Weaponizing the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games?

A comparative case study of different regime types using Sports Mega Events as a soft power resource

Content

Abstract

Sports has long been a neglected topic in the literature on international relations, but ever since Joseph Nye his work on soft power this has changed. Soft power is the ability of nations to get what they want through attraction rather than coercion. A particular strand of work focuses on how so-called Sporting Mega Events such as the FIFA World Cup or Olympic Games are used by host nations to create this attraction on the world stage. But why and how particular countries intent to use these events is showing very different results and remains up for debate. This paper presumes that the regime type of a country can affect intentions in a significant way. Therefore the aim of this paper is to research in what way the intended use of Sports Mega Events differ as a soft power resource between different regime types. In order to do this, a comparative case study approach is used, analyzing France hosting the Olympic Games and Qatar hosting the FIFA World Cup. To test this, hypotheses on the resources of cultural power, governance structure and trade are derived from existing literature on soft power and regime types and earlier work on SME's. Results show that an expected clear dichotomy between regime types does not exist empirically. Both countries use a hybridity of all resources in order to make use of their respective SME's as a soft power tool. Furter research is needed on how these events are used in the context of soft power and how different regime types intent to use them.

Key words: *Soft Power, Sports Mega Events, International Relations, Culture, Governance, Case Study, Regime Type, Sports.*

1. Introduction

Saudi Arabia, the only nation to submit a bid to the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), will host the Men's FIFA World Cup in 2034 (BBC, 2024). For many, this would have seemed impossible just a few decades ago, since Saudi Arabia was still an underdeveloped country. The president of the Saudi Arabian Football Association stated this was only possible because of the country's rapid transformation. The allocation of the World Cup to Saudi Arabia also immediately sparked a lot of criticism and accusations of so-called 'sportswashing'. Sportswashing is the use of sports by oppressive governments to divert attention from other moral wrongdoings like labor or human rights abuses (Fruh et al., 2023). Countries like Saudi Arabia, but also Qatar, China, and Russia, allegedly use sports as a way of distracting foreign actors, whether the general public or other governments, from those violations. Countries use sports as a foreign policy tool, thereby shaping their perception of the country. Sports as a tool in geopolitics is not a new phenomenon, as Dichter and Johns (2014) analyze with their historical overview of important sporting events. For instance, the First World War left Germany out of the 1920 and 1924 Olympics, and tensions in the Cold War led both the Soviet Union and America to boycott the Olympics in 1980 and 1984 consecutively. But perhaps one of the most intriguing displays of sports being used as a diplomatic tool was the visit of former NBA and basketball superstar Dennis Rodman to the Republic of North Korea. Amidst high tensions, North Korea had just launched their most powerful nuclear test to date, and the United States used a sporting symbol to try and ease tensions.

Then why has sports been long neglected in the realm of international relations? Taylor (1986) argues that despite the significant role of sports in world society and their potential to influence behavior in the interstate political system, there has been no significant research on their connections due to the perception that sport and international relations operate in separate domains. Another explanation is that for a long time, the dominant sporting culture was in the hands of western countries, and only ever since emerging countries have been getting involved have scholars and practitioners paid attention (Grix & Lee, 2013). Levermore and Budd (2004) underscore this neglect of sports in international relations. They acknowledge the existence of some work, primarily utilizing a realist or Marxist approach (Houlihan, 2000; Lowe et al., 1978). According to Chadwick (2022) argues that, because of globalization and shifts in the geopolitical landscape, the dominant research agenda on sports also needs to be widened. Sports is very much a cultural phenomenon, and with many international organizations and societal actors involved, like FIFA or UNICEF, it is striking that a more constructivist or liberal approach has been lacking for so long. Freeman (2012) is one of the first to talk about sports through this more liberalist approach when he says that ''sport is used as a form of non-military competition with other countries, political rivals, and otherwise'' (p. 1271). One way of doing this is by using the potential influence of so-called Sports Mega Events (SME), like the FIFA World Cup or Olympic Games, as a soft power resource (Cornelissen, 2010; Grix & Lee, 2013; Grix & Houlihan, 2014; Jeong, 2021).

Joseph Nye first dubbed the term soft power during the aftermath of the Cold War, where he saw that a partial shift in the proof of power in international relations would occur, away from a realist approach with a focus on military and economic resources, towards a more liberal or constructivist approach where the ability to change state behavior through other means became more important (Nye, 1990). In this new approach, not only resources like military power would persuade other states to do what they would otherwise not do, but also other concepts such as culture, communications, or sports. Soft power for countries then ''is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments'' (Nye, 2004, p. 256). Nations also use sports as a way of repositioning themselves geopolitically and to rebrand their image (Dubinsky, 2019). A particular strand of scholarly work focuses on the use of so-called Sports Mega Events (SME's) in relation to soft power (Grix, Brannagan & Lee, 2019). SME's are ''large scale sporting events, which have a dramatic character, mass popular appeal and international significance'' (Roche, 2002, p. 23). Because these SME's have an obvious international appeal, with viewer numbers in the billions, it is an excellent opportunity for governments to influence other countries through showcasing their cultural heritage or norms and values (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). To assess how much international appeal an SME has, Black (2014) differentiates between tier 1, 2 and 3 events according to their range, size, and cost. The Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup exclusively fall in category 1 and therefore are expected to be able to have the most impact when used as a soft power tool.

To study how and why countries use SME's to attain soft power, a lot of case studies have been conducted (Grix et al., 2024). Studies have shown that liberal democracies like Germany and the United Kingdom utilize SME's effectively to boost their national image (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Also, Asian states like the still-emerging South-Korea or an already-more-advanced country like Japan have been the subject of research (Jeong, 2021). Soft power strategies included enhancing the national image in the international community or improving relations with otherwise more hostile regional countries. BRICS countries have also been particularly interested in hosting SME's for different reasons. Ogunnubi's (2019) his analysis shows that the soft power strategy of South-Africa focused more on the regional level, emphasizing the usefulness of SME's to signal ambitions as a regional leader on the African continent. Brazil, on the other hand, already considered itself a regional power and intended to use its SME as a way of consolidating its power on an international level (Grix Brannagan & Houlihan, 2017). Russia is somewhat of an outlier in their soft power strategy, as they used their Sochi Winter Olympics more for domestic reasons and were not interested in showing the Western countries that they adhere to their dominant worldview (Grix & Kramareva, 2017). Jeong (2021) in his analysis of China, also acknowledged that the main purpose of hosting an SME was to enhance domestic legitimacy. This does not mean China and Russia ignored the soft power strategies available through SME's; just that because of their specific regime type, they prioritized differently.

Clearly, different countries have divergent motivations to engage with soft power strategies, but they all believe it can have a significant impact in the international arena of global politics. As previously

mentioned, regime types significantly influence the use of SME's (Walker, 2016). Therefore, it is surprising that virtually no scholarly work to date has conducted a comparative method of research between an authoritarian regime and a liberal democracy, specifically focusing on how these states intend to use soft power strategies. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to research how and why different regime types also differ in their intended use of Sports Mega Events as a soft power tool. This will be done by conducting a comparative case study of both Qatar, seen as a closed autocracy, and France, a liberal democratic country (V-Dem, 2024). The main research question follows:

In what way does the intended use of Sports Mega Events differ as a soft power resource between different regime types?

The paper has scientific relevance for several reasons. Nye's work on soft power has been applauded by many due to its more constructivist approach to the concept of power itself (Gallarotti, 2011). However, a significant critique is that Nye's work primarily examines the concept of power through a liberal Western lens. This makes analyzing the soft power strategies of authoritarian regimes, which are typically more concerned with regime security and legitimacy, problematic (Sørensen, 2017). By analyzing Qatar and their FIFA World Cup, this paper contributes to a better understanding of autocratic regimes and their soft power strategies. Secondly, although some case studies have been done, further work is needed on soft power strategies by liberal democracies. These industrialized countries can normally also rely on hard power resources, making it arguable whether these countries are interested in soft power as a resource in international relations (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). Lastly, there is a significant amount of debate on soft power in general and, specifically in relation to SME's, regarding methodological issues (Thomson et al., 2019). This paper will try to contribute to these discussions in the literature by further analyzing soft power in relation to authoritarian regimes and by clearly defining how   soft   power   can   be   defined   when   considering   SME's.

This research has societal relevance for several reasons. The rapid development and exorbitant wealth of autocratic states in the Gulf region have caught the attention of western countries. One of the ways in which these new powers try to exert influence globally is through the hosting of SME's. Every edition of the FIFA World Cup and Olympic Games reaches billions of people and can leave a lasting impression. Therefore, a better understanding of how and why countries intend to use it as a resource becomes very important. Understanding the conception and implementation of different strategies is crucial for both scholars and policymakers. This article aims to enhance policymakers' understanding of SME usage and potential in international relations by drawing a comparison between an autocratic regime and a liberal democracy. Also, this article hopes to contribute to a better understanding of the rationale   for   Middle   Eastern   countries   hosting   SME's.

