

World Cup Controversy

Football, or soccer as it's called in the USA, is the world's most popular sport. Every four years, billions of people from all over the planet tune in to support their nation's team during the World Cup. Hosting the World Cup is an honor, especially for countries as crazy about football as Brazil. However, hosting the tournament comes with a number of expensive obligations, such as building new stadiums, improving transportation infrastructure, and preparing accommodation for the millions of tourists the competition brings. According to most estimates, the Brazilian government spent more than \$11 billion in preparation for the 2014 World Cup.¹ Initially, many Brazilians were elated when Brazil was selected to host the 2014 World Cup; for some, that excitement dwindled as the tournament drew near.

Protests took place in cities all over Brazil, with hundreds of thousands of citizens criticizing the government for the enormous amount of money spent in preparation for the tournament. In a nation in which an estimated 11.4 million people live in poverty in *favelas*—slums—that surround major cities in Brazil, many believe that the taxpayer dollars should have been spent on education and health care rather than World Cup projects. Many Brazilians also felt that the government was catering to wealthy tourists rather than fulfilling its moral duty to provide much-needed social services to its own citizens. Those visiting for the World Cup spent huge amounts of money on vacations while ignoring the fact that millions of Brazilians live in poverty. Protestors carried signs with slogans like “The party in the stadiums is not worth tears in the favelas,” and one woman stated that “we need better education, hospitals and security, not billions spent on the World Cup.”²

Others defend the government's spending, saying that the projects provided jobs for the unemployed and increased confidence for future international investment and tourism in Brazil. Brazilian President Rousseff called the grievances of protestors a “false dilemma,” claiming that the money spent on preparations for the World Cup did not detract from spending on any social services or welfare programs and noted that the infrastructure built would not be taken home by tourists “in their suitcases.”³ Furthermore, it would have been a grave injustice to deny football fans the right to attend the World Cup on account of Brazil's impoverished state. Individuals may do whatever they please with their time and money. It is also argued that the increased tourism is steering many in the favelas away from crime as new jobs are created.⁴ The development the tourists stimulate is actually helping the underprivileged people of Brazil.⁵

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Was it ethical for the Brazilian government to host the World Cup, when some of the public funds it used could potentially have been spent on improving the nation's education and health care systems? If not, does this mean that only nations with top-notch social services should have the privilege of hosting large international events such as the World Cup?
2. Is it morally permissible for the affluent to spend huge sums of money on traveling and attending an event such as the World Cup, when others are living in extreme poverty?
3. What obligations, if any, do the wealthy have to those who are not as fortunate

¹ <http://www.cnbc.com/id/101750395#>

² <http://uk.reuters.com/article/2014/06/23/uk-brazil-worldcup-protests-idUKKBN0EY2NG20140623>;

³ <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-27789775>

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/travel/2013/nov/04/rio-de-janeiro-brazil-favela-tourism>

⁵ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/ricardogomerel/2013/01/31/eduardo-paes-rio-de-janeiros-mayor-reveals-where-the-money-is-heading-to-in-brazil-favelas/>

