



## **FIFA World Cup 2022: Impact on Middle Eastern Region and Beyond**

Sayyeda Aqsa Sajjad

Research Associate-NUST Institute of Policy Studies

Email: [researchassociate1.nips@nust.edu.pk](mailto:researchassociate1.nips@nust.edu.pk)

The Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded in 1904 to forge unity among the national soccer associations and comprises 209 member states rivaling the United Nations Organizations. It started with the cooperation of 8 founding members Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. FIFA is considered as one of the most prestigious sport organizations in the world. It divides the world into six regional confederations i.e., The Confederation of African Football (Africa), Asian Football Confederation (Asia and Australia), Union of European Football Associations (Europe), The Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (North & Central America and the Caribbean), Oceania Football Confederation (Oceania) and The South American Football Confederation (South America).

Started in 1930, till date FIFA has held 22 World Cup tournaments that have been organized by 18 countries primarily from Europe and Americas. The Americas hosted 8 tournaments: 3 in North America and 5 in South America. 11 were held in Europe, 2 in Asia and 1 in Africa.<sup>1</sup> FIFA Congress decides the hosting venue for holding the World Cup host country through ballot; a system that evolved over the years after many conflicts within the organization on the selection of hosting country. Till 2002 World Cup held in Asia, hosted by South Korea and Japan it was hosted on a set pattern of alternation between Americas and Europe. The decision for the hosting venue generally takes place seven years prior to the tournament. However, the host

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<sup>1</sup> Rudi Schuller, "FIFA World Cup Hosts: List of Every Country That Has Ever Staged the Famous Tournament", August 2, 2022. <https://www.dazn.com/en-US/news/soccer/fifa-world-cup-hosts-list-of-every-country-that-has-ever-staged-the-famous-tournament/1oj5lmkizmhej1h2vb30u3kx09>, accessed January 22, 2023.

for FIFA WC 2022 i.e. Qatar, was chosen 12 years back at the same time when Russia was selected as a host for 2018 tournament.

The World Cup 2022 held at Qatar from 20 November to 18 December 2022 is one of the most discussed tournaments of the world for a number of reasons. This is the first time when FIFA World Cup was hosted by an Arab Muslim country, and 2<sup>nd</sup> time in the Asia after 2002. The tournament also remained in highlights for being the most expensive i.e., 20 times more than the tournaments held since 1930.

Qatar, a small country of 3 million people around 300,000 of whom are permanent residents gained independence in 1971 and became the world's top LNG exporter by the mid-2000s. The country now holds a sovereign wealth fund of USD 450 billion worth and is amongst one of the countries with highest GDP and per capita in the world. Qatar got \$1.7 billion from FIFA, including the \$440 million prize money for the contesting teams. However, it spent an estimated amount of USD 220 billion,<sup>2</sup> roughly 100% of GDP, since winning the bid in 2010. The amount was spent in constructing 7 new stadiums for the international standard matches, refurbishing an old one and creating a metro system to link the venues of the matches. Besides, out of this amount the funds were used to upgrade an airport, construct new hotels for the visiting fans and upgradation of the roads to host a world class event. The tournament was held at 8 venues in 5 cities including Al-Daayen, Al-Khor, Al-Wakrah, Al-Rayyan, and the capital city of Doha. The matches were contested between 32 teams.

The FIFA World Cup 2022 held in Qatar is going to have long lasting impact. It was a unique event in its nature: as a small Arab country despite of multiple controversies managed to uphold its norms and Muslim traditions. It will also help in altering the 'world view' of Islam and may help in countering Islamophobia too. Moreover, it is likely to have enduring impact in terms of economic boost, modernized and customized civic and sports infrastructure improving image and international standing of Qatar. The event commenced with the recitation of following verses of

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<sup>2</sup> Tariq Panja, "Qatar Got the World Cup It Wanted", December 18, 2022.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/18/sports/soccer/qatar-world-cup-host.html>, accessed January 22, 2023.

the Holy Quran by a 20-year-old boy Ghanim Al Muftah, who is also a FIFA World Cup ambassador:

“Oh mankind, indeed we have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another.”<sup>3</sup>



Morgan Freeman and Ghanim al Muftah during the opening ceremony

Source: The Khaleej Times <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/fifa-world-cup/fifa-world-cup-2022-look-how-qatar-welcomes-the-football-fans-with-quran-recitation> , accessed January 16, 2023.

