



[The 2022 FIFA World Cup Opens in Qatar Amid a Mix of Controversy and Excitement](#)

On Sunday, the long-anticipated 2022 FIFA World Cup officially opened in Qatar, mixed with sentiments of excitement for the Arab World but also amid some fair concern over human rights-related issues. The build-up to this year's World Cup began in 2010 when it was announced that Qatar would make history by becoming the first Middle Eastern country to host the internationally-renowned event. Of course, there has been a great deal of enthusiasm, especially among Arabs, many of whom are hopeful that hosting the World Cup will give the Middle East a chance to showcase itself and garner more acclaim amongst the international community. Impartial analysts have attempted to emphasize the importance of providing a balanced perspective regarding the World Cup, giving attention to the legitimate criticisms of migrant worker conditions and other human rights-related problems but also ensuring to avoid double standards over negative backlash considering that the last World Cup (2018 in Russia) and Winter Olympics (2022 in China) were also held in countries with these types of concerns.

Preparation for the historically significant event has had a human rights shadow looming over it for twelve years, an element which seemed to deepen in the final weeks leading up to the start of the World Cup. An estimated 85% of Qatar's population consists of foreign laborers, which various rights groups and states alike have claimed are often exploited. According to a 2021 report from The Guardian, 6,500 South Asian migrants died from 2014 to 2020. Many of the rest live in overcrowded and poorly-maintained labor camps. Equally concerning, efforts to reform the infamous kafala system, considered by some to be a modern form of indentured servitude, have mostly failed. Labor conditions aside, critics have also called out Qatar's harsh treatment of the LGBTQ community. Qatar has, however, made notable improvements to their labor laws, and promised that LGBTQ attendees would be safe. They also now have one of the highest minimum wages in the Middle East, and there is evidence that suggests that The Guardian's death count is too large, even though Qatar's reported 37 deaths is at the same time, estimated to be far too low.

What has gone largely uncovered, though, is the hypocrisy and double standard-nature of the human rights allegations leveled at Qatar. Yes, there are certainly troubling human rights violations taking place, and observers should continue to use the World Cup stage to address them. On the other hand, however, international sporting events have been held in other countries with equally poor human rights records in recent years. The last World Cup was held in Russia. At the time, Russia was committing war crimes in Syria and was already in the process of illegally trying to annex Ukrainian territory. Now, of course, Russia has launched an invasion of Ukraine that has been raging for around 9 months. To the south of Russia, Beijing held the Summer Olympics in 2008 as well as the Winter Olympics in 2022. China is well known for its human rights violations, most notably against the Uyghur population. Reports indicate that China has detained as many as one million Uyghurs in recent years and sent them to "re-education camps" with shoot-to-kill policies for those who try to escape. Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International have accused China of crimes against humanity, and several nations including the United States have labeled the situation a genocide. China has also come under fire for years for their mistreatment of their Olympic athletes. The 2022 Human Freedom Index confirms that Qatar, Russia, and China are not so different – Qatar ranks 128th, Russia ranks 126th, and China ranks an abysmal 150th.

Human rights groups are hopeful that the spotlight of the World Cup will create lasting reforms in Qatar, and many have suggested that there have been recent ones that have been successful – albeit minimally. Others have put forward the notion that hosting a glamorous World Cup has simply been a means of deflecting from the more alarming aspects of society. Whatever the case may be, it is important to be fair and consistent in our assessments.