Bend it Like FIFA: Transnational Regulation of State Action

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Abstract

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) serves as the internationally-recognized governing body of football. The organization posits its dominion to deliver sanctions for issues related to government interference and non-compliance with other FIFA Statutes, including discrimination. However, little research has been conducted to determine to what extent FIFA’s attempts to regulate state action are successful and effective. This paper seeks to help fill in that gap. First, it analyzes available data of FIFA sanctions and threats of suspension from 2004-2019. It then investigates three case studies; Israel, Iran, and China to evaluate the extent to which FIFA’s autonomy in issuing transnational regulation is valid and to determine the explanatory power of liberalism theory. In doing so, this research seeks to answer if FIFA is effective in regulating state action and to what extent FIFA’s regulatory power supports liberalism theory’s conception of international organizations serving as a constraint on state action.
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On Tuesday, September 10th, 2019, Sahar Khodayari, a 29-year-old woman from Iran died. Khodayari’s death resulted from excessive burn wounds after she lit herself on fire in front of an Iranian courthouse in Tehran (Gambrell, 2019). Her act of self-immolation was in response to suggestions overheard from the court that she might be imprisoned for six months to two years (BBC, 2019). Her crime? Attending a football match.

Since the Iranian Revolution, it has been illegal for women to attend men’s football matches (Gambrell, 2019). As such, it has become a practice of women who wish to attend these matches to dress up as men and attempt to sneak into stadiums. These women risk public beatings and imprisonment in order to witness the global game. Khodayari was one such woman. Her death sparked a public outcry in Iran that led to the Twitter hashtag “Blue girl” – in reference to the blue wig she wore as part of her disguise in support of her favorite team, Esteghlal FC of Tehran (Gambrell, 2019; BBC, 2019). As her story began to be picked up by major global news outlets like the Associated Press and BBC, people in Iran began online campaigns for international sports organizations to ban their own country from competitions like the 2018 World Cup which brought so much pride to Iran (BBC, 2019).

The organization called upon most was the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the world’s governing body of football. FIFA has a practice of sanctioning its member associations and removing their funding and access to international competitions for acts that violate its statutes. Acts such as gender discrimination and human rights abuses count among them.

FIFA did respond to the global outcry, but it was unclear how the Iranian regime, specialists in ideological control, would react (CNBC Television, 2019). The case of Sahar Khodayari, the “Blue Girl”, served as a perfect test of FIFA’s ability to regulate and constrain the actions of states.

Sanctions in the realm of international sports are not a phenomenon unique to FIFA. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) maintains the right to issue sanctions to countries that wish to compete in Olympic events. So too does WADA, the World Anti-Doping Agency, which operates as an affiliate of the Olympic Committee. For example, in December 2017, in response to the McLaren Investigation by WADA and its subsequent Schmid Report, which detailed the systemic doping system of the Russian Olympic Federation, the IOC sanctioned the Russians and prevented the federation’s competition in the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Olympic Games (WADA, 2017).

In the area of sanctions and the ability to constrain state action, FIFA is unique. The IOC puts on two major events every four years. When the Olympics are not underway, the IOC is less relevant internationally. WADA only concerns itself with issues of doping and therefore, can only sanction for illegal acts of doping. The International Basketball Federation (FIBA) governs the sport globally, but its power is less than that of the National Basketball Association (NBA) in the United States.

FIFA operates as the lone international sports organization with a truly global reach that concerns itself with a range of different issues, serves as the main institution in the sport, both in terms of power and symbolism, and administers events daily. The English Premier League (EPL), the world’s richest and most popular in the world (it is watched by nearly 4.7 billion people according to the British Council) is governed by the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) (2015). UEFA, in turn, is a subsidiary of FIFA. Unlike the NBA, which
operates within its own set of rules, separate from those of FIBA, the EPL abides by the bylaws of FIFA.

The unique position of FIFA as a global sporting institution makes it an empirically interesting unit of analysis to understand the ability of international organizations to constrain state behavior. As such, this study will analyze the ability of FIFA to constrain state action over issues of football autonomy and human rights. The article continues in five steps. First, it explores the canon of research on the relationship between sports and international relations before examining the expanding role of international sports organizations in the present global system. Second, it delves into the bylaws of FIFA’s organizational statutes to provide an overview of how and why sanctions might be administered. Third, the paper makes its contribution to the literature on transnational regulation by international institutions and on liberalism by presenting data on FIFA’s history of sanctions and analyzing three case studies – Israel, Iran, and China. In the discussion, it examines what the results of the study suggest about FIFA’s regulatory power over national governments and about how liberalism serves as a potential explanatory framework for FIFA’s actions. Finally, in conclusion, this paper offers its thoughts on the implications and limitations of the research. It suggests that liberal states, especially the United States, should support the economic ability of FIFA to administer sanctions to constrain the actions of the Chinese.

**Literature Review**

The relationship between sports and foreign policy is a sub-field of political science that has only recently begun to be explored in-depth. Sports as a form of foreign policy has existed since at least the colonial era, for example, when the British used football to support their colonization of Kenya (Njororai, 2009). Both before and during WWII, Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini used sport as a political tool and to demonstrate soft power (Forlenza, 2017), though the term would not be coined until 1990 by Joseph Nye in his seminal work, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power*. Still, the study of sport and its relationship to politics and diplomacy only began to take off in the 1990s and today, research is still conducted to determine the overarching value of sports as a political tool and form of diplomacy (Merkel, 2017).

Furthermore, the majority of works in the field are not researched by political scientists, but instead by historians, economists, and tourism experts; as such, the field has contributed little to theoretical models and frameworks and, in addition, 93% of research in the sports policy arena fails to utilize a mixed-methods approach (Grix et al., 2018). One notable problem to the accessibility of a mixed-methods approach is a lack of relevant available statistical data to utilize for quantitative study; however, this is quickly changing and datasets related to sports are easier to find such as all international football results from 1872 to present and every result from 120 years of the Olympics (Jürisoo, 2019; Griffin, 2018).

