



opoint

Qatar 2022

Reputational Risk Project

The 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar has been the subject of intense media scrutiny and criticism. From allegations of corruption in the bidding process to concerns about the treatment of migrant workers and the extreme heat in Qatar, the host nation and FIFA has faced a barrage of negative news coverage.

This whitepaper aims to explore the various issues raised in the media and highlight the intersection between high-profile global events and reputational risk exposure. This is done by by deploying our industry-leading adverse media solutions.

By examining the facts and data we hope to shed light on the complex issues surrounding adverse media coverage and the reputational risk stakeholders face in controversial global events.



Executive Summary

1.

Adverse media coverage of the Qatar World Cup was prominent, underscoring the increasingly critical lens placed on global sporting events. For the 2022 tournament, this included notable discussions of human rights, LGBTQ+ rights, migrant worker conditions concerning Qatar's domestic laws, and the mistreatment of laborers involved in World Cup construction projects.

2.

Negative news varied significantly based on the language of publication and country of origin. Scandinavian datasets maintained the highest percentage of critical coverage over the duration of the World Cup (35-50% of content classified as adverse media), while French and Spanish content centered primarily around football. (<15% of content classified as adverse media)

3.

Sponsors affiliated with the Qatar World Cup face elevated reputational risk concerns driven by Qatar's conservative political practices and FIFA's weak response to criticism, with Budweiser, Coca-Cola, and Visa amongst the brands with the greatest exposure in negative news articles.

4.

Furthermore, sponsors facing criticism unrelated to the Qatar World Cup risk exacerbating pre-existing adverse media, as demonstrated by global textile industry protests targeting Adidas manufacturing centers over inadequate pay.

5.

While lucrative sponsorship agreements for global sporting events are unlikely to disappear, the increasing value of business reputation and its tangible implications for profits underscores a shift amongst corporates to reevaluate advertising investments and provide greater consideration to non-financial concerns.

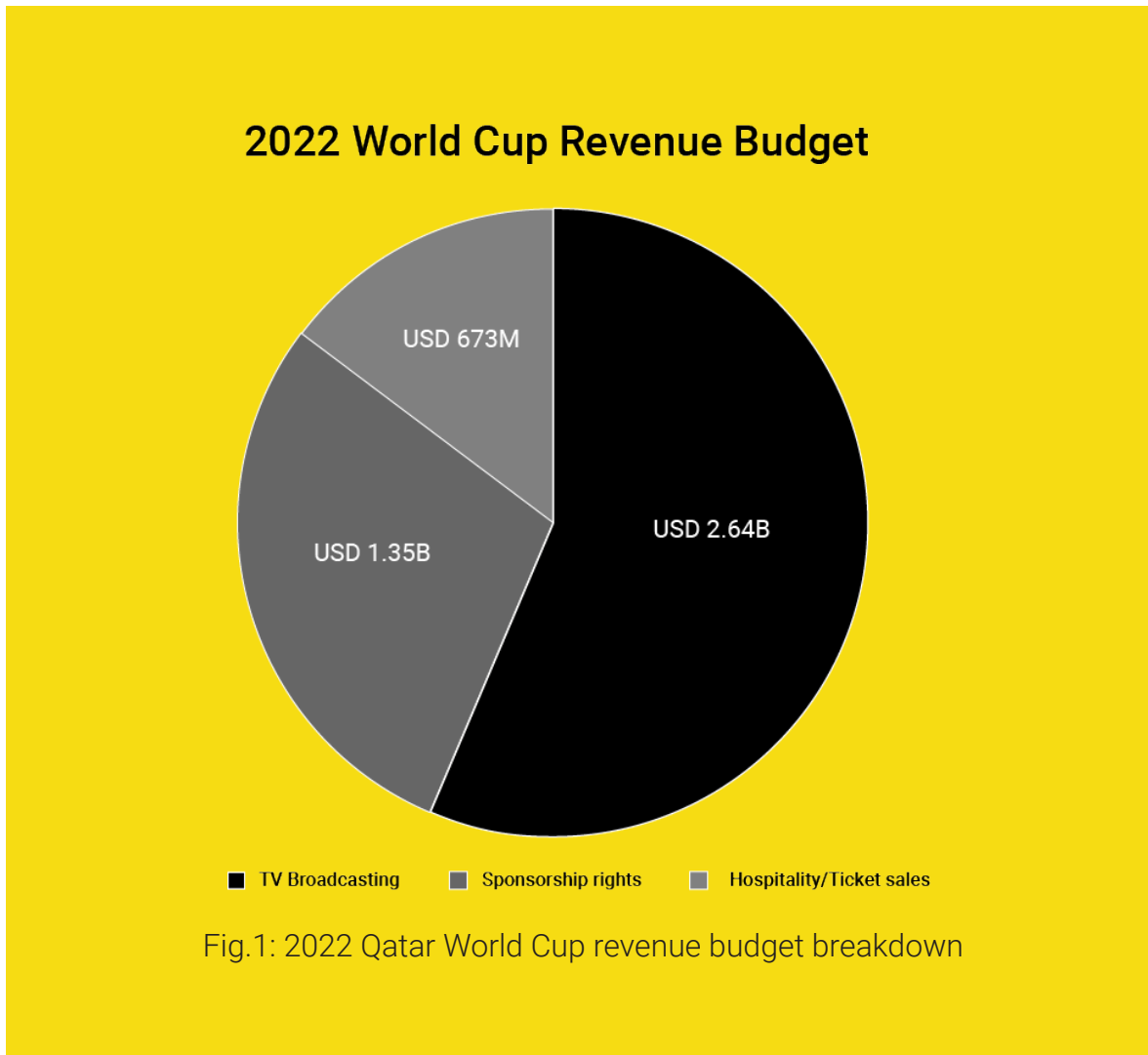


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The sponsorship value of the FIFA World Cup



The FIFA World Cup is a valuable opportunity for businesses to secure advertising and sponsorship deals due to its massive global audience. In recent years, the final match of the tournament has consistently had over 500 million viewers. Given the high viewership and reach of the World Cup, FIFA charges a considerable fee for companies to be involved in the event as advertisers. For Qatar 2022, the average cost of a sponsorship slot is estimated at USD 63 million, while several sponsors, such as Adidas, are committed to long-term contracts valued at over USD 100 million.

According to FIFA's projected 2022 World Cup revenue budget, sponsorship deals account for 29% (USD 1.35 billion) of inflow. While this is a significant profit source for the tournament, the 2022 figures continue a year-over-year decline in advertising inflow since 2014, with the Qatar World Cup budget cycle representing a 6.9% loss compared to the 2015-2018 sponsorship era (USD 1.45 billion), and a 16.7% drop since the 2011-2014 period (USD 1.62 billion).



FIFA scrutiny & reputational risk around Qatar

As media attention on FIFA has increased due to various corruption cases, the organization has seen a decline in sponsorship funding. This shift in public perception has had a negative impact on the advertising appeal of the World Cup, as evidenced by the [reduced](#) pre-tournament advertising campaigns of several brands leading up to the 2018 Russia World Cup. These brands were [concerned](#) about the political climate and law enforcement practices in Russia.

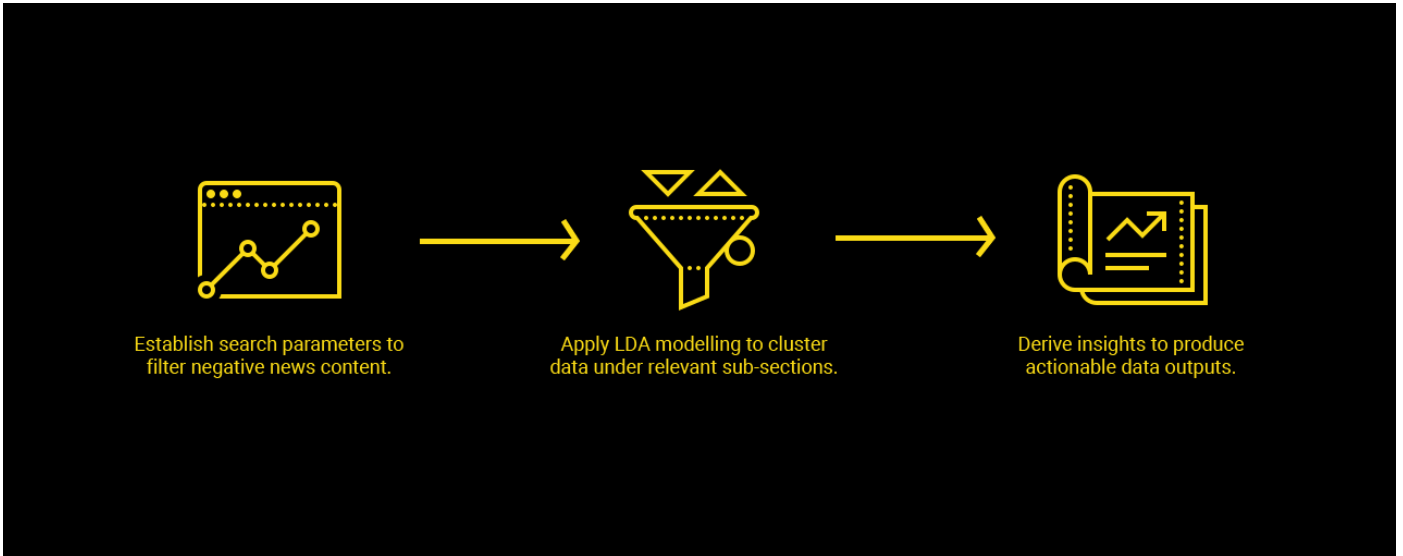
As the 2022 World Cup approached, FIFA continued to face intense media scrutiny. The organization awarded the hosting rights to Qatar despite a lack of thorough human rights [due diligence](#) and allegations of [bribes](#) for FIFA officials to favor Qatar's bid. As a result, Qatar has come under international scrutiny, with investigations into the country's conservative practices, domestic policies, and human rights record, including the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals and women, and the working conditions of foreign laborers. Activist groups have published numerous reports on these issues. (See [Amnesty International Series](#) and [Human Rights Watch](#) coverage).

