projections indicating that the country would only earn \$1.56 billion from the event. Similarly, Russia's investment of over \$1.9 billion did not translate into significant long-term economic benefits, as GDP projections showed limited growth following the event.

This raises questions about the sustainability of such investments and whether the anticipated economic gains justify the costs involved.

In summary, the analysis of the impact of hosting global sporting events reveals a complex interplay between expectations and reality. While countries like Qatar and Russia sought to enhance their international image, economic standing, and diplomatic relationships through these events, the outcomes often fell short of their ambitions. The mixed public opinion, significant protests, and modest economic returns suggest that the motivations for hosting may be more about global prestige and soft power projection than immediate financial gains.

8. How Does This Relate to Power?

This thorough examination of the overall impact of hosting global sporting events reveals a multifaceted and complex relationship between the aspirations of host countries and the realities they encounter. This complexity lies at the intersection of national image, ethical considerations, symbolic diplomacy, and economic implications, highlighting that the quest for power through such events is neither straightforward nor guaranteed.

The desire to host global sporting events is often rooted in the ambition to enhance a nation's power and influence on the international stage. However, the outcomes of these events illustrate that power is not merely a function of visibility or prestige; it is deeply intertwined with public perception, ethical scrutiny, and geopolitical realities.

The expectation that hosting a global sporting event will improve a country's international image is a critical aspect of this power dynamic. Qatar's attempt to leverage the 2022 World Cup to reshape its global image faced significant challenges. Public opinion data revealed that, despite the event's visibility, a substantial portion of respondents in key markets did not perceive a positive shift in Qatar's reputation. This indicates that image enhancement is not solely dependent on the event itself but is also influenced by existing perceptions and the country's broader geopolitical context. The limited success in changing public sentiment underscores the complexity of power, where mere visibility does not equate to enhanced influence.

The protests and advocacy that often accompany global sporting events serve as a counterbalance to the host country's aspirations for power. In both Qatar and Russia, international criticism regarding human rights practices led to significant public backlash, highlighting the ethical implications of hosting in such contexts. This backlash complicates the narrative of prestige, as the protests can overshadow the intended benefits of hosting. The willingness of the public to support boycotts illustrates a growing awareness and concern regarding the ethical dimensions of power, suggesting that a country's ability to project influence can be undermined by its human rights record.

Global sporting events also serve as platforms for symbolic diplomacy, where nations can engage in soft power projection. Historical examples, such as the "ping-pong diplomacy" between the US and China, illustrate how sports can facilitate dialogue and foster relationships. However, the effectiveness of such symbolic

gestures is contingent upon the underlying geopolitical realities. While events like the 2018 Pyeongchang Olympics showcased a moment of reconciliation between North and South Korea, they did not resolve the deep-seated tensions between the two nations. This reveals that while sports can create opportunities for engagement, the complexities of power relations often limit the potential for lasting change.

The economic impact of hosting global sporting events is often overstated, raising questions about the sustainability of such investments. Qatar's massive expenditure for the 2022 World Cup yielded modest returns, with projections indicating that the country would earn significantly less than it spent. Similarly, Russia's investment did not translate into substantial long-term economic benefits, as GDP projections showed limited growth following the event. This disparity between expenditure and economic gain raises critical questions about the motivations behind hosting and the true nature of power. If the anticipated economic benefits do not materialize, the ability of a country to leverage the event for long-term influence is called into question.

9. How Should Countries Host Major Sporting Events in the Future?

In the future, countries should conduct thorough public opinion research to better gauge domestic and international sentiment regarding their human rights records and other ethical concerns before bidding for global events. Understanding potential backlash can help in crafting strategies to mitigate negative perceptions, thus allowing the country to flourish even when facing a significant level of backlash.

Besides this, most countries should develop comprehensive economic plans that prioritize long-term benefits over short-term gains. This includes investing in infrastructure that can serve the population beyond the event and ensuring that the tourism and hospitality sectors are equipped to handle increased visitors sustainably. As seen in Qatar's case, spending millions of dollars on a stadium that hasn't been touched since the games ended may not have been the best long-term investment (Olley, 2023). Countries can learn from this and choose to prioritize long-term benefits over short-term ones that are made to impress visitors.

Lastly, open communication with international stakeholders about human rights practices and event management can help build trust and mitigate protests. Engaging civil society and advocacy groups in the planning process may also enhance the ethical framework surrounding the event.

10. What Further Research Is Needed?

Future research could focus on the long-term economic impacts of hosting global sporting events, examining not only immediate financial returns but also the effects on local economies, tourism, and infrastructure over several years. Researchers should explore the effectiveness of sports diplomacy in various geopolitical contexts, comparing outcomes across different countries and events to identify factors that

contribute to successful diplomatic engagement. Investigating how public perceptions of host countries evolve before, during, and after global sporting events could provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of image-building strategies and the role of media coverage in shaping opinions. By addressing these areas, future researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the implications of hosting global sporting events, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders involved in the planning and execution of such initiatives.

Thus, the future of global sporting events is unknown. History could repeat itself when Saudi Arabia, a country with poor human rights records, hosts the world cup in 2034. Or who knows if any country even wants to host the Olympics anymore because of the substantial costs?

The analysis of the implications of hosting global sporting events underscores that while these occasions offer nations a chance to enhance their power and international standing, the actual outcomes often reveal a complex interplay of expectations, ethical considerations, and geopolitical realities, necessitating a more nuanced approach to future bids.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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