Moreover, important research has already been conducted to evaluate the relationship between sports, politics, and foreign policy. Works considering the effects of mega-events like the Olympics or the World Cup on the host country are numerous (Baralsky, 2011; Garcia, 2012). In addition, research has been conducted considering the value of such events for the host country’s government in order to achieve a desired cultural shift (Ichii, 2019). Beyond the realm of mega-events, research has been published about the general use and effect of sports such as by Charitas (2014), who analyzed how French sport policy adjusted post-WWII to support a maintained dominance over its colonial holdings, by Krasnoff (2011), who built upon Charitas by exploring French sport policy through Francois Mitterrand, and by Armstrong (2007), in his...
analysis of the relationship between football and politics in Liberia by considering the election campaign of the country’s most famous footballer, George Weah (Mehler, 2008).

Recent trends in the field include the exploration of identity and of migration as they relate to sport. A film by Shutzer and Shutzer (2015) for the Abbasi Islamic Studies program and the Global Studies program, both at Stanford, explored how women’s football impacted notions of national identity in Tanzania’s semi-autonomous region of Zanzibar, despite public shaming. Nyambi (2018) detailed the politicization of national team football and the nicknames of the men’s and women’s teams in Zimbabwe by the country’s ruling party, ZANU PF, and how that impacted notions of identity. In one of the rare quantitative studies, Depetris-Chauvin and Durante (2017) conducted surveys to evaluate how football impacted ethnic identity, across Africa.

Studies related to sport and migration include Lago-Peñas, Lago-Peñas, and Lago’s research on the effects of player migration on national football team performance while van Campenhout, van Sterkenburg, and Oonk (2019) questioned what even constitutes a migrant footballer in the first place. Given the relevance of migration globally at present, studies have asked what effect sport may have on nativist attitudes and xenophobia (Alrababa’h et al, 2019; Depetris-Chauvin & Durante, 2017).

**International Sporting Organizations**

Because sports’ effects on society are now well-documented, heavy hitters in the industry are now being required to justify their actions and clarify their positions on global issues just like a state government. The IOC has made a point to detail the positives the Olympics bring, such as support for HIV & AIDS prevention and the empowerment of women and other marginalized groups (2013; 2016). FIFA has become more transparent in updating and publishing its disciplinary code, human rights policy, and its efforts to combat racism and acts of discrimination (2017a; 2019; 2017b).

Because the impact of sport is now more evident, especially financially, sporting organizations have begun to amass more power and influence. Today, these organizations act as “global governors” as introduced in Avant, Finnemore, and Sell’s book, “Who governs the globe?” (2010). Though scholars and government workers speak about the governance of the international system, the answer to who administers said governance is often left wanting. Avant, Finnemore, and Sell suggest the answer is “global governors” who work to solve issues that individual state capacity cannot. These “global governors” are “authorities who exercise power across borders for purposes of affecting policy”, and while states certainly contribute to this process, so too do other non-state actors, including international organizations and corporations (p. 2).

Wloch (2012) considered the manifestations of the concept of “global governors” in her argument that UEFA, the governing body of European soccer, and a subsidiary of FIFA should be considered a global governor because it sets rules for international sport. Wloch suggests that Poland’s legal concessions to UEFA (a set of 25 guarantees including, but not limited to intellectual property protection, visas and work permits, safety and security, and tax exemptions) in order to host the 2012 European Men’s Football Championships, provide evidence of UEFA’s position as a global governor. She further suggests that the exploding commercialization of sports have served as the impetus for the ability of international sporting organizations such as FIFA, and its subsidiaries to serve as powerful international actors (2012). These influential actors set the laws of the game.
According to Foster (2003), global sports law developed as, “a transnational autonomous legal order created by the private global institutions that govern international sport. First, its chief characteristic is that it is a contractual order, with its binding force coming from agreements to submit to the authority and jurisdiction of international sporting federations, and second that it is not governed by national legal systems” (p. 2).

It is because of this ‘law’ that Poland acquiesced to UEFA’s demands; the binding force in their relationship was the contractual desire of Poland to host the European Championships. Moreover, Garcia and Meier (2015) further explore the relationship between international sporting organizations and national governments when they question whether FIFA is a new actor in world politics. They posit that FIFA is a strong example of the ability of private institutions to utilize strictly enforced international policy to regulate the actions of public entities such as states. Additionally, they suggest that FIFA provides transnational private regulation (TPR) which serves as, “the ability of non-state actors to cooperate across borders in order to establish rules and standards of behavior in a distinct issue area accepted as legitimate by agents not involved in the rule definition” (p. 891).

Because both the national football associations and governments of states accept FIFA statutes, Meier and Garcia suggest FIFA is capable of enforcing TPR. They utilize examples of sanctions issued out by FIFA in addition to case studies on Greece, Spain, and Poland as evidence. Because the sanctions issued by FIFA have most often been met with reform by national governments, and because the case studies appear to confirm FIFA’s sovereignty over the right to govern football, Meier and Garcia confirm that FIFA operates as one of Wloch’s “global governors”.

Overall, the field of sports-related research in political science and international relations is budding. Efforts are currently being undertaken to change the history of research related to sports and international relations. Accordingly, this paper will attempt to contribute by building on the work of these scholars and utilizing a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the relationship between international sports organizations and state governments. More specifically, this paper will serve as an update to and an expansion on the work of Meier and Garcia. It will examine the effect of FIFA’s efforts to regulate national governments.

**Hypothesis**

FIFA is capable of transnational regulation over state action in football-related affairs. Additionally, the organization is also capable of shaping the normative behavior of states in relation to human rights in situations in which its economic welfare is not at play. Additionally, liberalism will serve as a strong theoretical framework to explain FIFA’s ability to constrain national governments.

**FIFA Statutes**

FIFA has made a point to insist that no matter the type of political interference, nor the size of the country, it will act swiftly and strongly to ensure each member FA is able to operate autonomously of government. When Nicolas Sarkozy, the former President of France, called for change within the French Football Federation (FFF) and pledged to lead an investigation into the organization after a disastrous 2010 World Cup showing, former FIFA President, Sepp Blatter responded defiantly, saying the French had, “made an ‘affair d’état’ with football” and that the
organization would make sure that interference would “definitely... be dealt with”, regardless of the influence of the French on football (BBC, 2010). Considering Blatter’s statement and FIFA’s insistence on its intention to remain unbiased in decisions of regulation, this study determines to evaluate the authenticity of those claims.