Adjacent to the controversy surrounding FIFA and the 2022 World Cup, corporate reputation and brand protection have become major concerns for top executives. A [survey](#) of 1,300 CEOs found that reputational damage is one of the top five "risks to growth" in 2023. This risk is driven by the potential disconnect between a company's practices and consumer sentiment, which can negatively impact stock valuations, employee retention, and future business opportunities.

To address this issue, companies are continually searching for ways to improve their due diligence processes and consider the impact of non-financial risks on their decision-making. This has led to a shift in strategic priorities to incorporate reputational risk exposure. As a result, the nexus between global sporting events and reputational risk has become an important topic for companies using sports as a platform for marketing and publicity.



Methodology



The Qatar 2022 Reputational Risk Project aims to quantify this interaction between reputational risk exposure and global marketing events through the examination of traditional news sources covering the 2022 Qatar World Cup. Over 1 million news articles were analysed in the data processing for this report, supplied by Opoint's curated source list containing over 220,000 news sources in 120 languages and across 220 jurisdictions.

To limit the scope of articles analysed, complex search filters were designed to identify stories relating to the Qatar World Cup and adverse media topics, and repeated for all seven languages included in this report. The languages this report is based on is English, French, German, Spanish, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish.

Once identified, relevant results were clustered into thematic topics with Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA), a topic modeling technique used to classify and detect topics based on keywords in the article text. These topic clusters serve as the basis for the report graphics and analysis.



Section 1: World Cup News Coverage Overview

Global news coverage of the Qatar World Cup varied significantly based on language, with English (31%) and Spanish (41.3%) content accounting for over two-thirds of all collected articles. The Spanish data contains two sub-categories, delineating between European Spanish coverage and South American/Latin American Spanish coverage.

Regional sub-groups were also created for English and French data, enabling comparative analysis at the country and continental levels. At the other end of the scale, Scandinavian languages (Danish, Norwegian and Swedish) combine to make up only 3% of total coverage, with Norwegian the smallest at 0.5%.

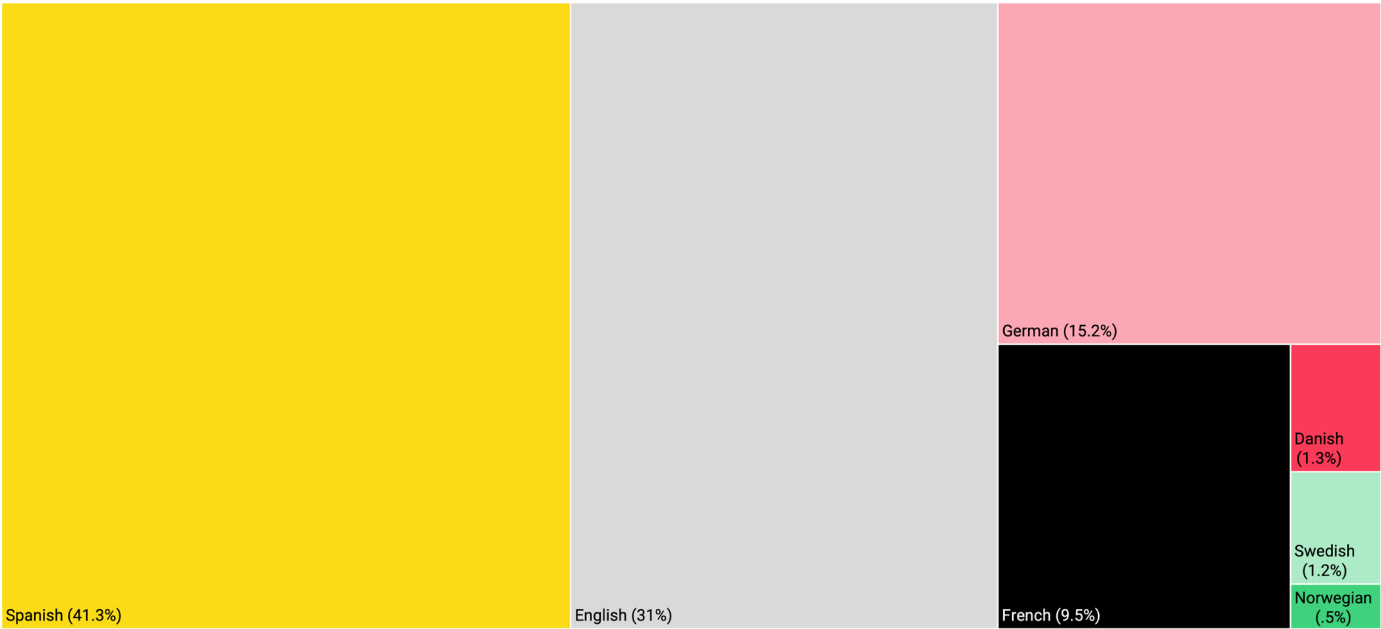


Figure 2: Total news coverage of the Qatar World Cup. (Total number of articles: 1 664 263)



As seen in Figure 3, coverage shifted strongly over the duration of the football tournament, with circulation rates increasing steadily in the two weeks preceding the World Cup, followed by a gradual decline through to the final stages. This matches pre-existing trends across most sporting events, where audience attraction is often front-ended, peaking during open ceremonies or initial matches.

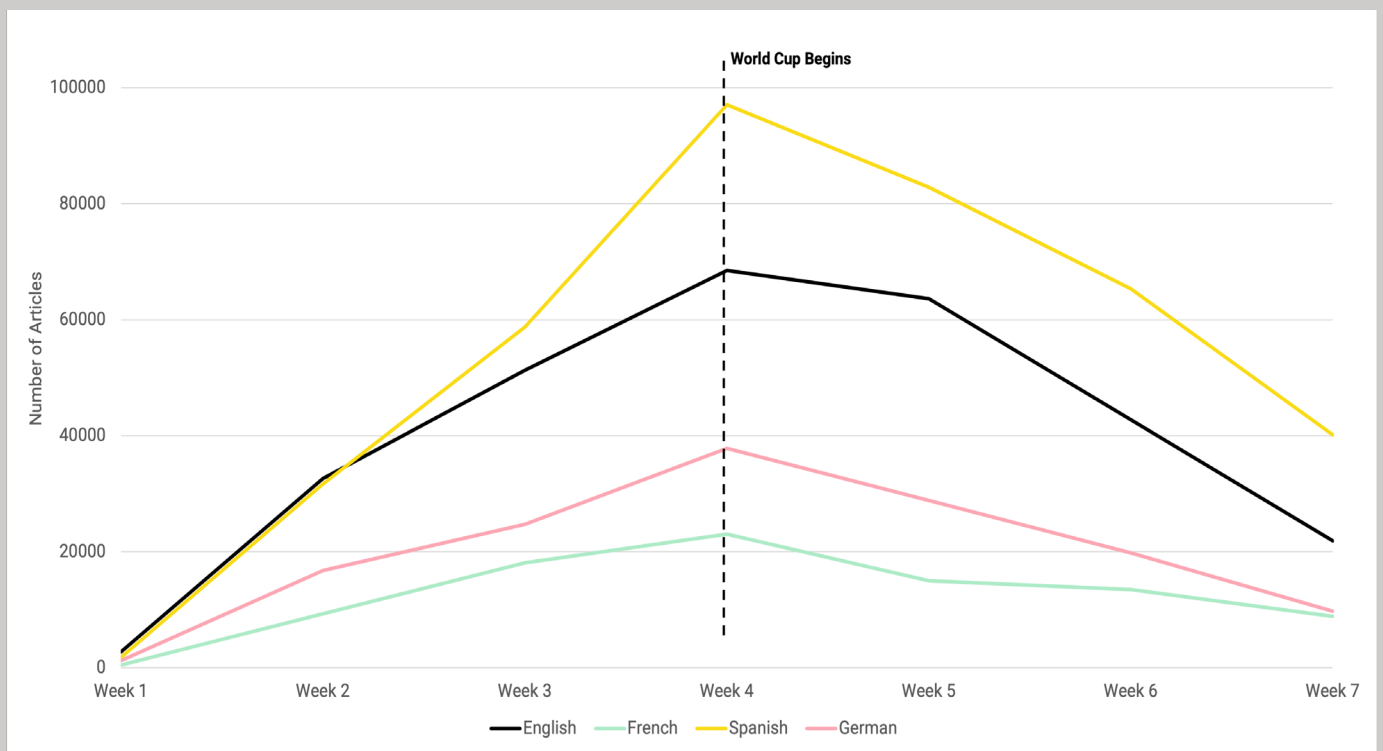


Figure 3: Timeline of news coverage during the Qatar World Cup across the top four languages.