The next section will elaborate on what has already been written on sports in international relations in general and SME's more specifically. Also, work on regime types and soft power is discussed to further clarify differences. Then, theoretical expectations will be formulated on the basis of

these regime types and on an ideal type to analyze soft power resources relating to SME's. In the methodology section, research design, case selection, and data collection will be discussed. Also, the issues of validity and reliability will be considered. The data analysis will empirically assess France and Qatar's soft power use through their respective SME's. Finally, a conclusion and discussion will follow.

2. Literature review

The research agenda on sports in relation to soft power and, more specifically, SME's, is relatively new. Therefore, this literature review will consider the development of the research agenda in more detail. Starting with what has been written more generally about sports in international relations and then moving on to SME's specifically and all developments in this field.

2.1 Sports and international relations

Since the end of the Cold War and after Nye (1990) coined his soft power concept, the use of sports in the international arena has become a more popular topic. There are two important fields of research on sports and international relations: one looking at sports in relation to development, and the other in relation to politics. Considering sports and development, Levermore and Budd (2004) point towards the possible benefits of sports for developmental purposes. Sports, especially when contrasting them with other forms of development aid, were considered more inclusive and appealing to recipient countries. Critics primarily criticized financial or governance aid for perpetuating and bolstering unequal power balances. But with most writings on international development, critiques of these supposed benefits also arose quickly. Darnell (2012) stressed that as long as structural inequalities through hegemonic power relations and neo-liberal economic policies are the dominant narrative in international relations, sports will have a hard time addressing and improving these inequalities. Neo-colonial theories even demonstrate that sports development reinforces these power imbalances (Lucas & Jeanes, 2020). Darnell (2012), in her book on sports for development and peace, also considers SME's in connection to development. He argues that SME's are in part still hosted because of their potential benefit for a national feeling of pride. This also brings us to the second field of research: sports and soft power.

2.2 Sport and Soft Power

In the field of sports and soft power, there is an abundance of theoretical concepts; let us consider the most dominant ones. For example, Freeman (2012) uses the concept of swaggering, which is a form of state behavior that strengthens national pride and boosts a country's image. He concludes that hosting or performing well in a big sporting event can influence a country's international standing. Another term often used is what kind of 'legacies' are left behind by the hosting of sporting events. Preuss (2007) coined a definition that is probably most cited within the literature and states that ''irrespective of the time of production and space, legacy is all planned and unplanned, positive and negative, tangible and intangible structures created for and by a sporting event that remain longer than the event itself'' (p. 211). Building on this work, Grix et al. (2017) discerned five overlapping categories as to what kind of legacies a country would want to obtain from an SME: (1) economic gains; (2) urban regeneration; (3) national pride/feel-good factor; (4) increased participation in sports; and (5) international prestige and soft power. Although these categories are somewhat overlapping in nature, the last category relates most to the international component of SME's However, this final category employs a diverse range of

concepts. For example, nation branding is the way a country sets itself apart by combining elements to create a distinct cultural image for specific targeted audiences (Kobierecki & Strożek, 2017). Derived from the economics of branding, it produces an emotional feeling towards a country (Ham, 2001). But according to Grix and Brannagan (2016), soft power relies heavily on credibility and trust, and this cannot solely be obtained through this nation's branding. Credibility and trust have to come from the authentic characteristics of a country and long-term relationship building. Only after that can policies on nation branding positively influence soft power. What has therefore also become a popular concept is sports diplomacy. This is forming a relationship between countries by showing a shared love or affinity for sports (Murray, 2012). In his theoretical and conceptual discussion, Dubinsky (2019) discusses soft power, nation branding, and sports diplomacy, highlighting the potential benefits and drawbacks of sports in soft power strategies. A more coherent line of work found in the literature focuses on the broader concept of soft power in relation to SME's specifically.

This literature has been on the rise ever since developing countries, also called emerging powers, started bidding for big sporting events (Grix & Lee, 2013). Cornelissen (2010) mentions the Beijing 2008 games as a landmark moment, and after that, amongst others, South Africa, Brazil, and Qatar hosted the Olympics and the FIFA World Cup. Chatin and Gallarotti (2019), in line with Cornelissen, argue that these sporting events are used to showcase soft power in the absence of other forms of international influence, like military power. These events also have an interesting cultural dynamic, where countries try to show that, on the one hand, they align with the international order but at the same time expose the world to their unique national narratives. Grix and Lee (2013) concur and see that a country's credibility on the global stage can increase despite its seemingly incompatible political and social systems with those of the West. Furthermore, they argue that the shift from developed to emerging states in hosting mega-events signals a structural change in the international system. With the hosting of such events also comes a level of 'prestige' on the international stage, and prestige is seen as a source of soft power (Grix & Houlihan, 2014). The research on SME's as a soft power instrument thus far tends to focus on two different dependent variables: the achieved effects for nations through hosting an SME or the intended effects (also their soft power strategies). Since both have strengths and weaknesses, they will be discussed.

2.3 Soft Power Outcomes and Measurement Issues

This section will discuss the research papers interested in measuring the actual effects of SME's as a soft power tool. In order to understand why developing countries started bidding and successfully bringing in SME's, Grix and Lee (2013) conducted a case-study in three different countries, namely China, South Africa, and Brazil. The presumption is that these countries, because of their varying degrees of unattractive political and social values, have a lot to gain from hosting an SME as a soft power tool. Only in one instance did they try to measure the effect of an SME as a soft power tool by showing that World Cup visitors changed their opinion on potentially visiting South Africa in the future.

Furthermore, the authors argue that the allocation of SME's to these countries already shows their ability to be attractive for other nations or international institutions. This would mean that even without hosting a SME, these countries already have attractive characteristics, disproving the premise of gaining soft power through SME's. Grix and Houlihan (2014) tried to come up with other indicators showing successful execution of SME's as a soft power tool in their case study on Germany and the UK. Grix and Houlihan (2014) used three indicators for Germany: tourism, the nation's global standing, and interviews with native Germans about their self-image. The UK measured its success based on the media coverage of the event. Upon examining these metrics, numerous methodological concerns surface. First off, the self-image of the German does not say very much about soft power in international relations. Secondly, media coverage is highly subjective, depending on, for example, the country of origin or the political affiliation of the media outlet. Another paper by Kobierecki and Strożek (2021) used the visibility and familiarity of a country as a dependent variable, measured by changing levels of Google searches for the host country. They righteously critique Grix and Houlihan (2014) in saying that examining media coverage cannot explicitly measure interest in a country. But an important assumption in their research is that familiarity is also positively linked with favorability, which is mostly based on research regarding companies. When considering nation-states, the relationship between familiarity and favorability does not hold true (Leonard & Small, 2003). Take, for example, Qatar in the lead-up to their 2022 FIFA World Cup. The allocation of this event quickly brought Qatar to the world's attention, but due to human and labor rights violations, the country's favorability is under dispute (Brannagan & Giulianotti, 2018).

All in all, this line of research adds a lot of value to further exploring the relationship between SME's and soft power, but it has a hard time measuring the actual outcomes of soft power strategies. This is not surprising, seeing that the most dominant critique of Nye's concept of soft power is measurement issues (Seong-Hun, 2018). Lekakis (2019) also critiques Nye's concept of soft power in his work on soft power and sports, specifically arguing that the current literature lacks a valid platform for measuring the true impact of SME's.

2.4 Intended effects of SME's as a soft power tool

Another line of research focuses more on the intended effects and strategies for hosting an SME. Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) looked into the strategies of Qatar in their host status for the World Cup 2022 and concluded that three themes emerge: Qatar confronting a health crisis, it's position as a microstate, and the pursuit of peace, security, and integrity. But they also see that the unique case of Qatar caused a western outcry for violations of human and labor rights. This shows that intentions from a host country don't always coincide with the actual outcomes. Grix et al. (2019) researched the strategies deployed by the Russian government in hosting their Olympic winter games in 2014 and the FIFA World Cup in 2018 and concluded that their strategies were more domestically oriented in order to maintain and improve political legitimacy for the Putin regime. This research highlighted the

multifaceted use of SME's in terms of focus, extending it from an international focus to a domestic one. This does, however, stretch the conceptual use of soft power, as it moves away from an international relations concept to a domestic one. Jeong (2021) incorporated these nuances in their case study on South Korea and their hosting of SME's in 1988, 2002 and 2018 and created a tripartite analysis considering the international, regional, and domestic dimensions of soft power strategies. Yet again, the focus of the study was on the rationale behind the hosting and not so much the actual outcomes. In the same dissertation by Jeong (2021), but this time focusing on Japan and their soft power strategies for hosting the Olympics in 1964, 2019 Rugby World Cup, and the 2020 Olympics. In this work, he concludes that the 2020 Olympics had the intention of showcasing Japan as a more outward-facing nation. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic caused many of the intended outcomes of increased tourism and its subsequent spillover effects to be missed. This only highlights the difficulties of measuring and realizing the actual outcomes of soft power strategies. Therefore, this paper focuses on the intended effects of SME's on host countries.