In order to gain access to the international footballing system and thus, its vast streams of revenue and soft power promotion, it is required to establish and maintain membership with FIFA as a national football association. Member associations are contractually obligated, “to comply fully with the Statutes, regulations, directives and decisions of FIFA bodies at any time” (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 14.1a). The statutes that members must abide by include provisions “to prohibit all forms of discrimination; to be independent and avoid any form of political interference;” and “to ensure that judicial bodies are independent (separation of powers)” (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 15b, c, d).

The compulsory independence of FIFA’s member associations is further explained by Article 15 which demands that “each member association will manage its affairs independently and without undue influence from third parties”. In addition, it stresses the need to hold elections and make decisions free from outside influence; any elections or decisions that are non-compliant will not be recognized by FIFA and face scrutiny (FIFA Statutes, 2019). Most cases of FIFA threats or sanctions fall within this category of non-compliance related to government interference. However, FIFA’s Statutes also prohibit,

“discrimination of any kind against a country, private person or group of people on account of race, skin colour, ethnic, national or social origin, gender, disability, language, religion, political opinion…” (2019, Article 4.1).

And while FIFA notes that it strives to “remain neutral in matters of politics and religion”, it withholds the right to make exceptions in cases that conflict with its Statutes (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 4.2). For the purpose of this research, Article 4.2’s provision is an important exception.

In addition to FIFA’s anti-discrimination policy, its statutes also contain a commitment to human rights stating that FIFA respects, “all internationally recognized human rights and shall strive to promote the protection of these rights” (2019, Article 3). In 2017, FIFA published its landmark Human Rights Policy which reiterated Article 3 of the statutes (Article 3 has been present in FIFA’s Statutes since 2016). According to the Human Rights Policy, FIFA’s dedication to human rights is “in accordance with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights” and “embraces all internationally recognized human rights, including those contained in the International Bill of Human Rights” (2017, Article 1, 2). However, the policy does contain a provision stating:

“Where national laws and regulations and international human rights standards differ or are in conflict with each other, FIFA will allow the higher standard without infringing upon domestic laws or regulations. Where the national context risks undermining FIFA’s ability to ensure respect for internationally recognized human rights, FIFA will constructively engage with the relevant authorities and other stakeholders and make every effort to uphold its international human rights responsibilities” (FIFA’s Human Rights Policy 2017, Article 7).

This provision appears to offer an out to FIFA in human rights cases it deems too organizationally controversial to confront.

Still, any failure to comply with these bylaws brings about the possibility for FIFA to suspend a member with immediate effect, and in cases deemed as “serious violations” the right is
reserved for FIFA to expel a member association (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 16.1, 17.1b). Cases of suspension prevent the exercise of any member associations rights; this impedes the suspended member from having any sporting contact with other FIFA members, and the FA (including anyone associated with it) cannot utilize any development program, course or training from FIFA or its affiliates (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 16.3). In certain situations, a suspension can involve the pulling of funding. Any decisions made with respect to violations are final and not open to appeal (FIFA Statutes 2019, Article 60.1).

In a 2004 meeting of the FIFA Associations Committee, the global football governing body renewed its commitment to the principles of autonomy for its member associations, insisting that their independence from political influence is essential to the ability of FIFA to promote football’s growth and its platform for “promoting social progress and transcending all differences” (FIFA, 2004). In order to put teeth to its words, in 2005, FIFA enacted policy changes at its 55th FIFA Congress which began the creation of a Task Force with the specific design of solving contemporary issues in football including ensuring federation autonomy from political interference (FIFA, 2005a, 2005b). In a further show of commitment to federation autonomy, FIFA instituted a firm deadline for compliance with its statutes of independence and called on specific members declaring, “Nations with sports legislation in place that does not comply with the FIFA statutes and especially where leagues are afforded a status whereby they are not subordinate to the football association (specifically, Greece, Poland, and Portugal) shall have until 15 July 2006 to amend the relevant legislation” (FIFA, 2005a).

The task of surveilling instances of political interference and non-compliance with FIFA’s statutes falls to the Association’s Committee which examines individual cases, “to ensure the adequate administration of football within the associations” (FIFA, 2008). In situations that do not require an immediate response, FIFA can choose to issue sanctions at its annual congressional meeting. If time is of the essence, suspensions fall to the employ of FIFA’s Emergency Committee. For situations in which FIFA has not yet determined government interference, but is concerned about member autonomy, its usual practice is to threaten the possibility of sanction, such as in the case of France after the 2010 World Cup (BBC, 2010; Jarry, 2010).

Methodology

This article examines the rate of success in FIFA’s endeavors to regulate national governments. For the purpose of this paper, the regulation includes, not only instances of government interference in the affairs of FAs, but also government resistance to societal norms FIFA deems essential to the international footballing community.

In order to do so, it utilizes a mixed-methods approach, analyzed through the lens of liberalism theory. The purpose of employing a liberalism framework is because liberalism’s tenets posit the relevance of non-state actors in the constraint of national governments (Gordon & Pierik, 2010). According to Meiser, state restraint can be achieved through the power of international institutions and norms. Global organizations support international cooperation and can inflict costs on states for violating agreements that have been fostered through international accord. Additionally, norms created by international institutions further shape state action by informing ideals of what is appropriate behavior (2018).

The study takes this design to evaluate the overall effectiveness of FIFA’s regulatory action (quantitatively) while also taking a deep dive into specific cases to more holistically
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determine the governing body’s success or failure (qualitatively). Accordingly, this data constitutes examples of FIFA threats or sanctions. The research in this article specifically focuses on FIFA’s ability to regulate national governments; therefore, it takes no interest in issues FIFA faces that relate to its member associations themselves. Though FIFA posits its commitment to its anti-racism policies, and the study of their effectiveness is certainly of interest, regulation related to racism does not involve interaction with national governments and therefore, is not of relevance to this paper.

This article will utilize data originally gathered by Meier and Garcia (2015) and updated to include FIFA’s history of sanctions from 2013-2019. It also includes some instances of threats made by FIFA to traditional footballing powers. However, public information access to every instance of FIFA’s Associations Committee issuing a suspension threat is not fully accessible from the organization’s records. Regardless, this inclusion is a necessity to better determine the organization’s ability to act as a regulating power with more influential nations that are less likely to commit full-on infractions.