The ceremony was preceded by an invitation to the world by the host nation. The people were welcomed to visit Qatar with an open-mind and discover it as a pluralist state; knowing about its culture, religion and in the broader sense about the Muslim world, respecting the local customs, traditions and laws.

Prior to the tournament a statement sent to CNN on behalf of the “Qatar’s Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy (SC)” stated that,

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<sup>3</sup> FIFA World Cup: Qatar welcomes football fans with Quran recitation, Morgan Freeman narration, November 20 2022. <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/fifa-world-cup/fifa-world-cup-2022-look-how-qatar-welcomes-the-football-fans-with-quran-recitation> , accessed January 22, 2023.

It is meant to be “an inclusive and discriminatory-free” World Cup, “There has never been an issue and every event will be delivered safely.” “Everyone is welcome in Qatar, but we are a conservative country and any public display of affection, regardless of orientation, is frowned upon. We simply ask for people to respect our culture. We all live on the same planet, but we each have different cultures. We welcome all, but we also expect and want people to respect our culture”.<sup>4</sup>

The host country guaranteed the tourists and spectators their safety and security by following the state laws and not undermining them. It also provided surety to the LGBT+ community not to be fearful to visit the country as long as they respect the traditions and values of Qatar. However, being prohibited in Islam consuming of alcohol at the stadiums during matches was banned. Facilitating the international fans of football, hard drinks were allowed in designated places including FIFA Fan Festival, other fan destinations and licensed venues, away from Qatar’s World Cup 2022 stadium perimeters.

Apart from the tournament, Qatar offered many spectacular sights including the sightseeing of the Katara Mosque to the visitors. The event’s most positive impact was change of visitors’ view about Islam. To many, their visit of Qatar was the first exposure to a Muslim country and Islam. Around two thousand scholars on Islam, from across the globe, who spoke different world languages to preach Islam in their own languages had been brought in. These scholars helped remove the misconceptions about Islamic terrorism, rigidity, aggression, and forced imposition of religion. This resulted in sending a message of peace to the world. Besides, there were QR codes displayed at mosques offering the visitors to know about Islam and Quran in their preferred languages. Electronic boards containing Hadith and Islam in more than 30 languages were displayed in the mosques and outside. An official at Qatar’s Ministry of Religious Endowments told AFP that the goal of the state was not “the number of converts

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<sup>4</sup> Oumaima Latrech, “Qatar Enacts Sex Bans for Unmarried Fans Ahead of World Cup”, June 22, 2022. <https://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2022/06/349859/qatar-enacts-sex-bans-for-unmarried-fans-ahead-of-world-cup>, accessed January 16, 2023.

to Islam, but rather the number of those who change their opinion about it.”<sup>5</sup> The initiative was meant to break the barriers and encourage people to learn and understand the peaceful spirit of Islam which is inherited by the Qatar.



Canadian couple Dorinel and Clara Popa pose for a photo inside the Blue Mosque, during Qatar’s 2022 World Cup, in Doha, Nov. 29, 2022.

Source: <https://www.voanews.com/a/world-cup-host-qatar-seeks-to-change-minds-on-islam/6862327.html>, accessed January 16, 2023.



Fans visiting Qatar for the FIFA World Cup can take free guided tours of the Katara Mosque in multiple languages.

Source: <https://www.interfaithamerica.org/world-cup-interfaith-understanding-islam/>, accessed January 16, 2023.

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<sup>5</sup> “World Cup Host Qatar Seeks to Change Minds on Islam”, December 04, 2022.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/world-cup-host-qatar-seeks-to-change-minds-on-islam/6862327.html>, accessed January 16, 2023.

Besides religious and cultural impact about the state of Qatar and the Muslim world, the FIFA World Cup 2022 will further elevate Qatar in multiple domains including socio-economic spheres, creating job opportunities, tourism, diplomacy and projecting the soft image of the country.

According to estimates, this World Cup generated 1.5 million job opportunities contributing in the state economy in construction, real estate, and hospitality.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the tournament will surge tourism in Qatar for a long time as it gained extraordinary coverage by international media introducing Qatar in the globe and providing it the accessibility to the new markets. The event also attracted thousands of people to the destinations less likely to be known and visited otherwise. Qatar expects to achieve the target of 6 million visitors annually by 2030, up from 2 million in 2019.

Furthermore, the infrastructure developed for the mega event comprising stadiums, hotels, roads, airports and metro-line for commuters have added to the state property for economic boost of the country, facilitating the tourists and in diversification of the economy.