2.5 Regime types and soft power strategies

The current literature on SME's and soft power primarily categorizes countries according to their level of development. In this typology, a dichotomy is created between emerging and developed states. However, this typology lacks a specific theoretical basis, leading to the omission of a crucial element for anticipated soft power strategies: the country's regime type. As aforementioned, countries like Russia and China had very different strategies for their SME's than, for example, South Africa, Germany, or Japan. Nye (1990) created his soft power concept in the aftermath of the Cold War with the idea that it pertains predominantly to democratic states since there values of freedom and tolerance were deemed universal principles. Consequently, Nye argues, authoritarian regimes will have a hard time using soft power. Walker (2016), however, observes a shift in soft power use, where authoritarian regimes have turned the tables and are using their own soft power tools to compete with liberal democracies in the realm of ideas. How authoritarian regimes engage with soft power is somewhat different from Nye's conception of attraction rather than coercion.

The goal of autocratic regimes is not to attract other countries per se but mostly to stop the spread of democracy (Walker, 2016). To try and do this, a variety of soft power strategies are deployed. Patalakh (2017) elaborates on how and why different regime types use different soft power strategies. First, autocratic regimes typically avoid involving independent NGO's or private sector actors due to mistrust, instead opting to create government-organized NGO's (GONGO's) for diplomatic efforts. Liberal democracies deploy a soft power strategy involving a complicated system of private-public sector partnerships where the government only directs and collaborates. In a highly top-down manner, an authoritarian regime carries out a soft power strategy by and for the state. In doing so, autocratic countries can, through propaganda, actively avoid sensitive issues and highlight past and present regime accomplishments and cultural assets (Li, 2013). This focus on the short-term is inherent to the type of

regime, since the legacy left behind is not certain after death. Liberal democracies, on the other hand, tend to focus more on global issues and long-term goals than their culture and society (Patalakh, (2017). This is because their values and ideals are less dependent on current leaders and more systemic. Universal democratic principles such as equality, justice, and individual freedom are dominant when liberal democracies try to brand their countries. Because autocratic regimes can be very diffuse and are still considered the less dominant regime type, their strategies focus less on promoting it.

3. Theoretical framework

This research will use Grix and Brannagan's (2016) ideal type as a framework for analysis in order to understand why and how France and Qatar intend to use SME's as part of their soft power package (see figure 1). In this section, we will delve deeper into the five distinct variables used to analyze the strategies. By combining these variables with our understanding of regime types and soft power, we will outline predictions about the behavior of both countries. These variables work together and are considered most important in a successful soft power strategy by a state (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Importantly, when considering soft power as a theoretical concept, these resources are used to try and influence foreign actors. Unlike other scholars (see for example Jeong, 2021), where soft power is also considered a domestic tool for influence, this paper will focus solely on regimes using an SME to influence foreign actors, whether they be government officials or citizens, in order to ''get what they want''. Therefore, we will analyze all resources in the soft power package based on their intention to influence these foreign actors, not a domestic audience.

Figure 1. Soft Power "Resources".
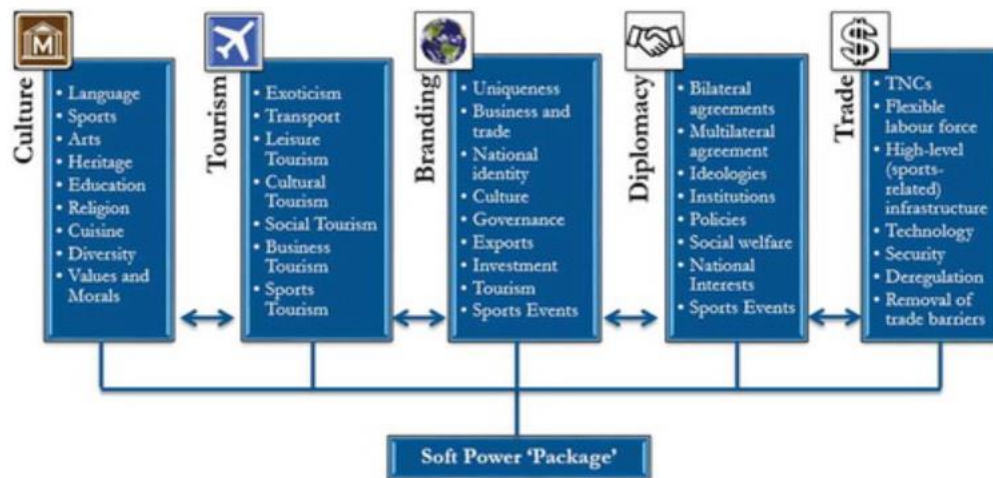
Note: Adopted from Grix and Brannagan (2016)

3.1 Culture

Soft power uses culture to enhance a country's appeal to other nation-states. Zamorano (2016), when discussing autocratic regimes, describes this as neo-propagandist, where policies are created to showcase the positive sides of the culture in a hosting country. For democratic countries, this is harder to achieve since they have less control over policy outcomes. When considering Qatar's cultural pillar of the soft power resource framework, only those assets they find appealing will be promoted. Antwi-Boateng (2013) expects Qatar to actively promote its sports initiatives and education, which are significant soft power tools. Furthermore, promoting a more modern Islamic way of living in contemporary society has

been an important pillar for the Qatari regime (Kayaoglu, 2015). This is expected to be further emphasized during the World Cup. We don't expect the regimes' misalignment with universal values of diversity, labor, and human rights to draw attention. Also, Qatar is a relatively young country, so its heritage is not a big asset. The preservation of the status of the ruling family is very important for Gulf State monarchies (Bianco & Sons, 2023). The Al-Thani family is the current ruling elite, and it is expected that the regime will be more focused on highlighting current regime accomplishments because the endurance of their legacy after death is not promised (Patalakh, 2017).

H1a: Qatar will try to promote its positive cultural assets and short-term accomplishments.

On the other hand, we expect France to collaborate with societal actors and focus more on the final indicators of the culture pillar. Firstly, in a liberal democracy like France, it is harder to actively steer policy in a pro-government way (Zamorano, 2016). Furthermore, in line with Patalakh (2017), this paper presumes France will focus more on collaboration to promote universal democratic values such as inclusion, diversity, and climate action. This is expected because the values of a liberal democracy are more systemic and enduring, resulting in a longer-term goal Li's (2013) work underscores this expectation, concluding that the UK government, also a liberal democracy, never aimed to promote British culture in areas such as arts or heritage, citing a lack of capacity due to their reliance on collaboration with societal actors rather than a top-down approach.

H1b: France will make no conscious effort to promote their domestic culture but will focus more on the promotion of global norms and values.

3.2 Tourism

Second, there is tourism, which has a dual function. It brings in economic benefits, but it also makes sure foreigners experience the hosting country firsthand and can relay positive messages to the home front. This implies that a hosting country must not only draw in a large number of tourists, but also ensure a positive experience for both the event and the country, underscoring the interdependence of these pillars. People generally believe that SME's like the Olympics or FIFA World Cup intentionally serve economic purposes, and tourism can serve as a tool to achieve this (Grix et al., 2017). Since increasing tourism is expected to be achieved through initiatives in the other pillars, no theoretical expectations are derived from this pillar.

3.3 Branding & Diplomacy

Third, there is branding, which Ham (2001) describes as the way foreigners think of another country. A country deliberately sells an image by utilizing resources such as culture, tourism, and diplomacy. Branding is the deliberate attempt by the host country to communicate a certain image or picture that attracts tourism and investment and counteracts negative stereotypes (Taylor et al., 2023). According to Patalakh (2017) autocratic regimes will adopt a top-down approach through government agencies in order to promote short-term achievements and cultural assets because there is a mistrust of independent

institutions or organizations. Griffin (2021) posits that the West primarily perceives Qatar as a 'Middle Eastern' or Gulf State, rather than as a distinct nation-state with unique characteristics. Therefore, we expect Qatar to leverage this SME as an opportunity to distinctively brand its country. Lastly, realpolitik will drive Qatar's diplomatic strategy during the World Cup; they will promote themselves based on the current state of global affairs, not ideological commitments (Patalakh, 2017). Amidst a turbulent environment in the Middle East, Qatar has tried to situate itself as a neutral actor and a facilitator (Kayaoĝlu, 2015; Mohammadzadeh, 2018). It is therefore expected that Qatar will use the World Cup to further highlight its position.

H2a1: Qatar will adopt a top-down and state-driven approach.
H2a2: Qatar will make use of their SME to set itself apart from other Gulf and Middle Eastern countries and situate itself as a neutral actor and facilitator.

Liberal democracies, on the other hand, focus on promoting their universal values when it comes to nation branding and have long-term goals for their soft power strategies. Normally, this type of regime will work in a complex public-private partnership to further promote these values (Patalakh, 2017). This also occurs because governments in liberal democracies recognize that they lack the power to actively control policy, as they cannot control civil society or private actors. In terms of diplomacy, we anticipate that France will foster a more interconnected environment, in contrast to Qatar's state-centric approach.

H2b1: France will create a more complex public-private partnership in order to promote its universal values and long-term goals.
H2b2: France will create a more networked environment where both societal actors and the national government will engage in diplomatic efforts.

