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# Qatar's World Cup 2022: Dropping Jaws and Turning Tables

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## **Qatar's World Cup 2022: Dropping Jaws and Turning Tables<sup>1</sup>** **Mahjoob Zweiri & Farah AlQawasmi**

In 2010, FIFA awarded the state of Qatar the honor to host the World Cup. Qatar's World Cup bid was strong, and FIFA officials believed that it's time for this immense international event to be held in a new and different location from where it's been traditionally hosted before. Consequently, this decision then set off numerous allegations of corruption, human rights issues, and many more allegations that escalated against the state throughout the 12 years of preparation. Why were there multiple accusations against the state of Qatar from a number of European countries that have not been seen before in either previous World Cups or in Qatar's hosting to global and international events, such as the COP conferences, or other similar events? Why is it that a number of states in Europe took a stance towards Qatar in this specific event as opposed to others?

European countries, with the help of the media, institutions such as the NGO Amnesty International, and even diplomats and sport officials, held rigorous campaigns urging people to boycott what they called "The World Cup of Shame." Those allegations, alongside accusations of bribery against both Qatar and FIFA, forced FIFA officials to undergo a year-long investigation which demonstrated Qatar's abidance by all rules and regulations of FIFA, and that there was no evidence to demonstrate Qatari corruption towards the World Cup. However, this did not put an end to the hateful campaigns, on the contrary,

it led to more scrutiny and injustice towards Qatar.

### *A 'Heated' Game: The Monopoly of the World Cup and World Standards*

Nasser Al Khater, the Chief Executive Officer of Qatar 2022, stated that the campaigns against Qatar hosting the World Cup come as no shock as he believes that European countries assume a [monopoly](#) over the World Cup. Moreover, Qatar hosting the World Cup demonstrated that the West does not only feel the need to monopolize Football and the World Cup tournament in specific, but that the West feels the need to continue exporting their standards and their way of living.

It is completely ironic that countries of the West call for the acceptance and inclusivity of the other, when in reality, the West have shown on multiple incidents through statements made by diplomats, state officials and news outlets their complete ignorance of the other, absolute rejection of the Middle East, and that 'Orientalism' is still alive and well. In an article by Feras Abu Helal about Western Hypocrisy in the World Cup, Abu Helal demonstrates how the West practiced both Orientalism and Eurocentrism in the World Cup. He claims that Orientalism was clear since the beginning with the image that was attempted to be drawn about the Gulf and Qatar in specific. Whether it was complaints about the weather, and the World Cup ruining the holidays for the West, or whether it was on migrant

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<sup>1</sup> All articles published under "Gulf Insights" series have been discussed internally but they reflect the opinion and views of the authors, and do not reflect the views of the Center, the College of Arts and Sciences or Qatar University, including the terms and terminology used in this publication.

rights, women's rights, and the infamous battle for the LGBTQ community, [the criticism against Qatar](#), that was backed by stereotypes rather than facts and observations, kept intensifying as the World Cup came closer in time. Furthermore, Abu Helal argues that Eurocentrism was demonstrated by the West as soon as Qatar was awarded the tournament. It started with naming it the 'Desert World Cup' with complaints about the tournament being hosted in a hot country in the summer months. That was followed with Qatar and FIFA announcing that the tournament will be hosted in the months of November and December, but that did not spare Qatar the criticism either.

In multiple interviews conducted with Qatari state officials, whether it was with the Emir of Qatar, or with officials on the organizing committee of the world Cup 2022, the majority of the questions revolved around aspects that go against Qatari traditions. Most questions circulated around showing public affection in the streets of Qatar, or the tolerance of the LGBTQ community. Although all the interviews concluded with the acceptance of the other, they however also asked for the respect of the Qatari culture. The German Football team, along with their Interior Minister wore the LGBTQ armband and the team members placed their hands on their mouths as a sign of protest against human rights. This was met with a [threat for sanctions](#) by FIFA on breaking the rules set by the FIFA committee.

