

## Analysis: Why Qatar is a controversial venue for 2022 World Cup

Bloomberg

Required Annotations		Student-Created Annotations		Summary / Questions / Reflection	
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Student-created

Required (bold)

Ever since it won the right to host the 2022 World Cup, Qatar has been a controversial choice. The Persian Gulf country's scorching climate made it impossible to hold the competition during the usual summer slot, so it was switched to November and December — just when national leagues are in full swing. Deprived of their star players, domestic competitions will have to shut down for up to six weeks. Investigations continue into how Qatar, a tiny nation of 3 million people with no soccer **pedigree**, managed to win a secret vote to become host. Human rights groups have decried the treatment of foreign workers building the stadiums and accommodation for visiting fans. The government says the event is a catalyst for improving its labor laws.

### Why was the bidding process contentious?

Ever since 2010, when soccer's ruling body FIFA awarded Russia and Qatar the rights to consecutive World Cups, allegations of vote-buying have swirled. Two members of the 24-man FIFA executive committee that chooses the hosts were suspended before the 2010 ballot after being filmed offering their support for cash. An investigation continues in France into the award of the 2022 tournament. An **indictment** was also filed in the U.S. in 2020 that accused several officials of receiving payments to back Qatar's bid. Their trial is set to begin in a federal court in New York in January. Qatar denies paying anyone for the hosting rights. FIFA said that holding the event in the country was in line with its goal of expanding soccer into new regions.

### What's in it for Qatar?

Qatar is betting the tournament will help to modernize its image and make it a tourism and business destination on par with regional rival Dubai. The World Cup is the world's most-watched sports event, with the last one held in Russia in 2018 attracting 3.6 billion television and online viewers. Bloomberg Intelligence estimated that Qatar was on course to complete \$300 billion of **infrastructure** projects before the opening game on November 20. That looks like a lot for a country smaller than Connecticut, but Qatar is one of the world's wealthiest nations thanks to vast natural gas reserves. Organizers expect the event to add \$17 billion to the economy, equivalent to about 10 percent of gross domestic product in 2021.

### Why the outcry over migrant workers?

Media reports have detailed cases of laborers working on the new stadiums and other infrastructure being subjected to inhumane treatment and unsafe working conditions. **Amnesty International accused the government of failing to properly investigate the deaths of many migrant workers.** The World Cup preparations have shone a light on the Gulf region's "kafala" (sponsorship) system, under which laborers require their employer's permission to switch jobs, return home or even open a bank account. In 2019, the United Nations **assailed** Qatar for

racial discrimination, saying a worker's nationality played an "overwhelming role" in how they are treated.

### **What does the government say?**

**While denying allegations that laborers are ill-treated, the government has been building some new living quarters and promised to improve safety.**

Qatar introduced new labor laws in 2020 designed to guarantee a minimum wage and make it easier to move jobs in what it says is an effort to **dismantle** the kafala system. Rules instituted in 2021 further limited the hours that workers can toil outside in the summer heat. At least on paper, the reforms make Qatar's labor laws among the most worker-friendly in the Gulf region. Rights groups acknowledge that working conditions have improved in recent years, but continue to publish reports documenting unpaid wages, illegal recruitment fees and poor enforcement of labor rules.

### **Is Qatar a free country?**

Qatar is ruled by its emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, who controls the government and the judiciary. Political parties are banned and most of the population are noncitizens with few civil or political rights. Homosexuality is officially illegal, though penalties are infrequently enforced. While FIFA rules stipulate that displays promoting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender rights be permitted in stadiums, a senior official responsible for security during the event warned that rainbow flags could be taken away from fans to protect them from being attacked. In March 2021, Human Rights Watch published a report calling on Qatar to reform the male guardianship system, a loose group of practices and rules that make many women's personal decisions **contingent** on approval from a male family member.

### **Will there be boycotts?**

Players and teams in Norway and fans in Denmark called for boycotts, but soccer authorities in participating countries ultimately rejected the idea. Amnesty and others groups said enforcement of Qatar's labor reforms has fallen short, but note the changes have been positive overall and pushed back on the idea of a stay-away. Sportswear manufacturer Hummel said it changed its design for the Danish national team uniforms because the brand doesn't "wish to be visible during a tournament that has cost thousands of people their lives." The mayors of Paris and several other French cities have said they won't set up giant screens and zones for fans to watch the tournament. Several tied the decision to Qatar's poor human rights record, while others cited financial reasons, energy costs and the winter climate.

### **What will it be like for fans?**

The weather should be quite pleasant. The average mid-November high is 85 degrees Fahrenheit (29 degrees Celsius), and the heat tends to dissipate in December. Nonetheless, some of the tournament's eight outdoor stadiums are equipped with air conditioning systems — adding an extra challenge to FIFA's pledge to make this World Cup carbon neutral. The limited number of hotels in Qatar means some fans are being encouraged to stay in other cities in the region

and travel by plane to matches.

### How should fans behave in Qatar?

The country's dress code reflects its Muslim traditions. While there's flexibility in five-star hotels, women and men must cover their bodies from shoulders to knees in malls and most public spaces. Public displays of affection are unwelcome; even hand-holding is rare. With a handful of exceptions, alcohol is limited to restaurants attached to high-end hotels, though World Cup organizers have said tourists will be able to drink in designated fan zones.

### Questions

1. Read the following sentence from the article. "The government says the event is a catalyst for improving its labor laws." Which sentence from the article BEST supports this idea?
  - a) Organizers expect the event to add \$17 billion to the economy, equivalent to about 10 percent of gross domestic product in 2021.
  - b) The World Cup preparations have shone a light on the Gulf region's "kafala" (sponsorship) system, under which laborers require their employer's permission to switch jobs, return home or even open a bank account.
  - c) While denying allegations that laborers are ill-treated, the government has been building some new living quarters and promised to improve safety.
  - d) Rules instituted in 2021 further limited the hours that workers can toil outside in the summer heat.
2. Read the following selection from the article.

The country's dress code reflects its Muslim traditions. While there's flexibility in five-star hotels, women and men must cover their bodies from shoulders to knees in malls and most public spaces. Public displays of affection are unwelcome; even hand-holding is rare. With a handful of exceptions, alcohol is limited to restaurants attached to high-end hotels, though World Cup organizers have said tourists will be able to drink in designated fan zones.

Which conclusion can be drawn from the selection?

- a) Certain rules will be more lenient in some places in Qatar throughout the World Cup.
  - b) People visiting Qatar for the World Cup should avoid spending time in shopping malls.
  - c) The limits on alcohol in Qatar during the World Cup are mainly for safety purposes.
  - d) The World Cup is being held in Qatar primarily to bring attention to important Muslim traditions.
3. Which answer choice accurately summarizes HOW sportswear manufacturer Hummel feels about the World Cup in Qatar?
  - a) It wanted to sponsor the tournament because it has a worldwide audience in the billions.
  - b) It pushed the teams in Norway and Denmark to boycott the tournament to protest Qatar's labor policies.
  - c) It decided to minimize its brand visibility during the tournament due to Qatar's human rights record.
  - d) It urged organizers to prohibit air conditioning during the tournament in order to keep it carbon neutral.
4. Which idea did the author develop the LEAST in this article about the World Cup in Qatar?
  - a) The country has mistreated foreign workers who are building the stadiums for the World Cup.
  - b) FIFA officials will likely be convicted of taking bribes from Qatar to award the country the World Cup.
  - c) Hosting the World Cup will have a significant economic impact on Qatar's gross domestic product.
  - d) Qatar has conducted extensive construction projects in preparation of the country hosting the World Cup.