3.4 Trade

Fifth, there is the trade resource, which is used to increase trade and economic prosperity. Countries use an SME to show potential trading partners their readiness as trustworthy and capable partners through, for example, infrastructural projects (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). Since Qatar is still an emerging country that has relied heavily on oil for its economic growth, it is presumed that Qatar will also try and use the SME to promote and diversify its economic endeavors (Koch, 2022; Reiche, 2015).

H3a1: Qatar will promote itself as a reliable trading partner through infrastructural projects.

H3a2: Qatar will make use of hosting their SME to further strengthen economic ties and diversify their economic state-led trading portfolio.

Since France is a liberal democracy and most domestic companies are privately owned, it is expected that the French government will play no bigger role than a mere facilitator for domestic and international companies to make use of the SME as a networking event.

H3b: France will, through their SME, facilitate networking for private companies to improve trade relations.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research design

This paper will use the case study approach because of the in-depth knowledge this research design can provide (Flyvbjerg, 2006). According to Creswell and Poth (2016), a case study is a qualitative research approach to real-life cases through detailed, in-depth data collection. Furthermore, a co-variational analysis will be conducted (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). We use empirical evidence in this specific research design for qualitative small-N case studies to investigate the relationship between the independent variable (country regime type) and the dependent variable (soft power strategies through SME's). By analyzing two different regime types, it will be possible to assert whether this independent variable has an effect on the usage of SME's. The paper will deductively investigate the main research question, meaning that expectations derived from theory will be tested empirically. We will test these hypotheses through a content analysis by engaging with, for example, government papers and official speeches. (see section 4.3 for a more elaborate overview).

4.2 Case Selection

A diverse case study approach will be used to answer the main research question posed in this paper. Seawright and Gerring (2008) describes this as a strategy where ''its primary objective [is] the achievement of maximum variance along relevant dimensions'' (p. 300). The relevant dimension in this case is the difference between France as a liberal democracy and Qatar as an autocratic regime, when considering that regime types are the furthest away from each other (V-Dem, 2024). This will ensure the cases will differ based on the independent variable of interest, namely the regime type of the countries (Blatter & Haverland, 2012). This case selection has thus not been random but done purposefully for the aims and objectives of the research question. Furthermore, the selection of France and Qatar stems from their under-researched status. There is no literature on France hosting an SME for soft power purposes, according to the author. Research on Qatar has been primarily theoretical, with only Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018) conducting a case study on the country. Furthermore, the years of hosting the events are 2022 and 2024, making it a topical example of the use of SME's. Also, geopolitical relations in this time period are different than ten or twenty years ago, meaning that the reasons for taking advantage of SME's as a soft power tool could be subject to change. This variable is accounted for when comparing two countries hosting an SME in a relatively short time period Lastly, both countries meet the criteria of having successfully hosted, or about to host, a SME that qualifies as a Tier 1 mega event (Black, 2014). We have chosen this selection criteria because these events are ideal for countries to engage with soft power strategies, as they have the largest ideological and branding appeals and a high degree of political intrigue (Black, 2014).

4.3 Operationalization & Data Collection

We must operationalize the dependent variables to test the hypotheses. In order to do this, the core concept(s) of each hypothesis will be defined in the context of this research, followed by the

measurement criteria and data sources for each hypothesis. We have conducted a document analysis and combined it with second-hand data for this study. First off, we chose document analysis because it aligns well with the in-depth and case-specific knowledge this paper aims to produce (Bowen, 2009). A potential weakness of relying predominantly on document analysis is less data triangulation, where one data source is controlled by another. For this study, being a cross-cultural research design, these data sources are the only viable options (Bowen, 2009).Combining written and oral data creates some triangulation. Sometimes bid books or strategy documents can be somewhat politicized; therefore, it is important to include other data sources like speeches and policy documents (Beissel & Kohe, 2022). The time period that has been selected to find relevant data started with the bidding phases for both tournaments; for Qatar, it ended right before the tournament, and for France, it ended up until the present.

4.3.1 Culture

Culture as a soft power tool relates to the places where culture is attractive to others (Nye, 2004). Culture then also becomes a form of diplomacy and is defined by Zamorano (2016) as ''the systematic intervention of governments in the arts, sciences, and other cultural expressions as the basis of an official categorization of national identity'' (p. 169). Grix and Brannagan (2016) created a pillar to operationalize culture, testing both H1a and H1b hypotheses by searching for references to language, sports, arts, heritage, education, religion, cuisine, diversity, morals, and values, with the aim of persuading external actors through these methods.

In order to measure this, different data sources will be analyzed. Qatar, in collaboration with FIFA, has developed the FIFA World Cup Sustainability Strategy, which formulates legacy programs from the host country. To corroborate the strategies in this document, statements from Qatari officials or people involved in organizing the event will be considered. Any statements from Qatar's leader on the event will weigh heavily in strategies; therefore, useful quotes will be produced. Furthermore, other interviews with direct quotations will be conducted in newspapers or other media outlets. Also, other scientific papers where direct quotes can be derived will be considered. Both France's official bid book, which outlines their plans for the Olympic Games, and the Paris 2024 Legacy and Sustainability Plan, which outlines the concrete model for the Olympics, are crucial documents for analysis. Again, to corroborate intentions, statements from government officials and involved people are assessed. French President Emmanuel Macron has issued statements on the event, and even Parliament has spoken about it. This will help create a deeper understanding of the strategies.

4.3.2 Branding & Diplomacy

The second set of hypotheses relates to the way in which the governments of both countries intend to reach their goals. Will they be heavily involved in planning and coordinating, or more of a facilitator? Expectations in this regard relate to different forms of government policy-making, such as a top-down or bottom-up approach. Let us first consider the top-down approach, which is a form of public policy making in line with traditional public management (Bryson et al., 2014). Despite the lack of consensus

on its definition, elected officials or technical experts typically determine and implement policy goals, administering them through hierarchical structures in public organizations. In defining policy goals, no or little input is expected from the public (Stoker, 2006). Next is the bottom-up approach, a form of public policy making more in line with public value governance (Bryson et al., 2014). Typical features of this paradigm include goal-setting in deliberation with all kinds of different stakeholders, where the government acts as a collaborator and facilitator to create a networked environment. To test all H2, these features will be considered when assessing relevant data sources.

These data sources vary, and again, both the main documents for legacy strategies by Qatar and France will be analyzed. Within the bid book, a section concerning the governance structure of the Games is outlined in France. This is an important document for analyzing how policy is created. Furthermore, given the involvement of both the public and private sectors, statements issued by businesses or non-governmental organizations are also taken into consideration. For Qatar, a supporting document for their Legacy Strategy also outlines the governance structure and will be considered. Other than that, the same strategies for France will be applied, and the data mentioned earlier, like quotes from interviews,.

4.3.3 Trade

Finally, the trade resource comes into play. Trade in this paper refers to the signaling of readiness to trade through hosting an SME (Grix & Brannagan, 2016). For Qatar, it is important to differentiate between specific plans for this World Cup and their more general plans in their 2030 National Vision. Measuring infrastructural projects will therefore relate only to all investments specifically mentioned in data sources about the FIFA World Cup. This is also true for diversifying their economy through this SME. In the context of France's SME, it is crucial to search for intentional policies that target economic activity. To test both hypotheses, all economic policies or mentions of economic strategies will be analyzed and controlled for external influence so that they relate to the concept of soft power.

Again, the strategy and bid books will be the main data sources to check for. Also, the ministries of economy or other relevant governmental organizations will be used to see if they are involved in policy creation. Also, quotes from speeches or interviews with relevant stakeholders will be analyzed.

4.3 Data Analysis

The research started with the skimming of a wide variety of documents through search engines such as Google, and terms searched for included the France Olympic Games and the Qatar FIFA World Cup, combined with, for example, foreign policy, soft power, tourism, and branding. This created a general picture of what kind of data sources were available, and the relevant ones were written down. After that, a content analysis was conducted, where the selected documents were organized into relevant categories according to the hypotheses (Bowen, 2009). During this process, it became evident that the bid books and strategy papers for both SME's possessed the most extensive data available, yet, as previously

mentioned, they were susceptible to political influence. Therefore, we also relied on other data sources to validate these documents. Speeches by the respective heads of government on the events were analyzed, and interviews in newspapers or other media outlets by government officials were used. This way, the main strategies were further defined. Also, second-hand data was used. Due to time and location constraints, this study was unable to interview relevant stakeholders. Therefore, direct quotes from other papers were used to substantiate the research.

4.4 Validity and reliability

An important point of critique in the work on SME's and soft power is the lack of consistency within research designs, thereby creating reliability and validity concerns (Thomson et al., 2019). Let us consider what reliability and validity entail before moving on to these concepts in relation to this paper.

Validity is normally defined as the extent to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure (Kimberlin & Winterstein, 2008). In qualitative research, validity is based on the accuracy of the findings from the researcher's standpoint, the participants, or the readers (Cresswell & Creswell, 2022). To make up for this, Cresswell and Creswell's validity strategies have been followed. For instance, despite the conventional use of desk research as a methodology for data triangulation, this paper aims to integrate triangulation by identifying various data sources, including written documents and speeches. This approach allows for the control of emerging themes from one data source through other sources. Furthermore, a thick and rich description has been provided, including both data supporting and contrasting the formulated hypotheses. This way, the reader gets more information and different perspectives, making the results more realistic. Lastly, this paper's small-N research approach achieves concept validity by operationalizing the variables in a more complex and multidimensional manner (Blatter & Haverland, 2012).

