

Soccer Is Democratic. The World Cup Is Oligarchy.

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Global Research, June 23, 2014

[North American Congress on Latin America](#)

19 June 2014

Region: [Latin America & Caribbean](#)

Theme: [Global Economy](#)

Support for hosting the World Cup has plunged in Brazil amid protests over abuse, corruption, and excess (coolcloud / Flickr)

This article is a joint-publication of NACLA and [Foreign Policy in Focus](#).

It's the biggest sporting event in the world. Fans from virtually every place on Earth don jerseys, scarves, and caps and head to the nearest bar to chug an ice-cold beer while passionately yelling and cheering their team on—hopefully to victory.

The World Cup only happens every four years, and for most of us, there's nothing like it.

In a test of stamina, national pride and strength, [32 teams](#) representing 32 different countries have descended upon Brazil. The first match, between host country Brazil and Croatia, took place at Arena Corinthians in Sao Paulo. The crowd there was lively, energized by a type of spirit that can only be felt at the World Cup.

What all those revelers and die-hard soccer fans may not have realized is that the very city that hosted the iconic opening match was one of the [most affected](#) by [forced evictions](#), with thousands of poor residents shunted aside to make way for stadiums that may never be used again. These evictions in Sao Paulo and across the country have left thousands of people homeless; the compensation for losing your home is a pittance that doesn't begin to cover the cost of housing in a country where real estate prices are skyrocketing.

"World Cup For Whom?" reads a [sign](#) painted on the street in Sao Paulo.

On June 4, 10,000 protesters belonging to Brazil's Homeless Workers' Movement [shut down a major highway](#) leading to Arena Corinthians. Their demands included more government spending on transportation, health, education, and low-income housing.

After all, if their government could spend billions on shiny new stadiums and brand new infrastructure to accommodate the influx of foreign visitors, surely it could spring for a few dollars for some development projects for its poorest citizens.

Unfortunately for Brazilians, that doesn't seem to be the case.

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Sao Paulo isn't the only Brazilian host city harboring anti-World Cup sentiments.

In 2008, a year after Brazil first won the right to host the 2014 World Cup, 79 percent of

Brazilians were in favor of their nation being the host. Brazil's national team is a five-time World Cup champion, more than any other country, and has produced several legendary *futebolistas*. So it's no surprise that Brazilians were initially excited to host the games.

Six years later, however, [that number has fallen](#) to a dismal 48 percent, a shift reflected in the number of Brazilians participating in protests.

In May alone, 12 Brazilian cities were [rocked](#) by anti-World Cup protests. In Rio, demonstrators coordinated with workers on strike, [claiming](#) that the money spent rehabilitating the Maracanã stadium could pay for 200 schools. In Belo Horizonte, 2,000 protesters [swarmed](#) the streets. In the capital city of Brasilia, demonstrators [carried banners](#) that denounced the deaths of stadium workers.

As the games began, protests showed no signs of winding down. Demonstrators and police [clashed](#) in the streets of Rio on June 15, three days into the World Cup. In one instance, police responded to a protest with tear gas—but ended up accidentally gassing tourists. Also in Rio, the Associated Press [released a video](#) of an officer shooting live rounds into a crowd of protesters.

Other Brazilians have chosen to express their discontent by [painting anti-World Cup murals](#) in the streets. Some of them depict hungry children with nothing to eat but soccer balls. Some of them pay homage to the largely indigenous communities that were evicted from their homes.

And some of them are harsh but succinct: *F*ck the World Cup*.

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Echoing [the Sochi Olympics](#), which came under fire for exorbitant costs and haphazard facilities, this World Cup will be the [most expensive](#) in history—and calling Brazil unprepared is putting it lightly.

As of April, Brazil had [spent](#) \$7 billion repairing stadiums and refurbishing hotels. Despite this being three times the original budget, many of the projects are still not completed—even though the games have already started.

One day before kick-off, the Amazonia stadium still wasn't completed. The stadium is located in the [middle of the Amazon](#) and is difficult to get to by road. Once the World Cup is over, the teams that will [call the stadium home](#) will almost certainly struggle to fill its seats, making the \$300 million spent on its construction a total waste.

And of course, it's not just Brazil.

Awash with [scandal, corruption, and bribery](#), FIFA's popularity is plunging. Even though the 2022 World Cup is a full eight years away, human rights activists and soccer fans alike are already calling on FIFA to take the World Cup away from Qatar.

The charges that Qatar won host-nation status because FIFA officials were [bribed](#) are indeed terrible, but the human rights situation there is even worse. Human rights group have [called foul](#) over Qatar's treatment of the migrant workers building the infrastructure for the Cup.

Allegations include meager pay, unsanitary living conditions, and passport theft. Worst of all, [400 people have died](#) constructing stadiums—and number that could reach 4,000 if immediate action isn't taken.

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International mega events and controversy seem to be synonymous as of late, and it doesn't help that Rio de Janeiro is set to host the 2016 Summer Olympics. Protests over those games have already coincided with World Cup demonstrations.

Russia, still recovering from the [negative press](#) surrounding the 2014 Sochi Olympics, won the rights to host the 2018 World Cup. More backlash is inevitable.

Soccer is a democratic sport. Anyone anywhere can pick up a ball, kick it around, and learn to play. But what's happening in Brazil is not representative of that sentiment. The Brazilian government has trampled over the rights of its own people, not in the name of soccer but in the name of money and prestige.

As protests sweep the nation, soccer fans face a predicament. We love soccer and want to watch our favorite players shine—but not at the expense of millions of disadvantaged Brazilians.

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