Section 2: Adverse Media

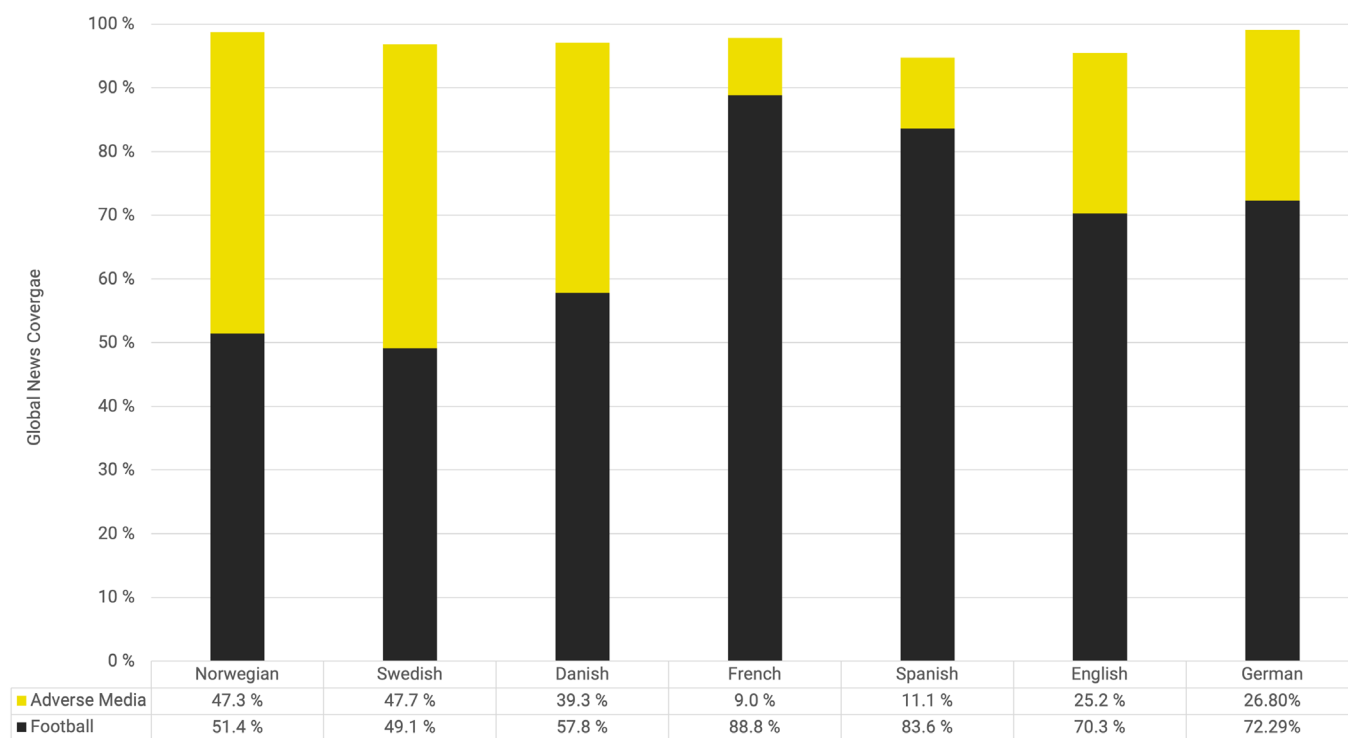


Figure 4: Total coverage across languages and clustered based on adverse media detection. Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% as sub-sections of each language set deemed insignificant were removed during data processing.

The percentage of negative news articles varied significantly across the captured language datasets.

Scandinavian sources had the highest proportion of negative articles by a wide margin. Norway and Sweden, which did not have teams participating in the 2022 World Cup, had the most critical discourse, with 47.3% and 47.7% of articles classified as negative, respectively.

Denmark, which did qualify for the tournament, had a slight decrease in negative articles (39.3% classified as negative) in favor of more football-focused media coverage.

In contrast, Spanish and French content had the lowest percentage of negative articles, with over 80% of the content in both datasets covering football developments and other neutral topics.

This difference in negative media coverage compared to other languages may have been exacerbated by statements from players on French and Spanish-speaking national teams downplaying their involvement in activist campaigns. For example, France captain Hugo Lloris [supported](#) FIFA's decision to ban the "OneLove" armbands on the eve of the Qatar World Cup.



Looking at coverage across the tournament, the number of adverse media articles peaked in the build-up to the opening ceremony, declining considerably across all languages following the first football match on November 20. This trend mirrors the overall decline in the number of articles in the general coverage dataset. (section 1).

After the group stage of the tournament ended (week 5), negative media coverage increased in all languages except French and Spanish. This increase in Denmark and Germany may have been driven by the elimination of those countries from the competition.

While the decline in negative news is universal, there are deviations between the rates of decline, as shown in Figure 5.

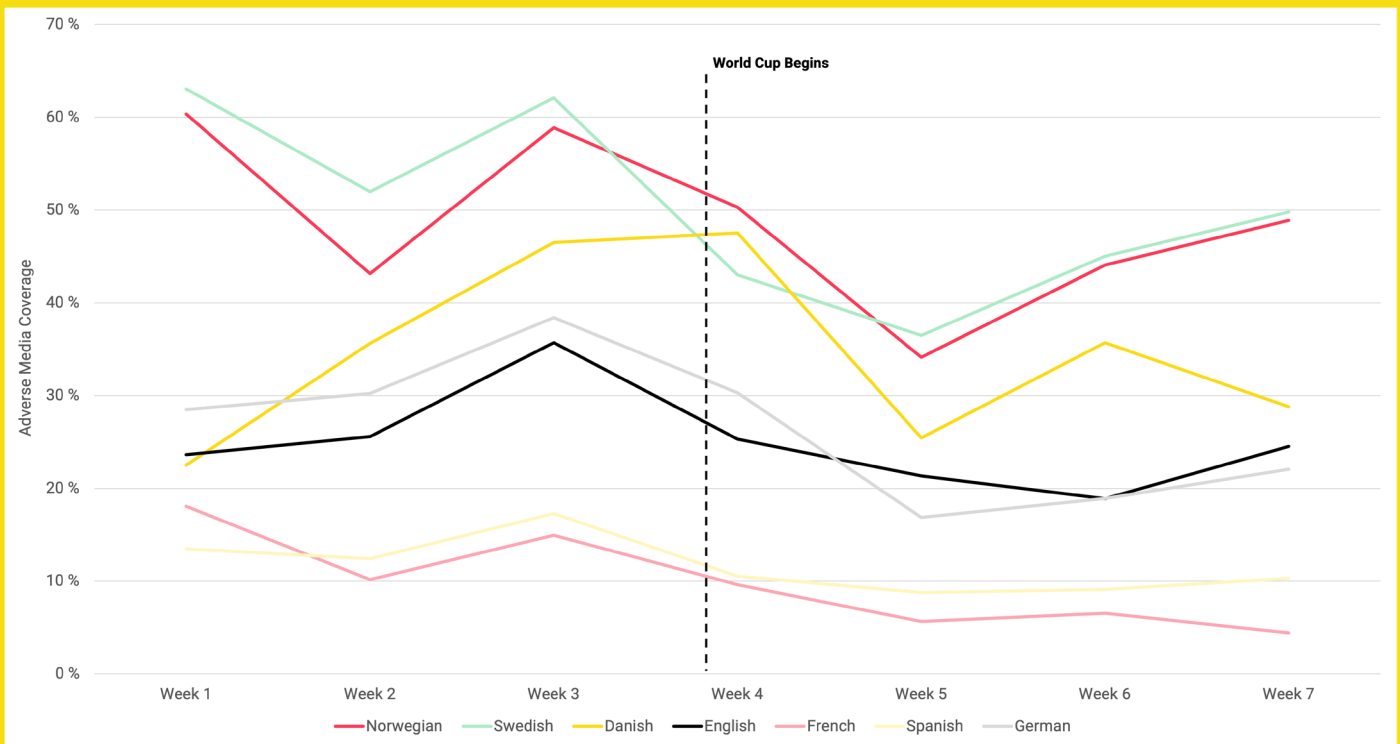


Figure 5: Adverse Media coverage of human rights, LGBTQ+, and migrant workers across monitored languages.



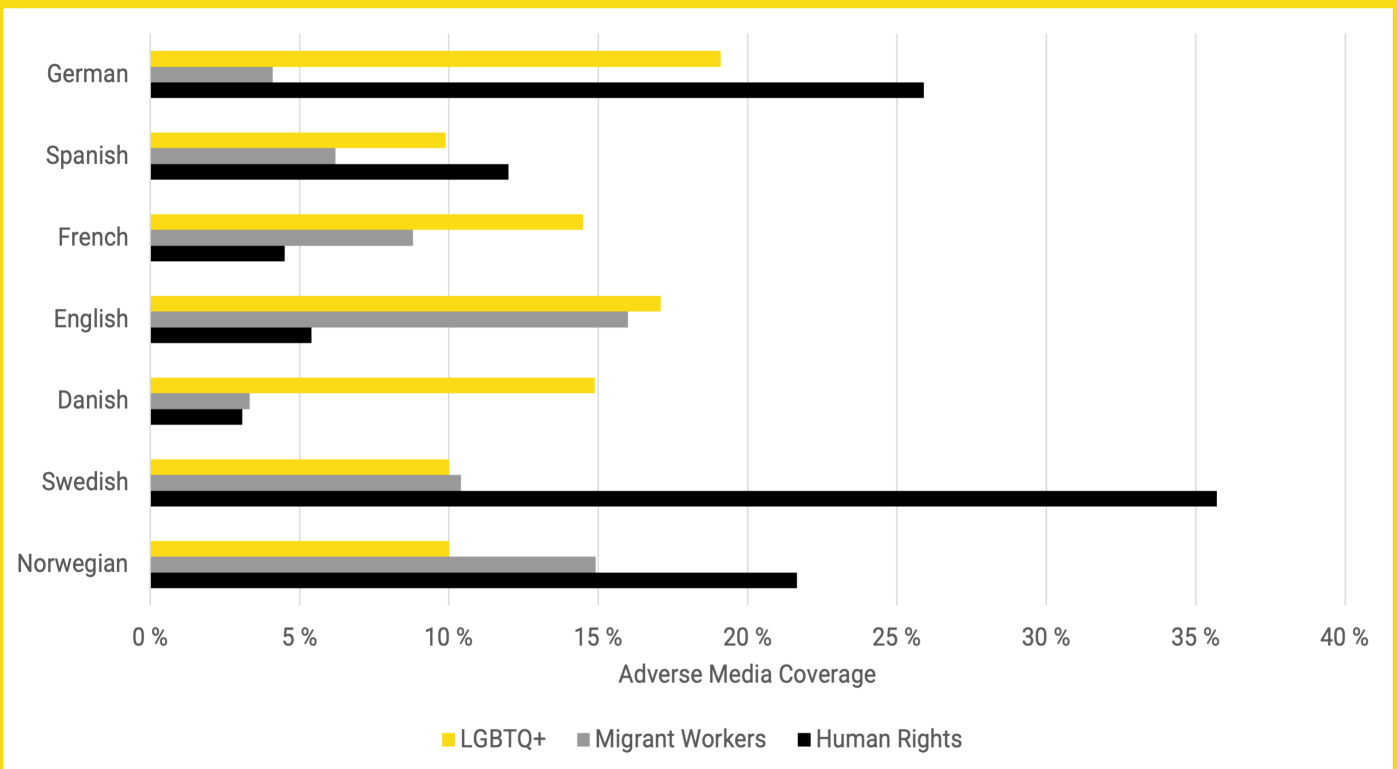


Figure 6: Adverse Media coverage of human rights, LGBTQ+, and migrant workers across monitored languages.