The data was gathered by analyzing source documents from the minutes of the annual FIFA Congress, as well as FIFA’s press and media releases and, in a few cases, from well-respected journalism outlets. Moreover, it also utilizes three case studies, specifically, the cases of Israel, Iran, and China. Israel’s case is utilized because of FIFA’s attempts to mediate a resolution between Israel and Palestine. Iran serves as an interesting example for study because it provides the opportunity to examine FIFA’s ability to enforce regulation on states for issues outside of governmental interference. More specifically, matters of societal norms that violate Article 15b of its Statutes to prohibit discrimination and Article 4.1 which explicitly forbids discrimination in relation to gender (FIFA Statutes 2019). The case of China has become a necessity to examine FIFA’s autonomy as a global governor of football because the innate nature of the Chinese Communist Party contradicts FIFA’s laws of neutrality from the affairs of the football association (FA).

These three case studies provide evidence to analyze the ability of FIFA to influence government affairs outside of state interference in FAs and to act as an institutional regulatory check on wealthy and powerful states, respectfully. By utilizing updated data, including cases of threats, and three case studies, this paper seeks to build upon Meier and Garcia (2015) and supplement the growing body of research in sports and international relations. It also seeks to contribute to the vast canon of research concerning the validity of liberalism theory while contributing to the discussion surrounding the ability of international sporting organizations to serve as regulatory powers.

Results

The first section of this study analyzes data (see Table 1) on instances of FIFA threats or suspensions of its member FAs in order to determine FIFA’s institutional ability to regulate the actions of national governments. According to data gathered from FIFA (2004-2019), since 2004 there have been 31 instances of football’s global governing body issuing suspensions to its member football associations. Additionally, there have been four well-documented cases of FIFA proposing the threat of suspension; these cases include, France, Israel, Spain, and Iran. In total, there are 35 cases with which to analyze the success of FIFA’s regulatory action.

Far and away the most common trigger of a threat or suspension has been governmental interference (30/35 - 85.7%). FIFA’s Statutes suggest this includes any form of political tampering with the member FA and specifically, points out its prohibitions on judicial measures
against FA employees (2019, 15c, d). Other cases include mismanagement (twice), discrimination (once), illegal detention of opposing players (once), and the failure to provide security at matches (once). This strong prevalence of regulatory action based on governmental interference is consistent with the results of Meier and Garcia (2015). Also, in line with the findings of Meier and Garcia, FIFA’s suspensions or threats appear to be effective.

Outside of three cases (Ethiopia, Samoa, Peru – 2008), in which the outcome of the sanction is not available in FIFA records, and the threat against Israel, each other documented suspension or threat has been resolved in FIFA’s favor (the Israel case requires closer inspection, to follow, in an in-depth case study). Furthermore, cases of suspension are typically resolved expeditiously and in only four cases does resolution take more than a full year.