Reliability ''concerns the extent to which an experiment, test, or any measuring procedure yields the same results on repeated trials'' (Johnson et al., 2019, p. 158). Reliability in case study research is somewhat harder to achieve because qualitative studies occur in social settings, which can change at any moment (Bryman, 2012). The strength of doing desk research is stability, meaning that data sources like documents are stable and suitable for repeated reviews (Bowen, 2009). Additionally, by outlining the procedures for data collection and analysis, this paper conducts a test-retest, repeating the same test at a later time (Johnson et al., 2019). Although several measures have been taken to account for the reliability of the research, the purpose of this paper is to create in-depth knowledge of these specific cases, so reliability is of slightly lesser importance.

5. Empirical Findings & Data analysis

In the data analysis section, results from the empirical evidence will be systematically outlined. According to the formulated hypotheses, Qatar's results will be presented first, followed by France. This paper employs a narrative approach to organize the data, presenting a story from multiple perspectives to paint a vivid picture in line with the formulated hypotheses. At the end of each subsection, the hypotheses are compared with the data and conclusions are drawn.

5.1   Qatar

5.1.1 Culture

First, we consider H1a: *Qatar will try to promote its positive cultural assets and short-term accomplishments.*

In the FIFA World Cup 2022 Sustainability Strategy of Qatar and the FIFA Organizing Committee, a key objective is for it to:

> Serve as a catalyst for the achievement of Qatar's development goals as laid out in the Qatar National Vision (QNV) 2030 and the National Development Strategy (NDS) 2018-2022, which define the long-term outcomes for the country under four main pillars: human development, social development, environmental development, and economic development (FIFA World Cup Sustainability Strategy, 2022, p. 6).

For human development, this means the protection of labor rights in order to leave a legacy of best practices nationally and internationally. Regarding social development, the emphasis lies on creating intercultural exchange in order to enhance a better understanding of Qatari culture and showcase what their part of the world has to offer. This pillar also includes making sure that people from all over the world and from all backgrounds feel included. Concerning environmental development, Qatar is committed to delivering a carbon-neutral World Cup. The economic pillar will be outlined when testing H3a2. Furthermore, the strategy states that all plans for the World Cup will align with the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2015–2030. Clear emphasis lies in showing the world Qatar, as exemplified by this quote: *This is a tremendous opportunity for the region to welcome and connect with billions of people from across the globe, showcasing its unique identity and culture and building new bridges of understanding (p. 8).*

The opening ceremony aims to highlight the beauty of Qatar and the Middle East by showcasing cultural aspects. Qatar being the first Arab country to host the World Cup is also something very important for the country and will be stressed before, during, and after the event (Grix et al., 2019). Sheikh Al-Thani's speech at the 77th general assembly of the UN, where he welcomed the world to their upcoming World Cup and expressed his desire to showcase the development his country has achieved, further underscores the importance of this (United Nations, 2022). In an interview with the ambassador of Qatar to Belgium, he says that the most important aim is to show what the country has gained and will gain (The Brussels Times, 2022). Furthermore, one Qatari official said that providing authentic

stories and experiences of Qatar is very much needed since it has to work hard to combat a lot of negative media stories and challenge unfair portrayals and misinformation about the country (Hajjaj et al., 2024). Yet another official from the Ministry of Culture and Sport says there will be a combined effort to show Qatar's cultural heritage alongside its modernization.

When considering H1a, it seems that Qatar will try and promote their uniqueness through what they mostly describe as cultural heritage in combination with the modernization they have undergone. Especially in Sheikh Al-Thani's speech, the focus also lies on showing the development the country has gone through, which points towards the short-term accomplishments reached by his and his father's regime. However, the tournament also prioritizes promoting universal values like labor rights, equality, and inclusivity. H1a can therefore not be accepted.

5.1.2 Governance

Let's now consider H2a: Qatar will adopt a top-down and state-driven approach, and H2b: Qatar will leverage its SME to differentiate itself from other Gulf and Middle Eastern countries, positioning itself as a neutral actor and facilitator.

Within the FIFA World Cup 2022 Sustainability Strategy, to support the organization of the tournament and to deliver events that highlight the unique culture and heritage of Qatar, a series of key events will be held, where collaboration with Qatar's entire cultural sector and local communities is actively promoted (p. 44). Furthermore, supporting the World Cup Strategy was a document on the governance structure for the tournament, in which an important role is played by over 100 different external stakeholders to develop the strategy (Development of the Sustainability Strategy, 2022). This involved a variety of international organizations, such as UN institutions and non-governmental organizations such as Terre des Hommes or Human Rights Watch. Kaplanidou et al. (2016) explored how an SME like the FIFA World Cup in Qatar can be used to create sustainable business and a networking legacy. In this context, different stakeholders were interviewed about how things work in Qatar. An interesting observation came from the interviews, where one respondent said "the way things work here everything has to come from the top down nothing goes from the bottom up'' (p. 4107). One interviewee from the organizing body discussed the potential human and labor rights violations in the World Cup-related construction projects, highlighting how the World Cup 2022 sets Qatar apart from other Arab and Middle Eastern nations (Al Thani, 2021). He then stated:

> I'm not saying we have the best human rights in Qatar, but we are a great deal better than Saudi [Arabia] or the UAE. Why are they never questioned, and it is only Qatar which has been attacked…… The state of Qatar has done massive work and made progress to contest perceptions. (p. 1793)

It appears to be important for Qatar to also differentiate itself from the other nations in the region. There seems to be no conscious effort by Qatar to further utilize their SME as a neutral actor and facilitator in the region. Therefore H2b can only be partially accepted, while Qatar intends to use its SME to convey

a unique Qatari message and set itself apart from other Arab and Middle Eastern countries, it does not further highlight its neutral and facilitator roles H2a is also ambiguous, some interviewees do acknowledging the top-down nature of the World Cup's organization. However, the governance structure and the sustainability strategy's intention to engage with local communities and NGO's also demonstrate a bottom-up approach. Therefore, full acceptance of H2a remains elusive..

5.1.3 Trade

Last, let us consider H3a1: *Qatar will promote itself as a reliable trading partner through infrastructural projects,* and H3a2: *Qatar will make use of hosting their SME to further strengthen economic ties and diversify their economic state-led trading portfolio.*

In the FIFA World Cup 2022 Sustainability Strategy, the intention is to further catalyze and diversify the economy by linking local businesses to the FIFA 2022 World Cup value chains. The objective of this is to enable local and regional businesses to network more easily with global partners in the FIFA World Cup network (p. 22). Furthermore, Qatar has spent more than 200 billion US dollars on building stadiums and all kinds of infrastructural projects with the goal of making the country an attractive location for future travel and investment (Hajjaj et al., 2024). Comparatively, Russia spent around 11.8 billion US dollars, which was then considered the most expensive World Cup (Statista, 2021). Furthermore, Qatar's chief investment officer, speaking to Forbes Middle East, reveals that the country has implemented labor market and regulatory reforms prior to the World Cup to enhance the economy's dynamic and attractiveness (Omran, 2022). Continuing, he states that the World Cup investments are in line with the plans in the Qatar National Vision 2030 strategy and are intended to work as a catalyst for economic diversification. Moreover, IMF Middle-East and Central Asia Director Jihad Azour acknowledged that Qatar has accelerated development and improved non-oil economic activity due to investments for the World Cup. However, the private sector plays a significant role in this diversification, according to the Qatari ambassador for Belgium (The Brussels Times, 2022).

Only about eight of the more than 200 billion US dollars spent on this World Cup went toward building stadiums The remaining funds are being used to demonstrate Qatar's readiness for foreign investment and its reputation as a reliable trading partner. The World Cup will attract a lot of foreign corporations, and Qatar will try to make use of this by linking them to local businesses. The Qatar National Vision 2030 places significant emphasis on diversifying the economic portfolio away from carbon and hydrogen, and views the World Cup as a potential catalyst to achieve this objective However, this diversification strategy reserves a more significant role for the private sector, indicating Qatar's intention to relax its control over economic policy. Therefore, we can accept only H3A1, while we cannot accept H3A2.

5.2 France

5.2.1 Culture

First, we consider H1b: *France will make no conscious effort to promote their domestic culture but will coordinate more on the promotion of global norms and values*

The Paris 2024 organizing committee developed the Legacy and Sustainability Plan (LSP), a paper that outlines the ambitions for the legacy the 2024 Summer Olympics and Paralympics aim to leave behind (Paris Legacy and Sustainability Plan, 2017). The plan aims to create a version of these games that serves as an inspiring example of eco-responsibility, inclusivity, equality, and solidarity. The governance structure of this committee already shows the commitment of France to coordinate, rather than directly steer, efforts to host this event. Societal actors, private actors, and regional and national institutions all take part in the steering committee (p. 121).