Human rights concerns, LGBTQ+ rights, and the treatment of migrant workers emerged as the three primary adverse media clusters during the Qatar World Cup, accounting for over 50% of all negative articles.

The focus on these issues changed in response to significant events, such as the [death](#) of a migrant worker at a Qatar World Cup training facility on December 5,

or reports of journalists being [banned](#) from stadiums for wearing pro-LGBTQ+ clothing.

In addition, certain countries, such as Germany, Sweden, and Norway, had a higher proportion of content discussing broader human rights issues, as shown in figure 6. Meanwhile, Danish, English, and French content focused more on LGBTQ+ rights.



In addition to the three main negative media topics, several smaller clusters of negative news were identified during the tournament. Figure 7 shows the topic distribution for English content, which includes a notable amount of coverage of Iranian protests.

This is one of several instances where external geopolitical events received media attention related to the 2022 World Cup, possibly because they were linked to national teams that qualified for the tournament.

The Iranian national team's [decision](#) to sing the national anthem before their final group stage game against the US led to an increase in coverage of ongoing protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini in September 2022.

Outside of the adverse media coverage generated by the "Iranian Protests" cluster, this finding underscores the power of global sporting events to serve as a platform for geopolitical discourse, creating another risk avenue for sponsors to monitor.

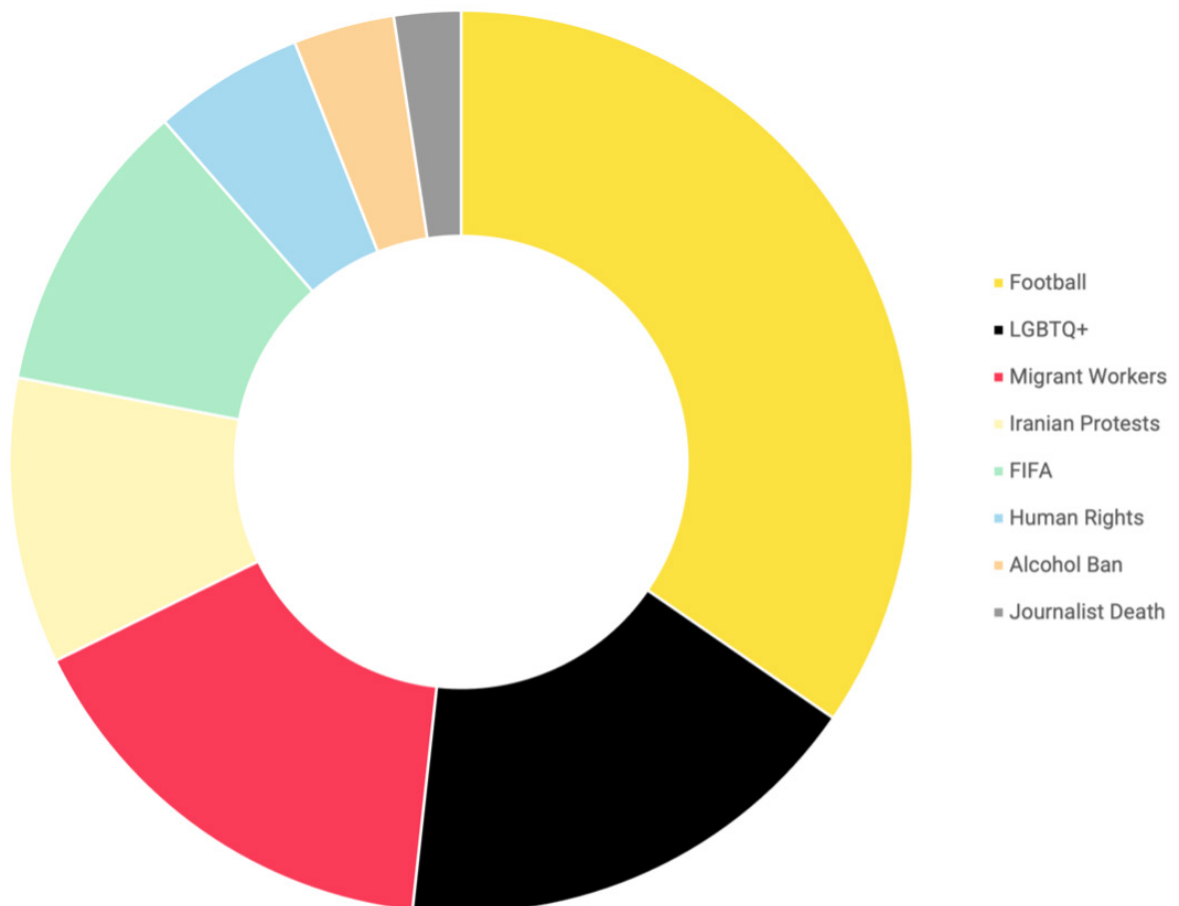


Figure 7: Division of adverse media coverage across all English jurisdictions



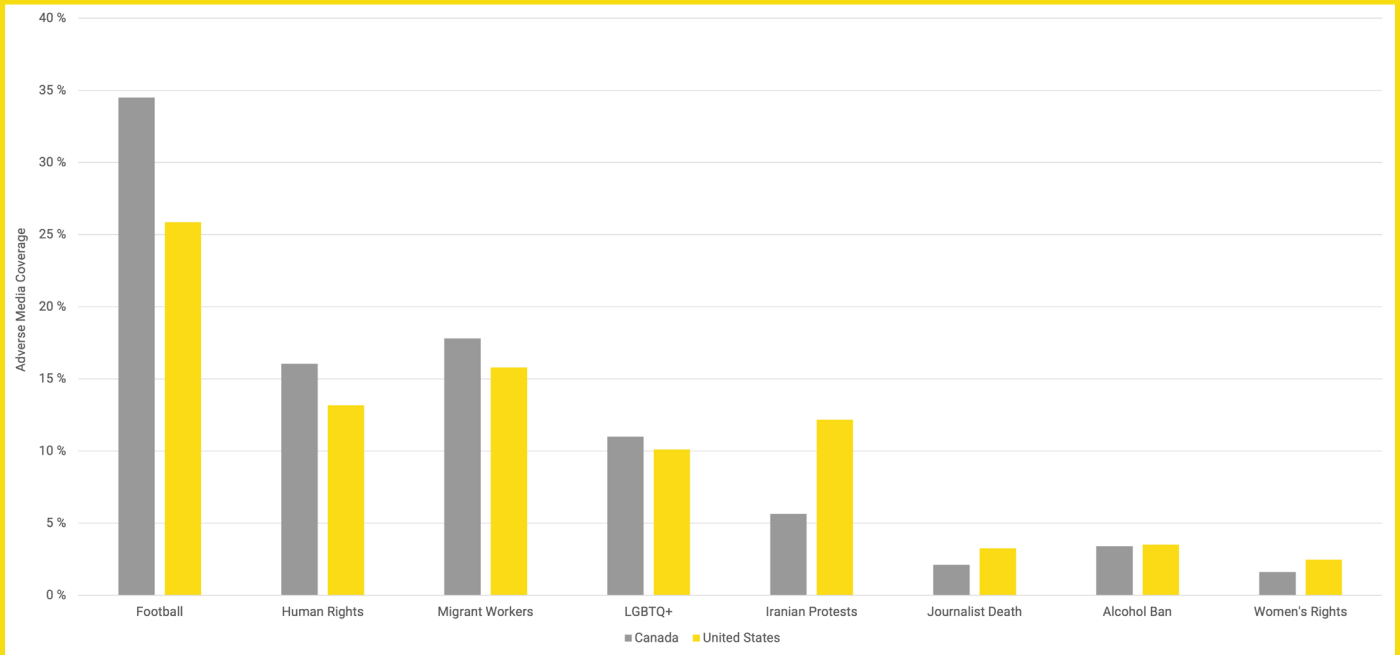


Figure 8: Comparative analysis of adverse media clusters across Canada and US news coverage.