However, there are six countries that serve as repeat offenders (Kenya, Iran, Iraq, Nigeria, Kuwait, and Guatemala). In addition, in the cases of Nigeria and Iraq, the reasons for the suspensions were extremely similar. For Nigeria, in each instance, the government either forced the resignation of or fundamentally replaced, FA officials. In Iraq’s case, after the government dissolved all its sports organizations in May 2008, it took the same action again, this time against only the football association in November 2009. In the case of Kuwait, the second suspension trigger is unknown. The cases of repeat offenders serve as evidence that, like many government institutions, the differential product between regulation and compliance can be difficult for FIFA to achieve.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Member FA (T=Threat Only)</th>
<th>Date of Suspension (or Threat)</th>
<th>Date of Resolution</th>
<th>Trigger of Suspension (or Threat)</th>
<th>Outcome of FIFA intervention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>9-Jan-2004</td>
<td>17-May-04</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Replaced FA and elected FA officials</td>
<td>Re-installment of elected FA leadership, recognition of Fas’ competencies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>2-Jun-2004</td>
<td>6-Aug-04</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Replaced FA officials due to mismanagement and fraud</td>
<td>Installment of a normalization committee to improve transparency and accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macau</td>
<td>15-Feb-2005</td>
<td>6-Mar-05</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Non-specified</td>
<td>Suspension lifted after negotiations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yemen</td>
<td>12-Aug-2005</td>
<td>9-Nov-05</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Non-specified</td>
<td>Suspension lifted after creation of a normalization committee and government concessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>3-Jul-06</td>
<td>12-Jul-06</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: National legislation granting professional league independence from FA was not revoked</td>
<td>Legislation amended according to FIFA’s demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>25-Oct-06</td>
<td>9-Mar-07</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Non-implementation of agreements, escalation of internal conflicts</td>
<td>Government declares to abstain from further intervention, pending legal proceedings withdrawn, reinstatement of elected officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Start Date</td>
<td>End Date</td>
<td>Governmental Interference</td>
<td>Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
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<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>23-Nov-06</td>
<td>20-Dec-06</td>
<td>Non-independence of decision-making and election processes</td>
<td>Creation of a transitory board and future implementation of FIFA's demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>29-Oct-07</td>
<td>20-Dec-08</td>
<td>Replaced FA officials</td>
<td>Suspension provisionally lifted after new elections announced, reinstallment of FIFA's transition committee, amendment of FA's statutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Albania</td>
<td>14-Mar-08</td>
<td>26-Apr-08</td>
<td>Initiated legal proceedings against new FA statutes</td>
<td>Legal proceedings stopped, creation of a working group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>19-Mar-08</td>
<td>19-May-08</td>
<td>Ministerial decree dissolved FA</td>
<td>Madagascar Supreme Court declared decree null and void, reinstallment of FA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
<td>28-Mar-08</td>
<td>7-May-08</td>
<td>Replaced FA officials and intended to hold new elections</td>
<td>Decree revoked, reinstallment of elected FA officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>26-May-08</td>
<td>29-May-08</td>
<td>Decree dissolved all sports organizations</td>
<td>Exclusion of FA from dissolution decree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>29-Jul-08</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Dismissal of elected officials, non-compliance with FIFA roadmap</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samoa</td>
<td>24-Oct-08</td>
<td>20-Dec-08</td>
<td>Repeated Management Problems</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peru</td>
<td>25-Nov-08</td>
<td>20-Dec-08</td>
<td>Non-specified</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brunei</td>
<td>29-Sep-09</td>
<td>1-Jun-11</td>
<td>Dissolution of FA and creation of new government controlled body</td>
<td>Conditions of FIFA Emergency Committee fulfilled and statutes amended according to FIFA statutes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iraq</td>
<td>20-Nov-09</td>
<td>19-Mar-10</td>
<td>Dissolved FA</td>
<td>Dissolution of FA withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>El Salvador</td>
<td>11-May-10</td>
<td>27-May-10</td>
<td>Did not accept FIFA's normalization committee and new FA statutes</td>
<td>Legitimacy of normalization committee and new FA statutes recognized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Governmental Interference:</td>
<td>Governmental Interference:</td>
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<tr>
<td>France (T)</td>
<td>29-Jun-10</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>President Nicolas Sarkozy threat to investigate FA and reform French soccer</td>
<td>No documented government interference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>4-Oct-10</td>
<td>8-Oct-10</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Forced resignation of officials</td>
<td>Suspension provisionally lifted after claimant withdrew legal actions and FA leadership and FA control over league were reinstalled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bosnia</td>
<td>1-Apr-11</td>
<td>1-Jun-11</td>
<td>Mismanagement due to ethnic divisions and rotating FA presidency</td>
<td>FA statutes amended according to FIFA's demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>17-Jun-11</td>
<td>7-Jul-11</td>
<td>Failure to provide security for national team matches</td>
<td>Suspension provisionally lifted due to positive developments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel (T)</td>
<td>12-Jun-12</td>
<td>3-Sep-13</td>
<td>Illegal detention of Palestinian players</td>
<td>Memorandum of understanding to facilitate movement of persons and goods</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cameroon</td>
<td>4-Jul-13</td>
<td>22-Jul-13</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Refused to accept FA elections results</td>
<td>Normalization committee created, new elections organized, finally reinstallation of elected FA officials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indonesia</td>
<td>5-Jun-14</td>
<td>14-May-16</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Issued decree permitting interference in FA</td>
<td>Decree revoked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>9-Jul-14</td>
<td>18-Jul-14</td>
<td>Government Interference: Court ordered appointment of civil servant to run FA</td>
<td>Court proceedings withdrawn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kuwait</td>
<td>16-Oct-15</td>
<td>6-Dec-17</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Unknown</td>
<td>New Sports Law of Kuwait, fully compliant with the FIFA Statutes and requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benin</td>
<td>12-May-16</td>
<td>10-Jun-16</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Prevention of elections</td>
<td>Elections held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guatemala</td>
<td>28-Oct-16</td>
<td>31-May-18</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Rejection of FIFA-mandated normalization committee</td>
<td>Acceptance of FIFA normalization committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mali</td>
<td>17-Mar-17</td>
<td>28-Apr-17</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Appointed provisional committee to facilitate elections of a new executive committee</td>
<td>Annulling of initial decision to dissolve the executive committee.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Date 1</td>
<td>Date 2</td>
<td>Governmental Interference: Ordered removal of FA President</td>
<td>Reinstation of FA President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudan</td>
<td>2-Jun-17</td>
<td>13-Jul-17</td>
<td>Ordered removal of FA President</td>
<td>Reinstated FA President</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pakistan</td>
<td>11-Oct-17</td>
<td>13-Mar-18</td>
<td>Government Interference: FA offices and accounts in control of court-appointed administrator</td>
<td>FA retaken control of offices and accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain (T)</td>
<td>5-Feb-18</td>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>Government Interference: Spanish Sport Ministry called for election of new FA President</td>
<td>No election held</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leone</td>
<td>5-Oct-18</td>
<td>3-Jun-19</td>
<td>Government Interference: Removal of the FA President and General Secretary</td>
<td>SLFA President and General Secretary cleared of corruption charges and returned to their posts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran (T)</td>
<td>19-Sep-19</td>
<td>10-Oct-19</td>
<td>40 year tradition banning women attending matches; &quot;Blue Woman&quot; self-immolation</td>
<td>Taking steps to allow women to attend matches; 3,000 women allowed to attend Oct. 10th international match in caged-off section from rest of 80,000 seat stadium</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: FIFA Congress minutes, FIFA media releases and Reuters (see Works Cited)

Despite the presence of repeat offenders, FIFA’s success rate is strong. To gain a greater understanding of the extent of the organization’s ability to constrain state action, it is useful to consider three case studies – Israel, Iran, and China – that resulted in very different outcomes. Furthermore, each case illustrates a different level of vigor in terms of FIFA’s regulatory action. In Israel, FIFA created a task force with the specific design to mediate and resolve football-related issues between Israel and Palestine. In the case of Iran, FIFA demanded immediate changes to the actions of the Iranians. However, in China, FIFA has not taken any action for violations of government interference or human rights abuses. In addition, the three cases all present different triggers for FIFA. For Israel, the case concerns a violation of human rights antithetical to FIFA’s anti-discrimination policy; in Iran, the case is also a violation of the anti-discrimination policy, but after intense global backlash; in the case of China it is more traditional governmental interference and human rights violations.

**FIFA Statute Infraction**

**Israel**

In June of 2012, according to FIFA media releases, Israeli authorities illegally detained “several” Palestinian football players in “violation of their integrity and human rights and without the apparent right of a due process (trial)” (2012). Specifically, the case of Palestinian player Mahmoud Sarsak was a strong point of contention as his health was quickly deteriorating owing to a hunger strike that had reached 90 days in exception to his illegal imprisonment. Reports suggest Sarsak had been illegally detained for three years, since 2009, without trial over concerns of links to an Islamic Jihad militant group (Browning, 2012). Sarsak and the other Palestinian players were detained under The Israeli Incarceration of Unlawful Combatants Law
of 2002 which permitted Israeli authorities to jail, without trial, anyone thought to have participated in, or to have a connection to, hostilities against the State of Israel (Shany, 2012).

The detention of the Palestinian football players conflicted with FIFA’s anti-discrimination article (4.1) of its statutes, however, in 2012, FIFA did not have a human rights provision in its statutes.