The FIFA World Cup helped Qatar in elevating its position from an ordinary sports performer to a key sporting hub of the Middle East, providing it an entry in global sports' business. Winning the bid of the World Cup 2022 in 2010 opened new avenues for Qatar which brought many international sport events to its doors since 2010. Organizing of this magnificent event engendered praise for a small Arab country. This has also opened new vistas of income generation and economic diversification addition to its revenues from oil and gas.

The successful conduct of this mega event is seen as a powerful element to rebrand Qatar's image including a legacy of being the first Arab Muslim country to host FIFA world Cup. It also projected the soft image of the Qatar enhancing its reputation not only at the regional level but also around the globe. Qatar successfully portrayed the Arab culture beyond its borders by utilizing the event and sent a message of being

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<sup>6</sup> Zahara Malik, "A Lasting Impact: The World Cup on the Middle East region and Beyond" 12 December, 2022. <https://www.arabianbusiness.com/opinion/a-lasting-impact-the-world-cup-on-the-middle-east-region-and-beyond>, accessed January 16, 2023.

capable of hosting a world class event adding into state confidence, illustrating the technological advancement, increased people-to-people interaction, tourism and cultural manifestations.

The event further helped in enhancing diplomatic relation between Qatar and Gulf countries, which were experiencing bitterness since 2017, as the World Cup left a positive impact on their economies as well in the form of having more tourists visiting Qatar's neighbouring countries. Particularly UAE, Jordan, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia experienced a notable increase in tourism since the commencement of the tournament.

FIFA World Cup 2022 did not only benefit its host country but also to the FIFA association. Al Jazeera, a Qatar-based news channel reported that the World Cup held at Qatar produced 7.5 billion dollars for FIFA governing body with an increase of \$1 billion on the revenue from the tournament hosted by Russia in 2018, which is a record in itself.<sup>7</sup> It proved to be distinguished event from the previous held tournaments which brought different people and cultures closer to one another from across the world. FIFA confirmed the notion by saying that,

“Football reinforced its unique cohesive power by uniting the world in a spirit of peace and friendship.”<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, Gianni Infantino, President FIFA, termed it ‘the best FIFA World Cup ever’.

In a statement posted on FIFA's website on December 20, 2022, Infantino stated that,

“What you have done and what they have done to welcome the world to this country - this beautiful country - has been unbelievable, and everyone felt at home.”<sup>9</sup> He further added that for the first time in the history of modern WC, the world has come together in the tournament held at Qatar.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/12/world-cup-football-financial-windfall/> (accessed January 16, 2023).

<sup>8</sup> FIFA World Cup 2022 praised for its “unique cohesive power”, December 16, 2022. <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/fifa-world-cup-2022-tm-praised-for-its-unique-cohesive-power>, accessed January 16, 2023.

<sup>9</sup> “Gianni Infantino: Football is becoming truly global”, December 20, 2022. <https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/president/news/gianni-infantino-football-is-becoming-truly-global>, accessed January 16, 2023.

In short, the very much contested FIFA World Cup 2022 impacted minds of number of people from across the world. The western media's criticism does not align with the social media stories of common people. The analysis of social media persons reflected that the Islam was introduced to many non-Muslims around the world, who came to attend the FIFA World Cup, as a religion of peace and harmony. The story of animosity towards Islam and its followers was portrayed through the mainstream media by interpreting Qatar as a country denying the basic rights to its citizens as well as the rights of LGBT community, and barring non-Muslims from consuming alcohol in the stadium premises. The Qatar, however, practically manifested liberty appropriately, within the local laws and norms. All in all, the event proved to be a massive hit and gave a message of peace to the world depicting the true spirit of Islam despite of prevailing controversies.

Qatar achieved the objectives of making this global event successful by focusing in multiple directions including developing relations with the states and making the people understand about their point of view. Simultaneously, it tried to remove the misperceptions of the people about Islam and its teachings and introducing them to the Muslim Arab culture. The success of Qatar in achieving its objectives was also indicated by the global media in the following words,

“Qatar has sent a powerful message to the world through the World Cup that a nation can keep its cultural and religious values while remaining modern.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> “FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022; bright chapter in Doha's efforts to promote tolerance, coexistence culture”, December 22, 2022. <http://en.kabar.kg/news/fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-bright-chapter-in-dohas-efforts-to-promote-tolerance-coexistence-culture/>, accessed January 23, 2023.