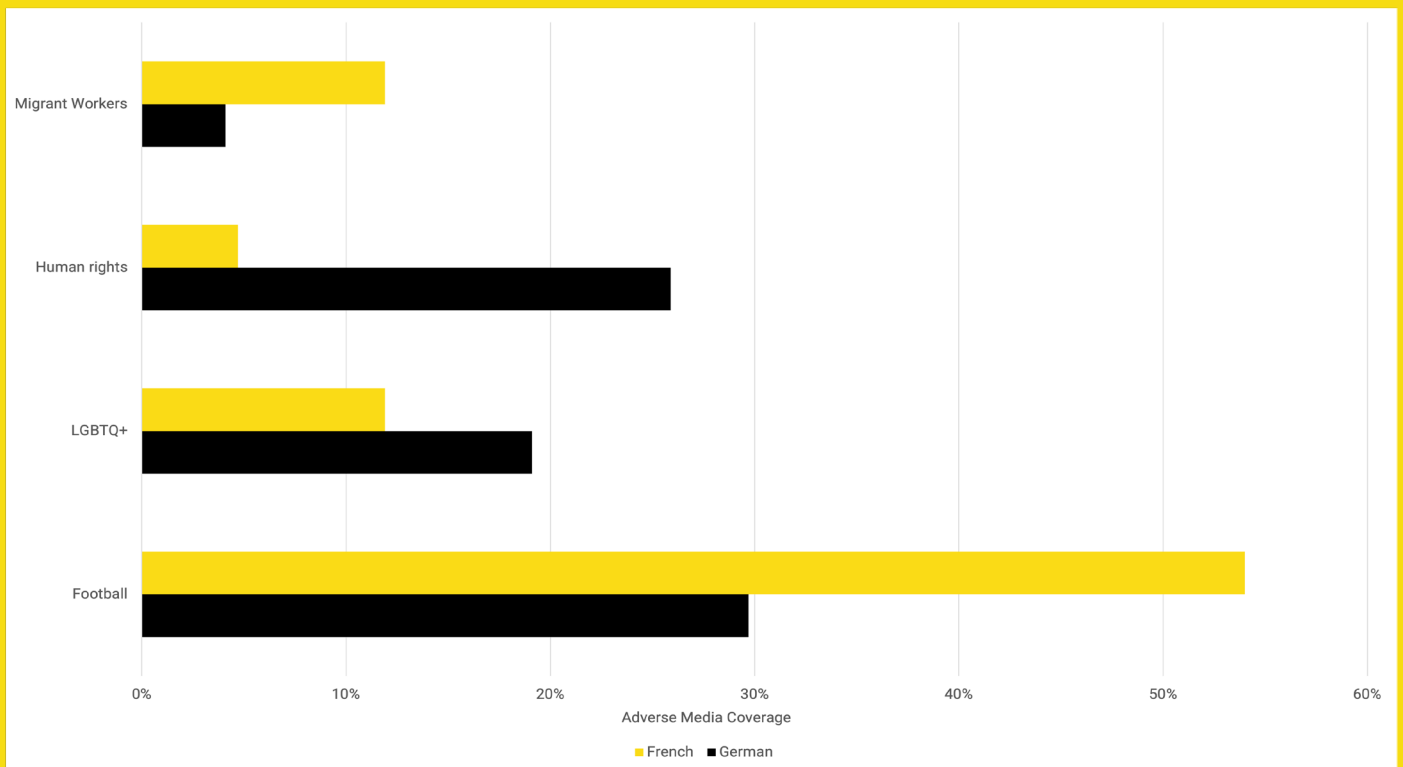


Figure 9: Comparative analysis of select adverse media clusters across German and French (European/Canadian) news coverage.



One Love Campaign Controversy

The discussion of LGBTQ+ rights saw considerable traction throughout the Qatar World Cup, driven in part by campaigns to counter Qatar's anti-LGBTQ+ [domestic policies](#), including the criminalisation of same-sex relationships.

Although LGBTQ+ rights were a consistent topic throughout the World Cup, deflection by FIFA executives and the organization's last-minute [ban](#) on the "OneLove" armband, a symbol of inclusivity worn by some European teams, drew attention back to Qatar's anti-LGBTQ+ policies. This led to more discussion of LGBTQ+ issues in the media, as seen in the coverage spike in English, French, German, and Spanish following the announcement on November 20.

It is worth noting that although negative news coverage of LGBTQ+ rights began to decrease in Week 2 of the World Cup (as shown in Figure 10), there were several spikes later in the tournament following statements and actions by high-profile figures. One example was the France's Minister of Sport wearing a sweater to show [support](#) for the LGBTQ+ community at a match..

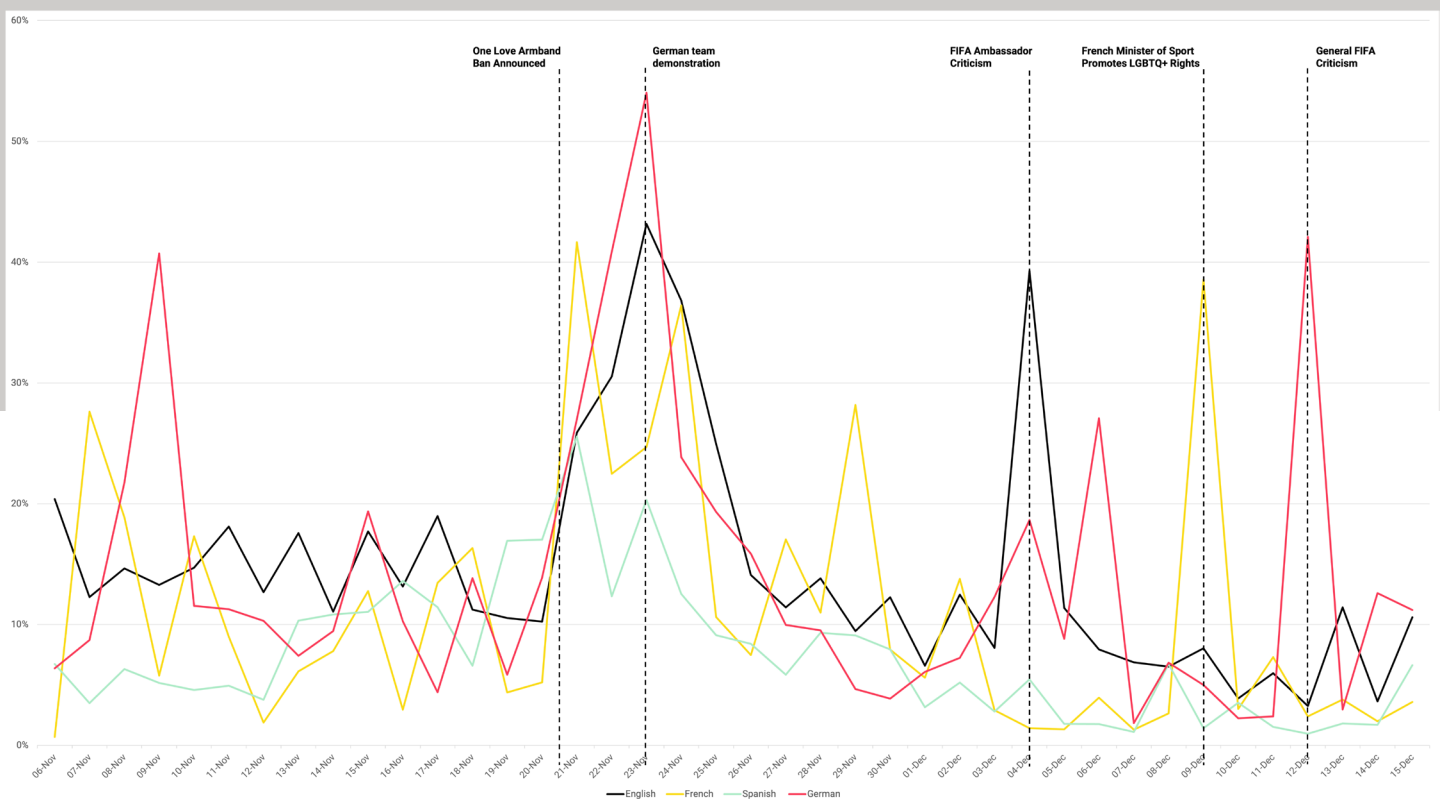


Figure 10: LGBTQ+ cluster coverage across select language sets (English, German, French, Spanish)



Section 3: Sponsors & Reputational Risk Exposure

Alongside the construction of adverse media coverage clusters, the Qatar 2022 Reputational Risk Project tracked news articles about FIFA brands, providing insights into a given sponsor's news footprint and possible reputational risk concerns driven by negative publicity. Figure 11 provides a high-level overview of the 10 FIFA sponsors with the largest digital footprint (articles mentioning the brand) and their adverse media exposure across the language subsets.

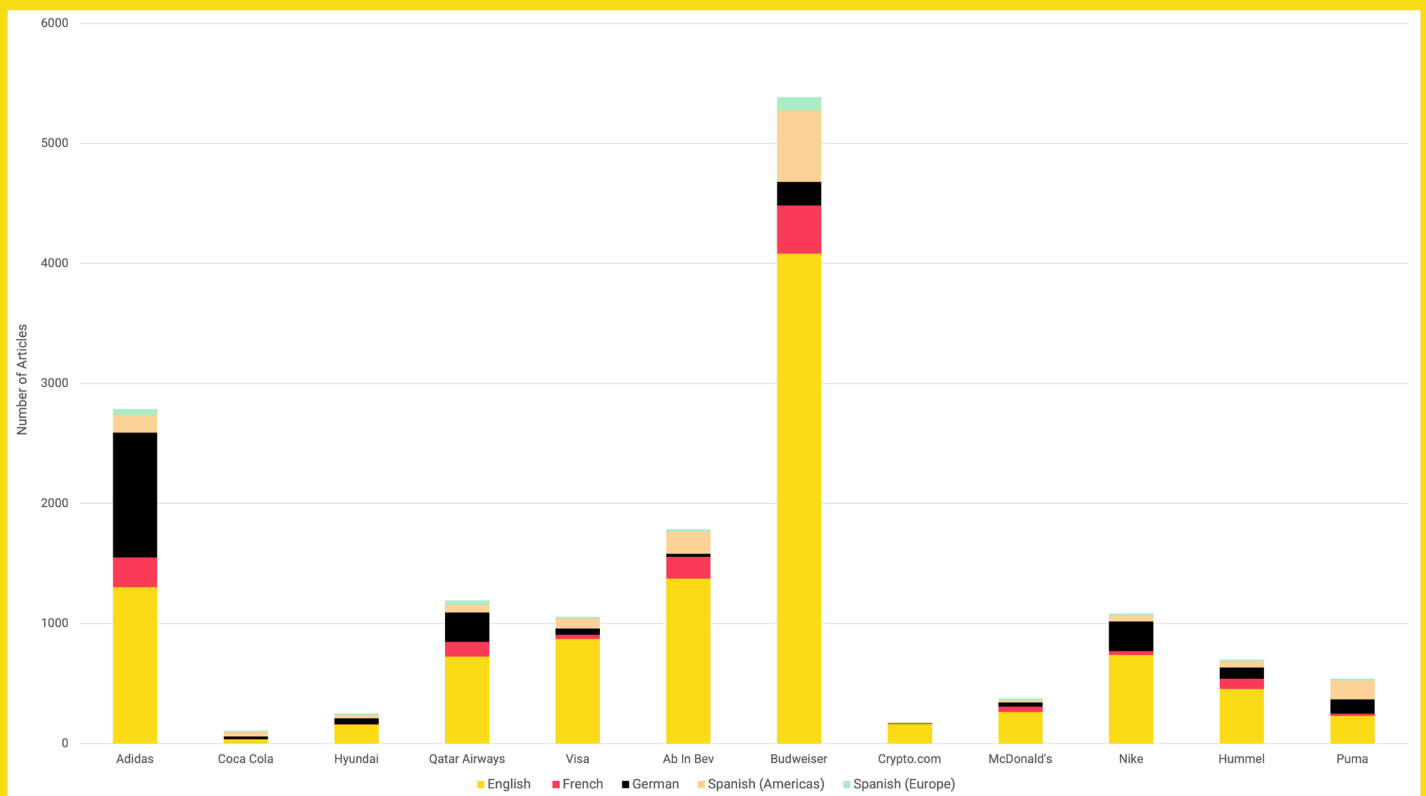


Figure 11: Sponsor exposure across select jurisdictions. (English, French, German, Spanish)

English articles form the bulk of content discussing sponsors, likely helped by the fact that most listed firms are headquartered in North America and Europe, while the Scandinavian datasets were removed due to their small sample size.