The organizing committee wants to show the world that sports can be a driver for environmental transformation. Therefore, Paris 2024 committed to being the first game to cut greenhouse gas emissions in half in line with the Paris Agreement, setting an inspiring example for climate-friendliness, a circular economy, and biodiversity protection (p. 16). The LSP recognizes the need for behavioral and value system changes to address the environmental transformation challenge, and the scale of the Games presents a unique opportunity to spread this message to billions of people worldwide (p. 104). What is more, the LSP intends to leave behind the most inclusive and equal games, as stated in the following:

Paris 2024 wants to use the Games as a platform to promote gender equality, inclusion and the fight against all of forms of discrimination, which is why it teamed up with the French State to create an "Equality" events label for the Paris 2024 Games.)p. 61)

Furthermore, the intention is to show the importance of solidarity and inclusion: ''leveraging sport to share messages promoting civic values such as social cohesion and the prevention and treatment of excesses, (including racism, anti-Semitism, and homophobia'' (p.92) and ''Harness the Games to change the way people think about disability and promote sport'' (p. 93). Another interesting value being promoted by the LSP is freedom of information and transparency. Therefore, the organizations commit to freely sharing their responsible purchasing strategy so that any actor can access it. Other values, such as human rights, are also something France intends to protect and respect, but also actively promote to the world (Human Rights Strategy, 2023).

The official bid for candidature is another important source of information on the plans of the French government for the Olympic Games (Bid Book, e.d.). The vision of Paris 2024 is to bring the world to the French outstanding infrastructure, culture, arte de vivre, creativity, and people (p. 11). Moreover, through Paris its outstanding historical and architectural heritage and as a place of artistic creation and innovation, the Games will enable the world to experience the wealth of French culture However, the goal is to spread French culture throughout all French cities and regions, not just in Paris.

24

When considering other sources, such as statements by government officials or legislation adopted by parliament, some other cultural nuances shine through. French President Emanuel Macron also contributed to how France looks at the Olympics as a soft power tool. Macron asserted during the 2024 Olympics bid that the shared values of the Games and France, namely openness, tolerance, and respect for the environment, are currently under threat and that the French bid offers the best protection of these values. This was also a direct response to the Los Angeles bid, backed by former US president Donald Trump, who had recently revoked its pledge to the Paris Climate Agreement (Reuters, 2017). Furthermore, during the 500-day countdown kick-off, Macron stressed in his speech that setting a standard regarding the environmental legacy is ''expected of us'' (FRANCE 24 English, 2023). Also, Macron has stated that Russia as a country has no place at the Olympics and has pleaded for a global cease-fire during the Olympics (Bloomberg, 2024)

Interestingly, the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs plans to use the Olympics as a platform to promote the French language by making it the official language for all sporting events (Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, ed.). Therefore, the Assemblée Nationale has passed a resolution urging the Paris 2024 Olympic organization to ensure that all documentation, communication, interviews, and press conferences take place in French An oversight committee will ensure the implementation of the resolution during Paris 2024 and other international sporting events, accommodating visitors in their translation of French.

It seems clear that a big focus for France is the promotion of universal values such as inclusion, equality, human rights, and climate neutrality. However, the organizer also considers typical French culture as important, and formulates a conscious policy to promote it. Therefore, full acceptance of hypothesis H1b is not possible.

5.2.2 Governance

Second, we consider H2b1: *France will create a more complex public-private partnership in order to promote its universal values and long-term goals,* and H2b2: *France will create a more networked environment where both societal actors and the national government will engage in diplomatic efforts.*

France's abovementioned strategies for their SME are outlined. The second hypothesis relates to the way in which these goals are to be achieved. Let's first look at the Legacy and Sustainability Plan and the official bid book.

The development of this plan has been a collaborative effort, considering the following extract from the paper:

The Legacy and Sustainability strategy was developed through a collaborative effort that began back in 2016 to define a shared ambition towards which all those involved in preparing the Paris 2024 Games actively contribute: the host city, the French state, and local authorities; the French National Olympic and Sports Committee (CNOSF), the French Paralympic and Sports Committee (CPSF) and the entire sporting movement; partner marketing companies, trade unions, employer organizations, and

those involved in the French economy; people living in France; and civil society as a whole. Hundreds of meetings, consultations, community workshops, discussions and suggestions formed the basis for this common framework. (p. 8)

France also works together with various IO, like the UNFCCC, to show how the world can use sports to cut greenhouse emissions (p.104 The bid book dedicates a whole section to explaining the governance structure of the games. The involvement of the entire civil society is fundamental to a successful legacy delivery. For example, WWF France is working together with other NGO's to deliver a footprint for sustainable delivery of the Games. France also intends to bring a variety of stakeholders, like municipalities and ministries, but also civil society and other interested parties, together to ensure coherence in their respective legacy programs (p. 11).

When considering diplomatic efforts, the French government will make use of a top-down approach, whereby the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be used to spread the values of France. Consider the following example:

Paris 2024 will leverage France's links to other French-speaking nations to spread the message of Olympism, in their own language, to people in fast-developing and often hard-to-reach areas, including Sub-Saharan Africa. The world's largest network of foreign embassies and consulates will be activated to engage communities around the globe with the social potential of the Olympic Games and Olympic sport. (p. 33).

Furthermore, during and after the opening of the Games, a high number of delegates from other countries or leaders of other IO's and NGO's are expected. Both during the ceremony and in a later event, Macron will welcome these delegates and host a summit on the future of sport in a more sustainable world (Inside the Games, n.d.).

Another soft power strategy is to heavily involve the public sphere and private sector. The French government appears to be more of a steering actor, leaving the delivery of the legacy of universal values and domestic culture to a complex collaboration of societal actors, including the private sector and the public sector. Therefore, H2b1 is accepted. But when it comes to diplomatic efforts, most initiatives come from the French government itself. Therefore, H2b2 is not accepted.

5.2.3 Trade
Last, there is *H3b: France will, through their SME, facilitate networking for private companies to improve trade relations.*

In the bid book, the organizing committee emphasizes the role of Paris as an innovation lab. Exemplified by the following:

For hundreds of years, it has attracted millions of people who have come to meet others, from France and all over the world, to debate and exchange ideas; to collaborate and inspire each other; to help shape ideas and forge the future. (p. 13)

Moreover, France intends to work as a facilitator for different actors to be able to network freely during the Games, as seen in the following:

> The City of Light offers marketing partners, NOCs, and other clients an unrivaled opportunity to provide hospitality, promotion, or connections with game visitors and local residents. The Paris 2024 concept foresees spectacular locations in public spaces adjacent to live sites and competition venues such as the Champs de Mars, the Champs-Elysees, the Grand Palais, and the Esplanade des Invalides for these activities. Private functions and hospitality centres can be hosted in a range of charming reception halls, mansions, and exhibition centres throughout the city. (p. 19)

Furthermore, France acknowledges the opportunity these games present to stimulate economic activity, showcase its people and capabilities, and bolster its international standing. The games will demonstrate and implement France's expertise and know-how. This operational excellence will boost France's economic attractiveness and attract foreign investors (p. 36). Hosting the Games will be an exceptional opportunity to generate economic activity and showcase France, its people, and its capabilities, contributing to France's international position. During the Games, companies will have the opportunity to demonstrate and implement their expertise and know-how. Demonstration of operational excellence will further boost France's economic attractiveness for foreign direct investments (p. 37).

The above shows that France does intend to work as a mere facilitator in improving trade relations. Firstly, by hosting the games, France can demonstrate its operational excellence and allow private actors to showcase their delivery expertise. Furthermore, France has the ambition to host private functions and hospitality centers throughout the Games in order to boost trading activities and networking. Therefore, the acceptance of H3b is possible.

6. Conclusion

Sports in international relations have long been a neglected subject. Only after the Cold War, and since Nye coined his concept of soft power, has this perspective somewhat changed. The use of sports mega-events as a soft power tool in geopolitics and international relations is a relatively new subject. Especially since hosting these events has shifted more from the dominant Global North to developing countries and regime types other than liberal democracies, this phenomenon has caught the attention of scholars working in international relations. The aim of this paper was to contribute to this growing field of sports in international relations by researching whether different regime types have different soft power strategies through hosting an SME. To do this, the following research question was posed: *In what way does the intended use of Sports Mega Events as a soft power tool differ between different regime types?* To address this question, this paper employed a deductive, qualitative case study approach, examining two regime types: the liberal democracy of France, which is hosting the 2024 Summer Olympic Games, and the autocracy of Qatar, which is hosting the 2022 FIFA World Cup. Furthermore, this research derived a few expectations about both countries' intentions to use their SME as a soft power resource from the literature on soft power, which pertains to both regime types and SME's. These expectations have been empirically tested using a variety of data sources.

The first difference between the regime types was expected in terms of how an SME will be used through culture as a soft power tool. This paper anticipated that France would prioritize universal values and long-term goals over their domestic culture. Qatar, on the other hand, would emphasize their culture, but only positive ones and short-term accomplishments. These expectations have not been fully accepted since France also intends to really focus on their cultural heritage and promote their language, and Qatar is also planning on focusing on universal values such as equality, inclusivity, and all UN SDG's. Of course, France's primary objectives are to promote long-term universal goals, while Qatar prioritizes showcasing its recent progress and domestic culture to the world. However, a more complex image presents itself, aiming for a blend of short- and long-term objectives, and employing diverse cultural   components   to   achieve   this..