Iran

On Tuesday, September 10th, 2019, a 29-year-old Iranian woman named Sahar Khodayari died after setting herself on fire after learning in a Tehran court she could spend up to half a year in prison for dressing up as a man and sneaking into a stadium to watch a soccer match (Gambrell, 2019). Khodayari was attempting to sneak into a match at Azadi Stadium in Tehran wearing a blue wig and men’s overcoat; her blue wig immortalized her globally as the “Blue Girl” (Gambrell, 2019). Khodayari’s death by self-immolation sparked a global backlash and condemnation of the Islamic Republic of Iran and its ban against women attending football matches. The ban has been in place in Iran since the Islamic Revolution in the country in 1979.

The ban on women’s attendance to football matches had been under discussion between FIFA and the Iranian government prior to this incident, but the strong international response forced FIFA’s hand to call out the violation of the anti-discrimination and human rights statutes which prohibit prejudice based upon gender.

China

In what, anywhere else in the world, would likely be considered a blatant infraction of FIFA’s statutes against governmental interference in the affairs of its member associations, from 2014 to 2019, the President of the Chinese Football Association, Cai Zhenhua, also served simultaneously as the Deputy Director of the State General Association of Sport which serves as an arm of the Chinese Communist Party (Rick, 2018). This joint appointment is a direct conflict of interest with the FIFA Statutes Article 15 which demands that its member associations operate independently and without outside influence. Considering Zhenhua served in such elevated positions for both organizations, it would seem FIFA would have a strong opposition to his continued employment as President of the Chinese Football Association.

Additionally, on October 24, 2019, the FIFA Council announced its unanimous decision to award the People’s Republic of China the right to host the first edition of the new annual FIFA Club World Cup in 2021 (FIFA, 2019a). However, in May of 2016, FIFA committed to a new bidding process for its events which includes the requirement to conduct and submit human rights reviews (FIFA, 2016). The awarding of the FIFA Club World Cup in 2021 then, appears to ignore China’s human rights issues, in regard to the conflicts in Hong Kong and the detention in internment camps of more than one million predominantly-Muslim Chinese minorities (Associated Press, 2019).

FIFA’s Intervention

Israel

After FIFA received reports of the illegal detention of the Palestinian football players, it released a statement in which Sepp Blatter, the organization’s former president, indicated his strong concern about the situation. Accordingly, FIFA called upon the Israel Football Association (IFA) to ensure that the relevant authorities were handling the incarcerations (FIFA, 2012). In July of 2013, FIFA announced the creation of the FIFA Task Force Israel-Palestine,
after a mandate from the 63rd FIFA Congress in May; the purpose of the joint task force was for discussion over potential agreements between the Israel Football Association and the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) for, “the movement of persons and goods for football purposes in and out and within Palestine” (FIFA, 2013a; 2013b). From these discussions, the two sides agreed to sign a memorandum of understanding on September 3rd, 2013 (FIFA, 2013b).

Iran

While prior to the self-immolation death of Sahar Khodayari, FIFA had been working with the Islamic Republic on the admittance of women to football matches, the global backlash sparked FIFA into further action. On September 19th, Gianni Infantino, the residing president of FIFA, issued a statement in which he deemed the prohibition of women “unacceptable” and stated that FIFA’s “position is clear and firm. Women have to be allowed into football stadiums in Iran. For all football matches” (FIFA, 2019b). In addition, the organization sent a delegation of its members to discuss and facilitate the ability of women in Iran to attend football matches; FIFA demanded that women need to be able to attend matches “freely” and that their attendance can only be dictated by economic demand (FIFA, 2019c). Furthermore, the delegation conducted an inspection of the Azadi Stadium and organized ticketing procedures with the purpose of ensuring a smooth transition to women’s attendance. Infantino noted that he expected women to be allowed to attend the next Iranian men’s national team match, which was set to occur on October 10th, 2019 (FIFA, 2019b).

China

Despite the glaring issue of government influence in the affairs of the Chinese Football Association, FIFA has taken no action against China. And yet, in October 2017, FIFA suspended the Pakistan Football Federation for “undue third party influence” which, more specifically, involved the appointment of the federation’s president by a state court (FIFA, 2017a). Notably, China’s football federation officials are dually appointed into state positions that prevent impartiality. Furthermore, after announcing the awarding of the 2021 FIFA Club World Cup to China, and when asked by media about conducting a compulsory human rights review, Infantino ignored the question and focused on rhetoric concerning football’s recent ability to promote development and improve conditions in other countries (Bradsher & Panja, 2019). Interestingly, the 2026 FIFA Men’s World Cup was awarded prior to the 2021 Club World Cup and the bid books, which contain the human rights reviews, are available online for the World Cup bids, but cannot be found for the Club World Cup. According to Human Rights Watch, which has supported FIFA on many issues, FIFA failed to conduct a human rights assessment, confirming its absence online (2019). After the appointment of China as the hosts of the event, Minky Worden, the organization’s Director of Global Initiatives, said FIFA ignored consulting its key stakeholders and avoided looking for answers they didn’t want to find (Human Rights Watch, 2019). However, it is important to note that there were no other bids to host the 2021 Club World Cup outside of China. Still, in opposition to its statutes, FIFA failed to make public the bidding process and did not conduct a human rights review.

Outcome

Israel

While FIFA, the IFA, and the PFA reached a memorandum of understanding for the movement of football-related goods and persons in September 2013, this did not stop issues that
continued to arise between the two member associations. As such, FIFA established the FIFA Monitoring Committee Israel-Palestine, by approval of the 65th FIFA Congress, with the express goal of mitigating issues related to Palestinian football; after the establishment of the committee, the renewed threat of the IFA’s suspension was withdrawn (FIFA, 2015a). In October 2017, FIFA released a press statement indicating that the political situation between Israel and Palestine was especially complicated and incapable of being solved by non-governmental organizations; as such, FIFA would remain in line with its statutes to stay neutral in political issues and would not impose sanctions or any other courses of action on the IFA or PFA (2017, b). However, the committee did indicate it would continue the facilitation of goods and players between Israel and Palestine as this measure had been positively received.