Sponsors' negative news exposure varies significantly based on location and cluster topics. For the English language coverage shown in Figure 12, most negative articles involving sponsors discuss migrant workers and Qatar's poor working conditions for foreign laborers involved in Qatar World Cup construction projects.

Meanwhile, FIFA's major sponsors, such as Adidas, Coca-Cola, Qatar Airways, and Visa, have significant mentions in all three primary negative media clusters (human rights, migrant workers, and LGBTQ+ rights). These trends are generally reflected in the Latin/South American dataset shown in Figure 13.

FIFA partners including Adidas, ABInBev/Budweiser, Coca-Cola, McDonald's, and Visa faced criticism before the tournament for supporting FIFA despite Qatar's poor human rights record. In response, they released statements in support of [compensation measures](#), including a FIFA "remedy fund" for migrant workers injured in Qatar World Cup construction projects.

However, this initiative was [not implemented](#) due to resistance from Qatari government officials, leading to further criticism of these brands for not using their financial influence to shape decisions.



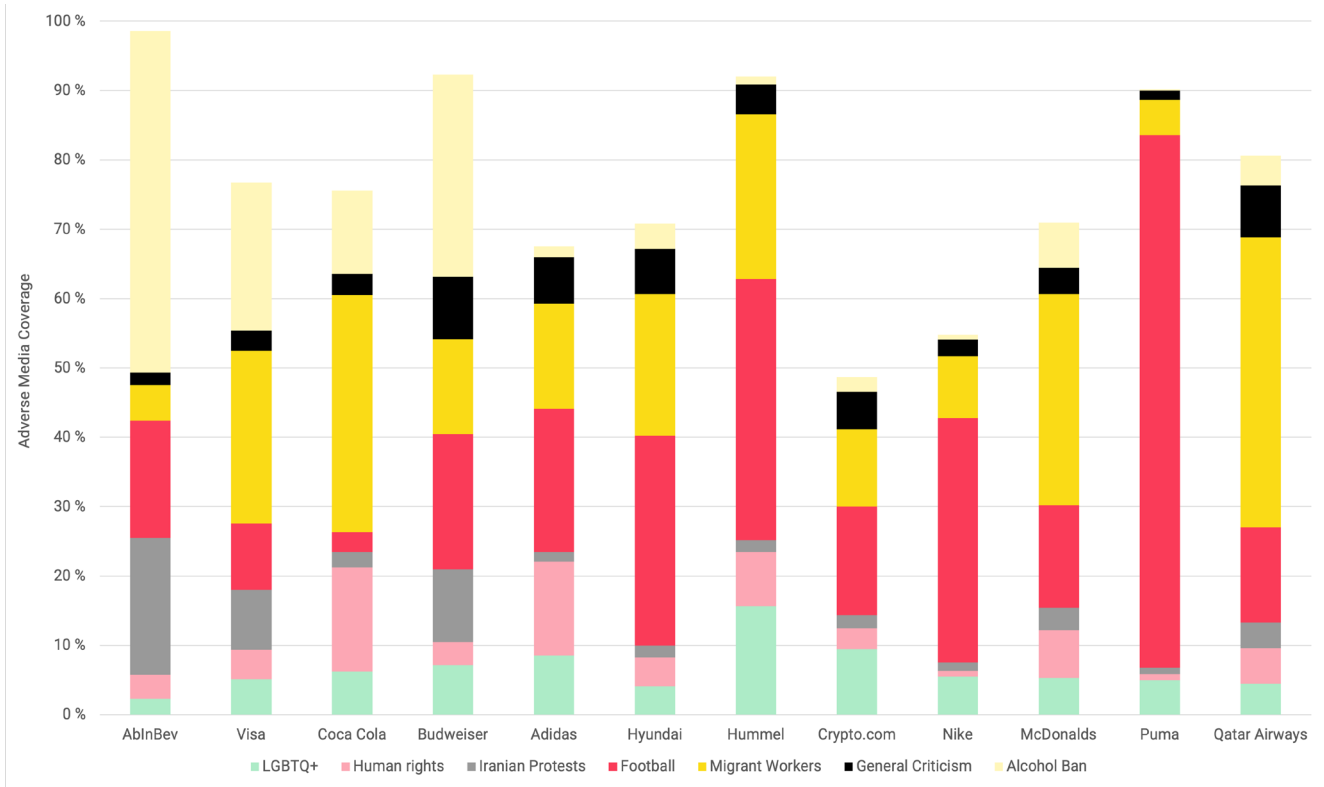


Figure 12: Sponsor adverse media breakdown across negative news clusters in the English dataset. Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% as sub-sections of each language set deemed insignificant were removed during data processing

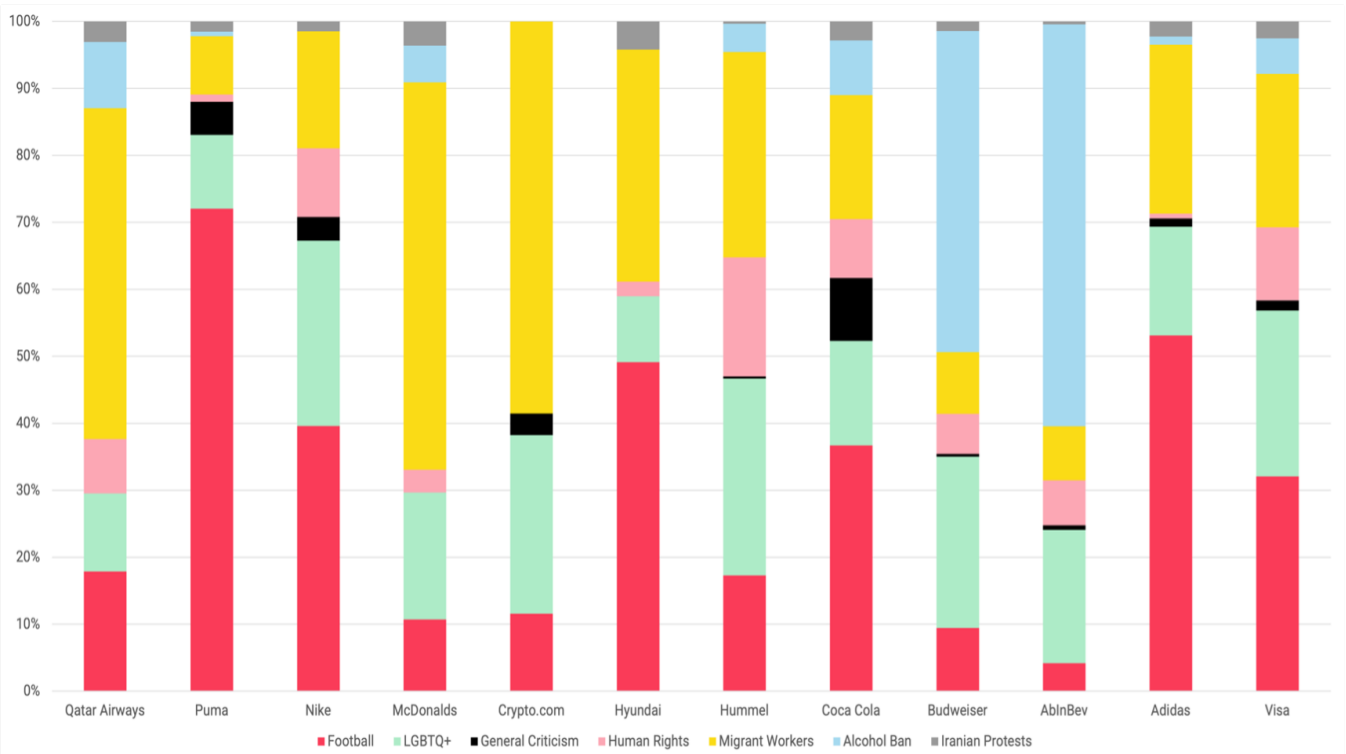


Figure 13: Sponsor adverse media breakdown across negative news clusters across South American and Latin American sources. Note: Percentages do not add up to 100% as sub-sections of each language set deemed insignificant were removed during data processing



Budweiser & the impact of the alcohol ban

In addition to negative media attention on human rights and other systemic issues related to Qatar's political climate, high-profile individual events also contributed to several clusters of negative news throughout the tournament.

The most significant one-time incident was the reversal of the decision to sell alcohol in stadiums during the World Cup after the Qatari government revoked its

approval. This had a significant impact on Budweiser's advertising strategy as the official beer provider for the tournament.

As a result, Budweiser's mention in negative media coverage across English, French, German, and Spanish spiked (figure 14), making it the most mentioned brand in the entire tournament.