The second distinction pertains to the methods employed to achieve these soft power strategies. France was expected to create a networked environment during the Games where a complex public-private partnership will be steered to accomplish their soft power strategy, and diplomatic efforts will also be more networked than top-down. Qatar was presumed to work in a very top-down manner in all efforts, where the state led diplomatic efforts and other engagements with foreign countries. France evidently heavily relies on a bottom-up approach, creating a networked environment to achieve its soft power objectives. However, diplomatic efforts are still conducted in a very top-down manner. Apart from the state apparatus, Qatar appears to be working with a wide range of societal and private stakeholders. However, an image of a top-down-led event does also emerge from interviews with actual

stakeholders. Once again, both countries seem to implement their soft power strategies in a hybrid manner, utilizing both bottom-up and top-down approaches.

The final contrast pertains to the economic soft power strategies employed by both countries. While Qatar aimed to demonstrate its reliability as a trading partner and diversify its state-led trading portfolio, France anticipated acting as a facilitator for private companies to enhance trade relations. The analysis shows that, regarding economic strategies, France intends to be a mere facilitator by hosting events and providing hospitality spaces. Qatar, on the other hand, also intends to use its infrastructural projects to show the world their readiness for trade and wants to use their SME to diversify its trading portfolio, completely in line with the Qatar National Vision 2030. But interestingly, Qatar also leaves space for local businesses to engage in economic activities. The expected differences then hold mostly true, but the Qatari state is not the only actor in their soft power strategy when it comes to economic policies.

7. Discussion & Recommendations

To the best of the authors' knowledge, this is the first paper to integrate the theory of soft power and regime type within the context of sports mega events. This paper, therefore, contributes in several ways to the academic debate. First off, this novel approach tries to incorporate a less western implication of soft power into the research agenda by investigating how a Middle Eastern, autocratic state intends to use soft power tools. Most of the previous research has focused on the bigger countries, like China and Russia (Patalakh, 2017). Given the differences between a country like Qatar and others like Russia or China, further investigation into Gulf countries is recommended. For instance, the claims that Qatar exploited this event for sportswashing, a tactic that conceals moral transgressions through athletics, are not accurate. Although Qatar has some way to go in improving labor and human rights, its strategies seem to show a great deal of commitment to these goals. Building on the work of Grix and Brannagan (2016), empirical evidence has further developed the linkages between the different pillars. This has shown that the soft power resources are very much overlapping, and further development is necessary. More clear operationalization of the mechanisms of soft power resources is needed to increase understanding of soft power strategies.

This novel approach has contributed to new insights but has also encountered some limitations. First of all, a concern already raised in the methodology section—research on soft power in general and SME's in particular—lacks a robust and coherent analytical framework. This paper aims to restore the original purpose of soft power in international relations, which was to influence other states. However, soft power strategies can also work indirectly and must be accounted for. Furthermore, the framework developed by Grix and Brannagan (2016) does help guide research into SME's, but the pillars are not exclusive resources. Also, autocratic regime types are still an umbrella term, and Patalakh's (2017) his work on soft power strategies for authoritarian regimes rests on an analysis of Russia and China. Further research into soft power strategies by other autocratic regimes is necessary. Furthermore, the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup have different institutional arrangements. These organizations have a big influence on the country hosting an SME. This variable needs to be accounted for when conducting comparative research. Another limitation is that most of the information comes from the bid books and strategies related to the events. Beissel and Kohe (2022) recognized the potential politicization of these information sources, underscoring the importance of accurately mapping the involved stakeholders in these documents for validity purposes. Although other data sources have provided some triangulation, first-hand interviews with relevant stakeholders could improve further research.

Lastly, this paper has tried to shed light on the different rationales for hosting an SME by different regime types, also because these games affect billions of people around the world each event. By highlighting the policy goals governments or leaders have, visitors and viewers can be better informed and able to make create their own opinions.

Bibliography

Abdi, K., Talebpour, M., Fullerton, J., Ranjkesh, M. J., & Nooghabi, H. J. (2019). Identifying sports diplomacy resources as soft power tools. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *15*, 147-155.

Al Thani, M. (2021). Channeling soft power: The Qatar 2022 world cup, migrant workers, and international image. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, *38*(17), 1729-1752.

Antwi-Boateng, O. (2013). The rise of Qatar as a soft power and the challenges. *European Scientific Journal*, *9*(10), 39-51.

Assemblée Nationale (e.d.). *Resolution N295*. Obtained via https://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/dyn/16/textes/l16t0295_texte-adopte-seance

BBC. (2024). 2034 World Cup: Saudi Arabia launches its bid for the tournament as the sole contender to host. Obtained via https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/68449959

Beissel, A. S., & Kohe, G. Z. (2022). United as one: the 2026 FIFA Men's World Cup hosting vision and the symbolic politics of legacy. *Managing Sport and Leisure*, *27*(6), 593-613.

Bianco, C., & Sons, S. (2023). More than a game: Football and soft power in the Gulf. *The International Spectator*, *58*(2), 92-106.

Bid Book (e.d.). Obtained via https://library.olympics.com/Default/doc/SYRACUSE/171681/candidature-file-paris-candidate-city-olympic-games-2024?_lg=en-GB

Black, D. (2014), 'Megas for strivers: the politics of second-order events', in J. Grix (ed.), Leveraging Legacies from Sports Mega-events, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 13–23.

Blatter, J., & Haverland, M. (2012). *Designing case studies: Explanatory approaches to small-N research*. Springer.

Bloomberg (2024). Obtained via https://www.youtube.com/shorts/1y7xIaDi88A

Bowen, G.A. (2009). "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method", *Qualitative Research Journal*, Vol. 9 No. 2, pp. 27-40. https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027

Brannagan, P. M., & Giulianotti, R. (2018). Soft power and soft disempowerment: Qatar, global sport, and football's 2022 World Cup finals. In *Leveraging Mega-Event Legacies* (pp. 89-105). Routledge.

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods*. Fourth edition. Oxford university press: New York. ISBN 978-0-19-958805-3

Bryson, J. M., Crosby, B. C., & Bloomberg, L. (2014). Public value governance: Moving beyond traditional public administration and the new public management. *Public administration review*, *74*(4), 445-456.

Chadwick, S. (2022). From utilitarianism and neoclassical sport management to a new geopolitical economy of sport. *European Sport Management Quarterly*, *22*(5), 685-704.

Creswell, J.W., & Creswell, J.D. (2022). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed

methods approaches (6th ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.

Chatin, M., & Gallarotti, G. (Eds.). (2019). *Emerging powers in international politics: the BRICS and soft power*. Routledge.

Cornelissen, S. (2010). The geopolitics of global aspiration: Sport mega-events and emerging powers. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, *27*(16-18), 3008-3025.

Darnell, S. (2012). *Sport for development and peace: A critical sociology* (p. 192). Bloomsbury Academic.

Development of the Sustainability Strategy (2022). Obtained via
https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/338831bac02e5c33/original/eru28lokzia0jpiirzk7-pdf.pdf

Dichter, H. L., & Johns, A. L. (Eds.). (2014). *Diplomatic games: sport, statecraft, and international relations since 1945*. University Press of Kentucky.

Dubinsky, Y. (2019). From soft power to sports diplomacy: A theoretical and conceptual discussion. *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*, *15*(3), 156-164.

FIFA World Cup Sustainability Strategy (2022). Obtained via
https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/5adbe651c67c78a3/original/o2zbd8acyiooxyn0dwuk-pdf.pdf

Flyvbjerg, B. (2006). Five misunderstandings about case-study research. *Qualitative inquiry*, *12*(2), 219-245.

FRANCE 24 English. (2023, March 14). *REPLAY: 2024 Paris Olympics: French President Macron kicks off 500-day countdown • FRANCE 24* [Video]. YouTube.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_7fk3pzxrL0

Freeman, K. (2012). Sport as swaggering: utilizing sport as soft power. *Sport in Society*, *15*(9), 1260-1274.

Fruh, K., Archer, A., & Wojtowicz, J. (2023). Sportswashing: Complicity and corruption. *Sport, ethics, and philosophy*, *17*(1), 101-118.

Gallarotti, G. M. (2011). Soft power: what it is, why it's important, and the conditions for its effective use, Journal of Political Power, 4:1, 25-47, DOI: 10.1080/2158379X.2011.557886

Grande Cause Nationale (e.d.). Obtained via https://www.grandecause-sport.fr/nos-partenaires-sengagent-pour-la-cause

Griffin, T. R. (2021). National identity, social legacy and Qatar 2022: the cultural ramifications of FIFA's first Arab World Cup. In *Moments, Metaphors, Memories* (pp. 104-117). Routledge.

Grix, J., & Lee, D. (2013). Soft power, sports mega-events and emerging states: The lure of the politics of attraction. *Global society*, *27*(4), 521-536.