Iran

After initial discussions took place between FIFA delegates and Iran, on October 10th, 2019, for the first time in 40 years, women were allowed to freely attend a men’s football match (FIFA, 2019d). However, only 3,500 tickets were made available to women in a stadium with a capacity of 78,000; these tickets sold out in a matter of minutes (Evans, 2019). The limited allocation of tickets is in direct opposition to FIFA’s insistence that tickets be made available to women based purely on economic demand. Additionally, women were only allowed to view the match from a section barred-off from the men in attendance, while women were also not permitted to attend as photographers (Batha, 2019). These caveats went unmentioned in a statement by President Infantino in which he expressed his happiness that women were able to attend and committed to FIFA’s ongoing commitment to women’s attendance to football matches in Iran (FIFA, 2019d).

China

As of November 2019, FIFA has ignored all instances of government interference by the Chinese government into the affairs for the China Football Association (CFA). Moreover, FIFA has failed to issue any threats of sanctions towards the CFA.

On October 29th, Human Rights Watch sent a letter to FIFA asking for an explanation on its decision to award the Club World Cup to China without conducting a human rights review or even consulting its key consultants (Human Rights Watch, 2019b). Additionally, the letter ascertained as to how FIFA planned to ensure its human rights standards would be upheld in China and for a timeline on their implementation. In a November 7th response, FIFA indicated that due to its decision to refashion the Club World Cup, the organization was forced to operate on a shorter timeline and therefore, could only conduct an “informal” bidding process (FIFA, 2019e). Moreover, the letter only suggested in broad terms that FIFA would work with the CFA and the Chinese government to meet its human rights commitments. Overall, FIFA has failed in its commitment to its statutes, both in relation to government interference and human rights, in its relationship with China.

This research indicates that in every case of sanction, the result of the dispute ended in FIFA’s favor. However, there are instances of repeat offenders, two of whom commit similar infractions.

In the case of Israel, FIFA successfully reached a memorandum of understanding to facilitate the movement of football-related goods and peoples between Israel and Palestine but could not solve greater issues that it felt were of a political nature in which it could not interfere.
The discriminatory practice of banning women’s attendance to football matches in Iran was dissolved through FIFA negotiations with the regime. However, attendance was limited, sectioned-off, and it remains to be seen if Iran will continue to oblige FIFA’s demands.

Finally, the Chinese case indicated FIFA’s lack of willingness to uphold its statutes and commit to state constraint with China. Despite officials in the Chinese Football Association holding positions with direct conflicts of interest FIFA failed to sanction China. Moreover, the organization also failed to conduct a human rights review before awarding the PRC the 2021 Club World Cup.

Discussion

The research presented in this article has analyzed the ability of non-state actors to constrain national governments. By utilizing FIFA as a unit of analysis, this paper has attempted to answer whether football’s governing body is capable of transnational regulation and whether liberalism serves as a powerful explanatory framework.

Liberalism’s tenets posit the relevance of non-state actors in the constraint of national governments (Gordon & Pierik, 2010). Considering FIFA’s high success rate in issuing sanctions and thus, resolving disputes, it is easy to suggest that football’s governing body serves as a strong example of the ability of non-state actors to conduct transnational regulation. Not only has FIFA been 100% successful in cases in which the outcome was made available, but cases have tended to be settled expeditiously. Whether the infractions involved the forced removal of member association officials, which is a quick and easy fix, or they concerned legislative decrees that take more time to revoke (Greece, Madagascar), in cases in which FIFA issued out sanctions, its results are difficult to argue with. Therefore, the data presented in Table 1 would suggest that liberalism is correct in its assumption that international organizations are capable of regulating state action.

To better understand the relevance of liberalism to the research, it is important to note that the relationship between FIFA and state governments is one of economic mutual benefit. Meiser (2018) suggests that it is this reciprocal gain that reduces instances of conflict and creates incentives to avoid issues that might prevent the continued accumulation of economic mutual benefit. The relationship between FIFA and states is one such example. According to a New York Times review of the organization’s financial documents, FIFA profited $6.1 billion from the 2018 World Cup in Russia (Panja, 2018). In order to put on an event of the magnitude of the World Cup, it is inherent that FIFA requires cooperation from both its member associations and their national governments. On the other hand, the 211 footballing member associations globally, rely on FIFA to support them both financially and logistically (FIFA). Therefore, it is of mutual benefit for all parties involved in international football to cooperate and maintain economic profit.

Without this cooperation and reciprocal gain, it is unlikely that FIFA would be effective in its attempts at transnational regulation. As noted in Meier and Garcia (2015), FIFA holds exclusive rights over the allocation of access to global football. As such, it is the economic benefit from the international football system that is the driving force behind FIFA’s regulating power. Without the potential for economic gain, it is arguable that states would simply abandon the FIFA system and operate within their own system that ignores outsider attempts at state regulation. Together, the normative pressure of global collaboration and the potential for large financial inputs support national government’s acquiescing to FIFA’s demands. International
cooperation and mutual benefit are hallmarks of liberalism and each helps to illustrate the ability of FIFA to restrain states, as shown in Table 1.

However, when considering the three case studies – Israel, Iran, and China, FIFA’s capacity to induce state constraint is less clear and accordingly, so is liberalism’s explanatory power.

While, in the case of Israel, FIFA’s Monitoring Committee Israel-Palestine was unable to solve all the issues that had sprung up between the two states, it is unrealistic to expect that FIFA would be capable of such an outcome. Given the calamitous nature that has become of Israeli-Palestinian relations and subsequent peace negotiations, it is no surprise FIFA failed where more powerful international organizations and some of the strongest individual state mediators have too. However, the fact that FIFA was able to organize freedom of movement for football-related goods and persons across the shared border suggests that the hypothesis that FIFA is capable of transnational regulation over football matters may still be correct. The release of the Palestinian football players one month after FIFA’s outcry also suggests the organization is capable of shaping state behavior surrounding human rights and discrimination in situations in which its economic welfare is not at stake.

The case of Iran only further entrenches this notion. For nearly 40 years, the normative societal behavior in the Islamic Republic of Iran was the prohibition of women’s attendance to football matches. Prior to the case of the ‘Blue Girl’, women had long since been risking their lives and freedom by impersonating men to attend football matches. The inability of women to attend these events had already been noticed by FIFA and discussions were hitherto underway with the Iranian government before the global outcry at Khodayari’s death (Gambrell, 2019).