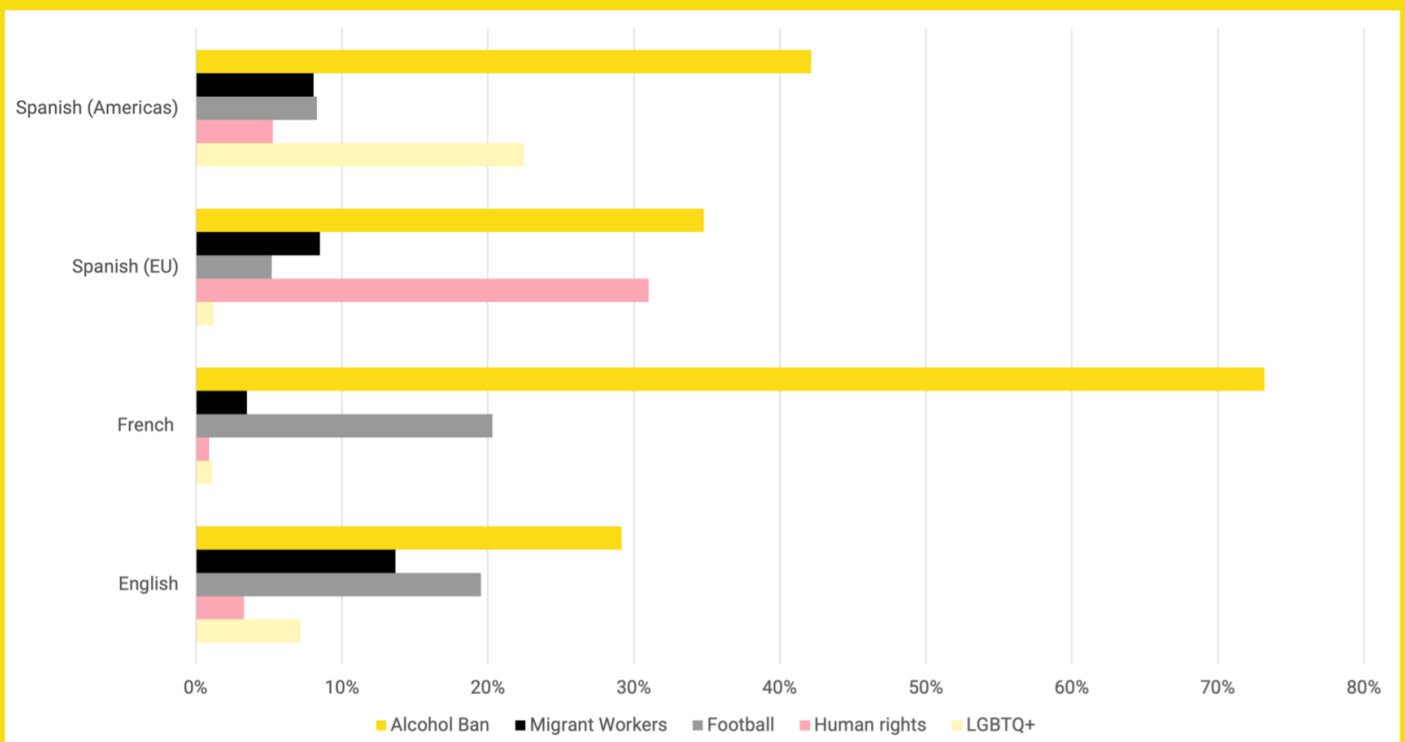


Figure 14: Budweiser coverage across English, Spanish, and French dataset



Kit manufacturers

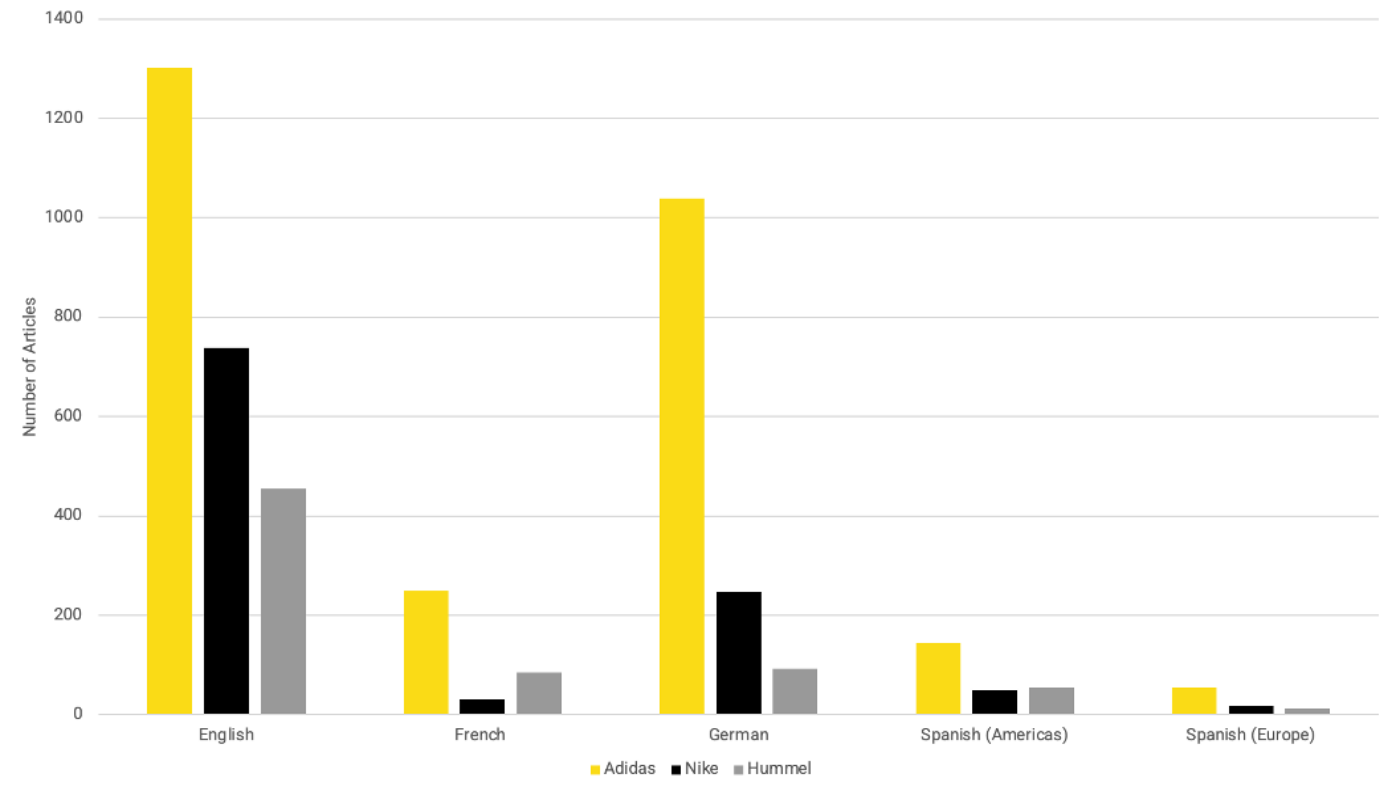


Figure 15: Adverse media coverage across English, French, German and Spanish datasets.

In addition to FIFA partners, football kit manufacturers were the second-largest group of sponsors at the Qatar World Cup, Adidas, Nike, and Puma was providing over 80% of the kits and received the most negative media attention.

Much of the coverage of kit manufacturers went beyond controversies at the World Cup and instead focused on global protests against poor working conditions and low wages in the garment and textile industry.



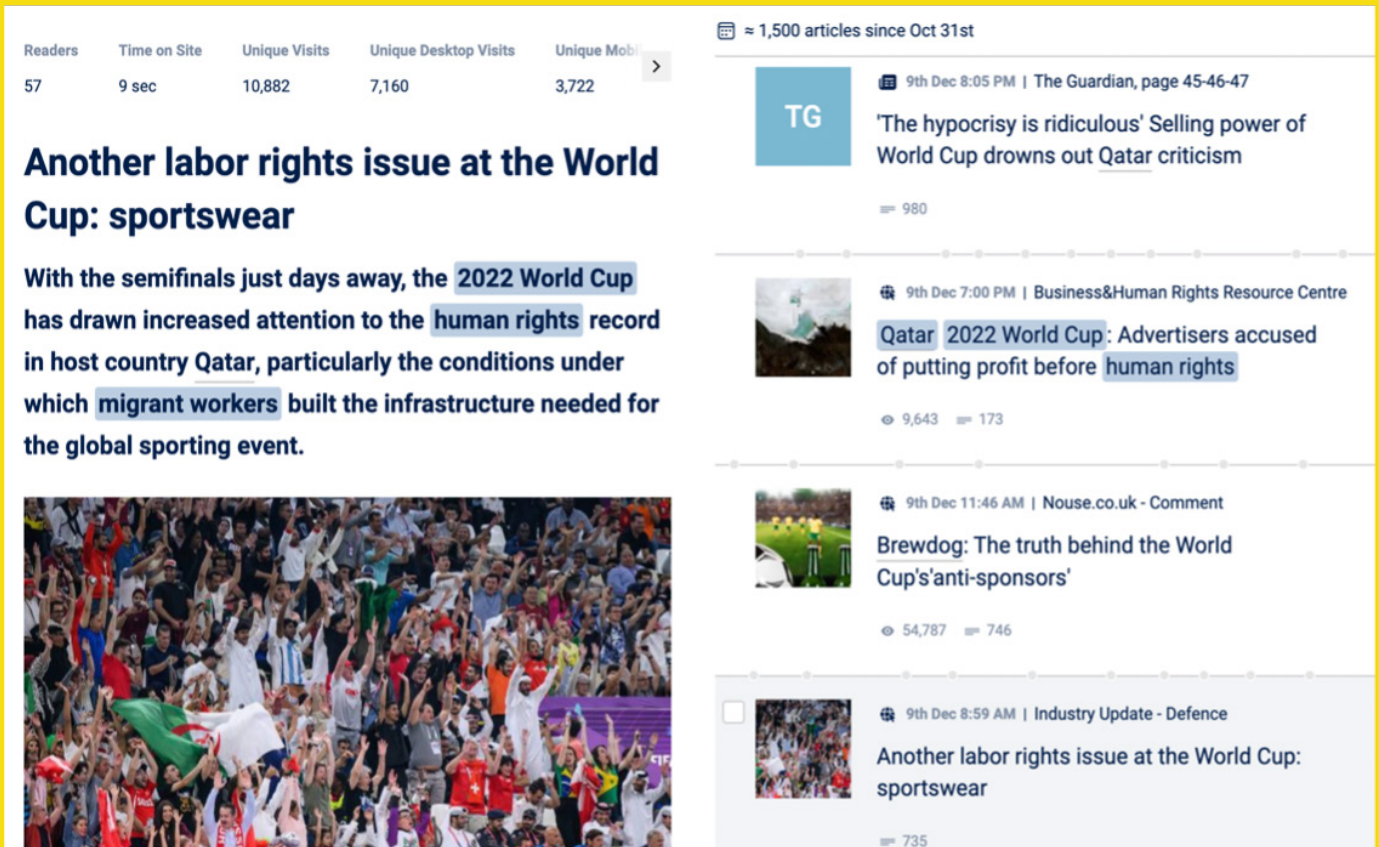


Figure 16: Search results for English adverse media articles mentioning Adidas.