Grix, J., Bason, T., Grix, L., & Jeong, J. B. (2024). An overview and analysis of sports mega-events as part of state soft power strategies. *Research Handbook on Major Sporting Events*, 449-460.

Grix, J., & Brannagan, P. M. (2016). Of mechanisms and myths: Conceptualising states'"soft power"

strategies through sports mega-events. *Diplomacy & statecraft*, *27*(2), 251-272.

Grix, J., Brannagan, M.P., and Lee, D. *Entering the Global Arena: Emerging States and Sports Mega-Events*, 1st ed.; Palgrave Macmillan: London, UK, 2019; p. xiii-117.

Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., & Houlihan, B. (2017). Interrogating states' soft power strategies: A case study of sports mega-events in Brazil and the UK. In *Challenges to Emerging and Established Powers: Brazil, the United Kingdom and Global Order* (pp. 192-208). Routledge.

Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., Wood, H., & Wynne, C. (2017). State strategies for leveraging sports mega-events: Unpacking the concept of 'legacy'. *International journal of sport policy and politics*, *9*(2), 203-218.

Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., Lee, D., Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., & Lee, D. (2019). Russia's unique soft power strategy. *Entering the global arena: Emerging states, soft power strategies, and sports mega-events*, 53-68.

Grix, J., & Houlihan, B. (2014). Sports mega-events as part of a nation's soft power strategy: The cases of Germany (2006) and the UK (2012). *The British journal of politics and international relations*, *16*(4), 572-596.

Grix, J., & Kramareva, N. (2017). The Sochi Winter Olympics and Russia's unique soft power strategy. *Sport in society*, *20*(4), 461-475.

Hajjaj, M., Borodin, V., Perțicas, D. C., & Florea, A. G. (2024). Qatar's FIFA World Cup odyssey: A quest for legacy transforming a small nation into a global destination. *Heliyon*, *10*(9).

Ham, V. P. (2001). The rise of the brand state: The postmodern politics of image and reputation. *Foreign affairs*, 2-6.

Houlihan, B. (2000). Politics and sport. *Handbook of Sports Studies*, 213-227.

Human Rights Strategy (2023). Obtained via https://medias.paris2024.org/uploads/2023/06/Paris2024-230626-CMP-StrategieDH-Sans-Annexes-EN.pdf

Inside The Games (n.d.). *France prepares for 120 world leaders at the opening of Paris 2024*. https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1145608/france-prepares-120-world-leaders-at

Jeong, J. (2021). *How Nations Use Sport Mega-Events to Leverage Soft Power: A New Rise in East Asia* (Doctoral dissertation, Manchester Metropolitan University).

Johnson, J. B., Reynolds, H. T., & Mycoff, J. D. (2019). *Political science research methods* (9th edition). Thousand Oaks, CA: CQ Press.

Kaplanidou, K. K., Al Emadi, A., Sagas, M., Diop, A., & Fritz, G. (2016). Business legacy planning for mega events: The case of the 2022 World Cup in Qatar. *Journal of Business Research*, *69*(10), 4103-4111.

Kayaoĝlu, T. (2015). Islam and Foreign Policy: The Case of Qatar. *European Journal of Economic & Political Studies*, *8*(1).

Kimberlin, C. L., & Winterstein, A. G. (2008). Validity and reliability of measurement instruments used in research. *American journal of health-system pharmacy*, *65*(23), 2276-2284.

Kobierecki, M. M., & Strożek, P. (2017). Sport as a factor of nation branding: A quantitative approach. *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, *34*(7-8), 697-712.

Kobierecki, M. M., & Strożek, P. (2021). Sports mega-events and shaping the international image of states: How hosting the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cups affects interest in host nations. *International Politics*, *58*(1), 49-70. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1057/s41311-020-00216-

Koch, N. (2022). Sporting cities and economic diversification in the Arabian Peninsula. In *the Routledge Handbook of Sport in the Middle East* (pp. 287-296). Routledge.

Lekakis, N. (2019). The limits of soft power-sports diplomacy templates in IR research. *E-International relations*.

Leonard, M., & Small, A. (2003). *Norwegian Public Diplomacy: Executive Summary*. Obtained via https://www.regjeringen.no/globalassets/upload/ud/vedlegg/public.pdf

Levermore, R., & Budd, A. (2004). Introduction: Sport and international relations: continued neglect?. In *Sport and International Relations* (pp. 18-27). Routledge.

Li, Y. W. (2013). "Public Diplomacy Strategies of the 2008 Beijing Olympics and the 2012 London Olympics: A Comparative Study." The International Journal of the History of Sport, 30(15), 1723-1734.

Lowe, B., Kanin, D. B., & Strenk, A. (1978). Sport and international relations. *(No Title)*.

Lucas, R., & Jeanes, R. (2020). Ethnographic reflections of the role of Global North volunteers in sport-for-development. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, *55*(7), 953-974.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Europe (e.d.). *France's international strategy for sports diplomacy*. Obtained via https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/sports-diplomacy/france-s-international-strategy-for-sports-diplomacy/

Mohammadzadeh, B. (2018). Status and Foreign Policy Change in Small States: Qatar's Emergence in Perspective. In *Foreign Relations of the GCC Countries* (pp. 19-36). Routledge.

Murray, S. (2012). The two halves of sports-diplomacy. *Diplomacy & Statecraft 23*: 576–592.

Nye, J. S. (1990). Soft power. *Foreign policy*, (80), 153-171.

Nye Jr, J. S. (2004). Soft power and American foreign policy. *Political science quarterly*, *119*(2), 255-270.

Ogunnubi, O. (2019). Soft power and the currency of sports:(Re) imagining South Africa's rising hegemony in Africa. *Global Society*, *33*(4), 520-540.

Omran, H. (2022, November 19). *EXCLUSIVE: QIA says FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 will accelerate economic diversification*. Obtained via https://www.forbesmiddleeast.com/industry/economy/exclusive-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-accelerates-the-economic-diversification-says-qia

Paris Legacy and Sustainability Plan (2017). Obtained via https://medias.paris2024.org/uploads/2021/09/Paris2024-210830-Legacy-Plan-EN.pdf

Patalakh, A. (2017). What Makes Autocracies' Soft Power Strategies Special? Evidence from Russia

and China. *The Korean Journal of International Studies*, *15*(1), 41-69.

Preuss, H. (2007). The conceptualisation and measurement of mega sport event legacies. *Journal of sport & tourism*, *12*(3-4), 207-228.

Reiche, D. (2015). Investing in sporting success as a domestic and foreign policy tool: the case of Qatar. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, 7 (4), 489–504. doi:10.1080/19406940.2014.966135.

Reuters (2017). *Macron says the Paris 2024 Olympic bid embodies ''threatened'' values.* Obtained via https://www.reuters.com/article/olympics-2024-paris-idUSL8N1K22O0/

Roche, M. (2002). *Megaevents and Modernity: Olympics and Expos in the Growth of Global Culture*. Routledge.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political research quarterly*, *61*(2), 294-308.

Seong-Hun, Y. (2018). An overdue critical look at soft power measurement. *Journal of International and Area Studies*, *25*(2), 1-20.

SoftPower30 (e.d.). Obtained via https://softpower30.com/country/france/

Sørensen, C. T. (2017). Constraints on the soft power efforts of authoritarian states: The case of the 2015 military parade in Beijing. *Journal of current Chinese affairs, 46*(2), 111-134.

Statista. (2021, March 16). *FIFA World Cup spending in Russia 2018, by category*. Obtained via https://www.statista.com/statistics/1220795/2018-fifa-world-cup-spending-by-categoryrussia/#:~:text=The%20total%20public%20and%20private,and%20renovation%20of%20sports%20facilities.

Stoker, G. (2006). Public value management: A new narrative for networked governance?. *The American Review of Public Administration*, *36*(1), 41-57.

Taylor, T. (1986). Sport and international relations: a case of mutual neglect. *The politics of sport*, 27-48.

Taylor, T., Burdsey, D., & Jarvis, N. (2023). A critical review on sport and the Arabian Peninsula–the current state of play and future directions. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, *15*(2), 367-383.

The Brussels Times (2022). *Why Qatar is hosting the World Cup, and what it hopes to achieve with it*. Obtained via https://www.brusselstimes.com/324884/why-qatar-is-hosting-the-world-cup-and-what-it-hopes-to-achieve-by-doing-it

Thomson, A., Cuskelly, G., Toohey, K., Kennelly, M., Burton, P., & Fredline, L. (2019). Sport event legacy: A systematic quantitative review of literature. *Sport Management Review, 22*(3), 295–321.

United Nations (2022). *Amir Addresses United Nations General Debate, 77th Session (English)*. Obtained via https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5EKH0O9c7M0&t=4s

V-Dem (2024). *Democracy wins and loses at the ballot*. Obtained via https://www.v-

dem.net/documents/43/v-dem_dr2024_lowres.pdf

Walker, C. (2016). The Hijacking of" Soft Power". *J. Democracy*, *27*, 49.

Zamorano, M. M. (2016). Reframing cultural diplomacy: the instrumentalization of culture under the soft power theory. *Culture Unbound*, *8*(2), 165-186.