While the threats issued by FIFA towards Iran did not result in women’s access to the October 10th, men’s national football team match as dictated by economic demand, it did result in the first legal viewing of men’s football by women in decades. Though access was limited, it did mark a telling first step by Iran and a clear adherence to FIFA’s threats. Brian Hook, the United States Special Representative for Iran and Senior Policy Advisor to the Secretary of State, noted this compliance when he suggested that FIFA’s efforts to put pressure on the Iranian regime worked. By “driving up the cost” of their continued ban on women’s attendance, FIFA forced the regime to turn to its “pragmatic side” and appease the demands because it felt “at risk” (CNBC, 2019, 12:55). Hook continued to say that he felt similar strategy from the United States would yield equally desirable results. Given the United States State Department publicly acknowledged that FIFA’s pressure worked, it is fair to suggest in the case of Iran, FIFA is also capable of football-related state constraint.

Additionally, it is important to note the power of normative behavior in this instance. FIFA requires that anyone, regardless of gender, is allowed to attend football matches. The international outcry that followed the realization of this infringement upon women’s rights supported FIFA’s threats and thus, lends credence to liberalism’s idea that institutional norms help constrain states.

Further research will need to be conducted to determine the long-term authenticity of Iran’s transition away from gender discrimination and to conclude on FIFA’s regulatory power on this matter. No matter, at present, Iran serves as a further suggestion of the capability of FIFA to conduct transnational regulation, especially over human rights issues.

However, China calls into question FIFA’s ability to constrain state governments. Football’s governing body has made no attempts at sanctioning, nor even suspending the Chinese Football Association for clear government interference in its affairs. Furthermore, FIFA blatantly
ignored obvious human rights violations and its own statutes when the organization chose to award the 2021 Club World Cup to China without a human rights review. What explains this strong difference in behavior?

The answer is economics. The 2015 FIFA corruption scandal opened the world’s eyes to the rampant issues of bribery and kickbacks plaguing the organization. Over the course of 2015, more than 30 FIFA officials were indicted in the United States for corruption involving more than $200 million in bribes (BBC, 2015). Moreover, the most powerful man in football at the time, Sepp Blatter, the former president of FIFA, was banned for nearly a decade from football-related activity and became the subject of a Swiss criminal investigation (BBC, 2015). According to the New York Times, in the three years following the global scandal, FIFA operated at a loss of about $1 billion (Panja, 2018). However, China has served as the financial antidote to FIFA’s ills.

According to The New York Times’ financial review of FIFA, the $6.1 billion earned from the 2018 World Cup put the organization back into the black by a tune of $1.1 billion. The large majority of these increased earnings are due to large investment from Chinese companies in FIFA events (Panja, 2018). However, FIFA is not yet out of the dark which further explains its lax attitude towards China. Panja explains that the scandal scared off Western companies; no new sponsors have been signed from the West since 2011. Moreover, current FIFA President Gianni Infantino has pledged to quadruple the money given out to member associations at a time when finances are tight (2018). FIFA’s economic situation has limited its capacity to regulate China because it has relied upon Beijing to help stay financially solvent in the short term, post-scam. Furthermore, they are looking to China as the next big football market in the long term (Bradsher & Panja, 2019). As such, FIFA has been unable to constrain, nor regulate China.

While the case of China helps to cement the hypothesis that FIFA can shape the normative behavior of states in situations in which its economic welfare is not at stake, it damages the idea that FIFA is capable of transnational regulation of state action. It would seem the same caveat must apply to attempts at constraining state actions.

It would also seem that the case of China brings into question liberalism’s explanatory power. FIFA’s decisions to abdicate its statutes in favor of a cozier relationship with China and its economic power cast doubt on the ability of international institutions to regulate state behavior. It is clear that FIFA does not feel it can constrain China without backlash that the organization is unwilling to have to deal with.

Conclusion

This research serves as an update to Meier and Garcia (2015) by expanding the role of analysis of FIFA’s state constraint. FIFA appears able to shape state behavior regarding issues of human rights when economics is not a major consideration. In Israel and Iran, FIFA succeeded in ameliorating human rights issues; in China, where economics was a major factor, FIFA made no such attempts. Football’s governing body also appears to only be willing to commit to constraining state behavior in football-related matters when its economic welfare is not at play. This serves as an update to the hypothesis which did not consider economic well-being in issues of transnational regulation.

The results of this study indicate the continued importance of Western powers’ awareness of the actions of the Chinese. FIFA’s unwillingness to regulate Beijing serves as a notice to China’s increasing ability to upset the international system. For the United States specifically, it must be aware of China upsetting the status quo and fulfilling suggestions that it may be capable
of achieving global hegemony (Tammen, Kugler & Lemke, 2017). If possible, the United States, as the other major untapped football market FIFA is looking towards, should pressure football’s governing body to treat China as it does all other countries and enforce its transnational regulations.

However, considering China and the United States are likely the only two nations with the individual economic might to defy FIFA, liberal states should find encouragement in FIFA’s regulation. Certainly, the United States Department of State seems to have been heartened by FIFA’s check on the Iranian regime. Such liberal states should continue to support the reform of football’s governing body post-corruption scandal to increase the ethical value in FIFA’s words and actions.

Western states should also be emboldened to support the capacity of international institutions such as FIFA to shape normative behavior globally. While China is certainly a bad actor, in this case, it is unclear what ramifications increased investment from western companies in FIFA may have on the organization’s willingness to constrain Chinese action. President Xi Jinping has indicated his desire to turn China into a global football power and to host a World Cup (Bradsher & Panja, 2018). If the West can better support FIFA economically, the organization could potentially better restrict China (thus supporting the West’s constraint on China) which needs FIFA’s institutional capacity to help improve its football at both a grassroots and national team level to achieve its goal of becoming a footballing power.

Potential limitations of this study include possible missing information related to instances of FIFA threats or sanctions that could alter the results. In addition, it is not yet possible to conclude the outcome of FIFA’s regulatory action in Iran. Finally, though Human Rights Watch indicated FIFA did not conduct a human rights review before awarding China the 2021 Club World Cup, it possible analysis was carried out privately and the event was awarded with stringent human rights advances contingent.
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