Fans at the stadiums and internationally were infuriated at the hypocrisy demonstrated by the German team and held pictures of Mesut Ozil, a Turkish German Football player who no longer plays for Germany after being extensively criticized for him being against China's prosecution of the

Uyghurs. Ozil received harsh criticism by both European and Chinese Officials, and that came as no surprise to him as he has already been facing discrimination for being from Turkish Origins. "In the eyes of Grindel and his supporters, I am German when we win but I am an [immigrant](#) when we lose."

Piers Morgan, a British broadcaster and journalist, condemned the BBC for not broadcasting the World Cup and called it an "absurd hypocrisy." He went further to criticize Western media outlets, and western officials that boycotted the World Cup for not presenting their [desired version](#) of the game in their desired part of the World. The multiple layers of criticism on Qatar and the World Cup revealed the monopoly that some Western countries hold over standards and expectations. The West's definition of human rights, acceptance and inclusivity is limited to the people they want accepted, not to 'all people matter'. This World Cup was an eye opener, and perhaps the beginning of the end of the stereotypes that the West has set on this side of the World.

The criticism on Qatar was strategic and systematic. The 'concerns' that western countries held towards Qatar grew with time and with intensity. As stated above, it started with a matter of climate and location, and it grew to become an issue of bribery, then migrant worker rights, Women's rights and ended with the battle of representation, specifically the representation of the LGBTQ community. Many believe that numerous reporters from the west arrived to Qatar with the intention of highlighting and supporting their stereotypical claims. Jenny Taft, a sports Fox News reporter, received backlash after posting a video on TikTok claiming "not feeling special"

for having to walk through a female's only checkpoint. Taft's video received hundreds of responses, the majority criticizing her complete negligence of the culture and religion, and highlighting her intentions on criticizing the culture rather than understanding it. She was met with multiple western families that visited Qatar and attended the World Cup who reported that the tournament was extremely safe and accommodating to their families, and that the country is safe as a whole. Ladies stated that they [feel safe](#) walking around the streets of Doha at night unaccompanied, something that they would not imagine doing back home. The Moroccan football team's celebrations with their mothers was yet another affirmation to the West on the values Arabs and Muslims place on their women and their families.

### *Conclusion*

The World Cup has concluded on the Qatari National Day, two celebrations for the moment of history, where an Arab Muslim country hosted an international event that received a lot of targeted hate from afar, but even more love from within. Argentina won the hearts of football fans, and the title of the World Cup Champions of 2022, while Qatar has certainly won the hearts of 99% of its visitors. The West's so-called 'concerns' demonstrated one thing, and that is that orientalism is alive, but this time around, many people questioned the rights of those countries in enforcing their standards, and manipulating their news and their people to believe the stereotypical image that they've drawn on the Muslims and Arabs for years. This time not only did the Arabs question the West's media intentions, on the contrary, hundreds of people from

around the World pointed out the West's loud hypocrisy. This World Cup was different by all means and every aspect, and most embraced the differences. Hats off to Qatar for not bending backwards to make this a typical World Cup, hats off for maintaining its Arab Gulf and Muslim identity. Qatar did not have to raise the LGBTQ flag or offer alcoholic drinks in the stadium to make everyone happy; instead by embracing its own culture and identity, it welcomed all, and as Shaikh Tamim put it in his welcome speech at the World Cup, "On behalf of my people and I, I welcome all to Doha, the city for all," Congratulations Qatar, 1-0 to you.

### **About the authors**

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### **About the Gulf Insights series:**

The "Gulf Insights" series is published by the Gulf Studies Center on a weekly base with the aim to promote informed debate with academic depth. The Gulf Insights are commentaries on pressing regional issues written by the GSC/GSP faculty, staff PhD and MA students, as well as guest scholars, and they can be between 1,200 to 1,500 words.

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