Adidas, mentioned in over 2,700 negative news articles in all languages, received significant attention during the World Cup due to a global campaign against the company over factory conditions in Asia.

The “[Adidas Steals](#)” movement was [active](#) in 38 cities and over a dozen countries. The campaign, part of the wider [#PayYourWorkers initiative](#), raised several complaints against Adidas. This included [mass layoffs](#) at an Indonesian factory that produced football boots, in stark contrast to the company’s lucrative World Cup sales [projections](#).

Nike and Puma also faced similar pressure from industry unions. This highlights the risk of negative news generated by a major sporting event serving as a catalyst for other negative media topics and damaging brand images in front of massive global audiences.



Adidas vs Hummel: Not all negative coverage is damaging

While negative media coverage is a known risk for companies, it is important to understand the context of the negative news and any potential positive aspects of critical content.

To illustrate this variation, figure 17 compares negative news coverage for Adidas and Hummel in English articles. The results show that both brands received significant mention in negative media clusters, including human rights and migrant workers.

However, most of Hummel's mention is about the company's strong criticism of FIFA and Qatar as a host nation. The mention includes their decision to [reduce](#) the visibility of their logo on uniforms for the Danish national team and the creation of a "[blackout kit](#)" to represent the "color of mourning" for the thousands of worker deaths on World Cup infrastructure projects. This coverage is very different from the largely negative tone of articles mentioning Adidas, which were linked to global textile industry protests.

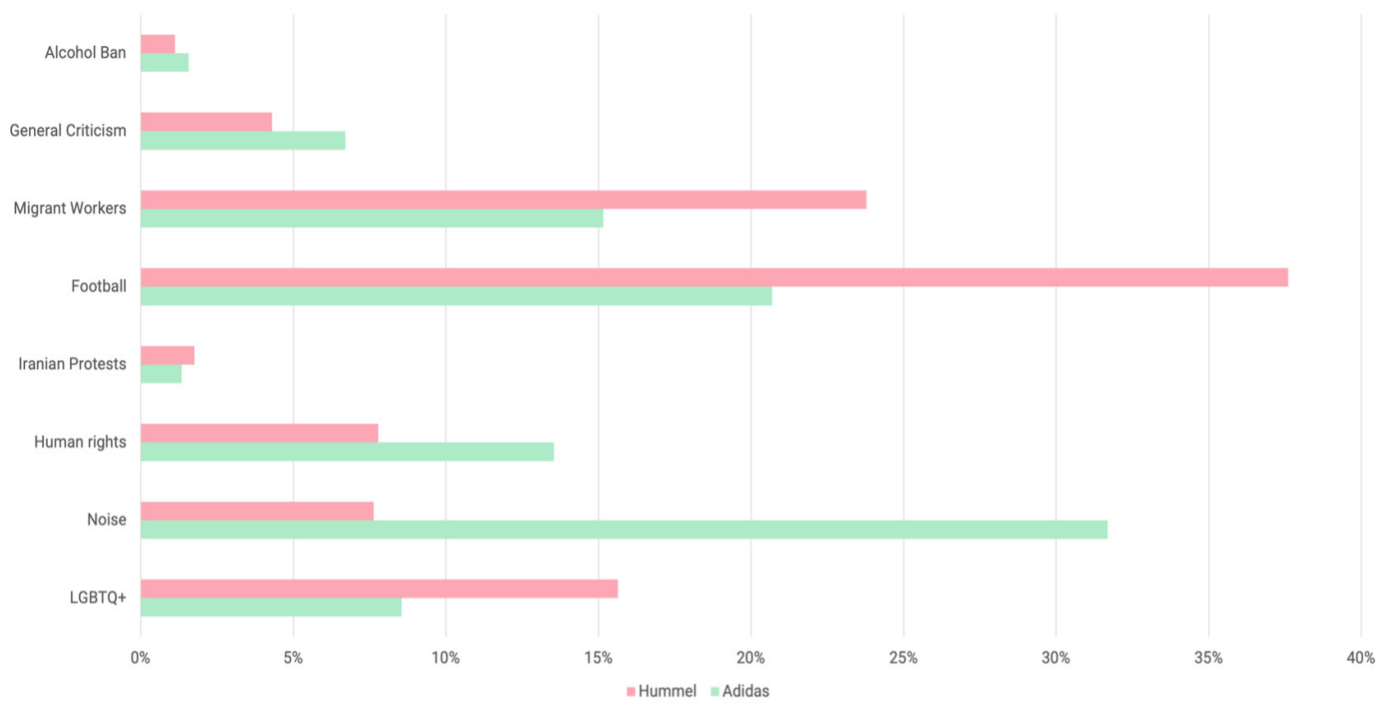


Figure 17: Comparative analysis of Adidas and Hummel's English adverse media coverage



Conclusion

The controversy surrounding FIFA tournaments is unlikely to abate despite coverage shift to football

The results of Opoint's Qatar 2022 Reputational Risk Project highlight the increasing presence of negative media coverage during controversial sporting events. Region and language were important factors in the division and presence of negative media, as well as the extent to which coverage changed during the 2022 World Cup.

In the complete datasets, Scandinavian regions, particularly Norway and Sweden, were the most critical jurisdictions, while Spanish content from the Americas and the French dataset had the smallest percentage of negative news. English and German fell between these two groups. Here we found a significant decrease in negative media during the World Cup group stage followed by an increase in critical publications throughout the second half of the tournament.



In line with trends from previous global sporting events, overall adverse media coverage fell sharply following the first football match, buoyed by record viewing numbers across [several](#) regions despite the tournament controversy, resulting in sizeable [profit projections](#) for FIFA sponsors and advertisers.

However, the 2022 World Cup failed to fully deflect pre-tournament dialogue around Qatar's poor human rights track record and conservative political apparatus, as evident by the resurgence in critical news stories during the knock-out phase.

Although discussion of FIFA brand ambassadors and one-off events, such as Qatar's decision to ban the sale of alcohol in stadiums, triggered significant data peaks, the thematic discussion of LGBTQ+ rights, human rights, and the treatment of migrant workers constitute the largest discussion points.

This persistent negative news coverage deviates from news output during the previous World Cups, where the initial decline often maintained its downward trajectory. As a result, FIFA faces an increasingly difficult task of steering audiences to focus solely on football matches and away from controversial topics.



The future of reputational risk & FIFA sponsorships

For sponsors, Opoint's analysis suggests the shift towards more critical media coverage during the 2018 Russia World Cup and 2022 Qatar World Cup is likely to persist, with FIFA tournaments susceptible to strong negative news levels that elevate the threat of reputational risk for affiliated brands. FIFA's embroilment in controversy across the media landscape may also carry further implications for viewership levels, devaluing the investment threshold for sponsorship deals.

Furthermore, the consistent publication of critical news on politically charged topics, such as LGBTQ+ rights and migrant worker conditions, creates a more critical public profile for businesses, making companies a more viable target for action from activist groups. This was made apparent with Adidas' supply chain disclosures become a focal point for activist networks, contributing to worker strikes across the company's manufacturing hubs.

Elsewhere, sponsors with high exposure in controversial sporting tournaments risk formal reprimands that may further impact brand management. This includes possible governmental inquiries, such as those [held](#) by the US Congressional-Executive Commission on China for major US sponsors of the 2022 Beijing Winter Olympics, where company executives were accused of subsidizing a tournament in a country "actively committing human rights abuses".

More recently, the UK House of Commons adopted a motion [condemning](#) FIFA itself for the organisation's reversal of the "OneLove" armband campaign at the Qatar World Cup.



Sportswashing concerns

Outside of the 2022 Qatar World Cup, global sports face increased scrutiny over their global positioning and country affiliations, with the practice of “sportswashing” – the leveraging of global sporting events by countries to improve their global standing – increasing in frequency.

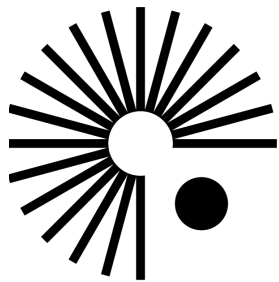
Entering 2023, some of the largest global sporting events, including Formula 1 and the Olympics, have drawn similar criticism to FIFA for awarding hosting rights to controversial states backed by huge financial bids. For football, [Saudi Arabia](#) is said to be positioning itself for a host bid in 2030, adding to the kingdom’s attempts to diversify its image away from dogged human rights abuses by securing favourable sporting coverage.

With FIFA reportedly [seeking](#) additional sponsor investment to secure future World Cup deals for the 2026 tournament cycle, the data in this report should, at the very least, prompt greater due diligence by participating companies before committing to multi-year contracts.



Qatar 2022 Reputational Risk Project

This project is the result of a joint effort between [Opoint](#) and [Infomedia](#) and forms the first part of a two-paper series discussing adverse media coverage at the Qatar World Cup, and its implication for companies and sponsors. The second paper is scheduled for release late January 2023 and will be a more in-depth study comparing negative news trends from previous World Cup tournaments to the current one. Additionally, it will examine the impact of negative press on corporations, including changes in stock prices and the loss of employee trust.



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