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Q&A- 2026 World Cup most consequential tournament in FIFA history; Revenue at \$11 billion: Mark Temnycky, Atlantic Council



The 2026 FIFA World Cup could be the most consequential in the tournament's history due to its unprecedented scale, three-country format and projected \$11 billion in revenue for FIFA, **Mark Temnycky, non-resident fellow at the Atlantic Council's Eurasia Center**, told the Reuters Global Markets Forum on Tuesday, June 23.

"It is the largest World Cup to date: 48 teams participating across three countries and multiple time zones," Temnycky said.

"But the more lasting significance may be cultural. Teams like Cape Verde and Curaçao are making the World Cup, earning results, and winning the hearts and minds of neutral fans. Boston and Glasgow are becoming sister cities."

Below are edited excerpts from the conversation:

Q: As someone who studies both geopolitics and sports, what makes the 2026 World Cup different from previous tournaments?

A: FIFA has expanded the number of participants at this tournament. At the 2022 FIFA World Cup, 32 countries competed. This year, there are 48 national teams. This presents an opportunity for countries in various regions around the world to feature at the World Cup, making it more inclusive. For example, Cape Verde, Curacao, Jordan, and Uzbekistan are all making their World Cup debuts during this tournament.

This World Cup has also allowed for several personal stories for neutral fans, given the expansion of the tournament. For example, Cape Verde earned impressive draws against Spain and Uruguay. Not only has the island nation qualified for its first tournament, but also it earned its first points at the competition. Should Cape Verde defeat Saudi Arabia later this week, then the island nation will advance to the World Cup's Round of 32, making history.

Meanwhile, Scotland played its first two group stage games in Boston. The Scottish fans instantly became a hit for locals in Boston to the point where the city governments in Boston and Glasgow have now discussed becoming sister cities.

These are just two examples of how football is helping unite different countries and cultures around the world for this tournament.

Q: What's one aspect of this World Cup that you think isn't getting enough attention?

A: When FIFA announced that the competition would expand from 32 teams to 48 teams, critics argued that this would lead to greater mismatches in the group stage, believing that heavyweight countries would advance out of their groups with ease. However, that has not proven to be the case. Cape Verde drew against Spain and Uruguay. Curacao drew against Ecuador. DR Congo drew against Portugal. These results suggest that teams that were initially dismissed can carry their own against the heavy weights.

Q: How strong are the second- and third-order effects on host cities?

A: A joint FIFA-World Trade Organization study released in April 2025 estimated that the U.S. would see roughly \$17 billion in GDP growth. But a May 2026 Euronews report cautioned that the gains might not be that high due to high ticket prices and skyrocketing gas prices, which have increased travel costs. As a result, host cities are not

seeing as high levels of tourism as FIFA initially predicted in its report last year. That said, the strongest second-order effect for host cities is tourism and housing. Airbnb projects that host revenue across the 16 host cities will sit around \$2.6 billion, which is still very significant. As for a third-order effect, FIFA is earning revenue from ticket sales and sponsorships, meaning the money earned is not going into the host cities.

Q: Based on past tournaments, who tends to benefit the most - the host cities, local businesses, FIFA, or something else?

A: Historically, FIFA benefits the most from the World Cup. The organization keeps the ticket and sponsorship revenue, while host cities absorb the security and infrastructure costs.

Broadcasters also benefit from the competition. Something new at the 2026 FIFA World Cup is the mandatory hydration break during matches. This allows broadcasters to cut to commercials during this break in play, where it is estimated that broadcasting companies will be earning millions of dollars due to this new advertisement introduction during matches.

Q: So, when the tournament is over, what metrics should we use to judge whether it was a success?

A: Before the competition began, Tourism Economics projected that the U.S. would welcome 1.2 million visitors during the competition. One metric to judge the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be whether tourism in the U.S. exceeded it or fell short. FIFA will make billions of dollars from the competition, so the financial figure at the end of the tournament will not be significant in terms of how to judge the competition.

Q: Has FIFA been too aggressive in its pricing strategy, or is it simply acting rationally by maximizing revenue for what is arguably the world's most in-demand sporting event?

A: At the 2022 FIFA World Cup, the cheapest tickets in Qatar were around \$55. In this competition (2026 FIFA World Cup), the cheapest tickets in the same category seating are hundreds of dollars, while some resellers have sold tickets for over \$1,000.

Furthermore, FIFA has a monopoly on hosting the World Cup. The real cost for FIFA is reputational.

Q: When people look back on past World Cups, certain tournaments stand out for either sporting drama or broader significance. Where does 2026 have the potential to rank among the most consequential World Cups?

A: The 2026 FIFA World Cup may be the most consequential because of its sheer size and scale. It is the largest World Cup to date: 48 teams participating across three countries and multiple time zones. FIFA's revenue is also projected at roughly \$11 billion from this tournament.

But the more lasting significance may be cultural. Teams like Cape Verde and Curaçao are making the World Cup, earning results, and winning the hearts and minds of neutral fans. Boston and Glasgow are becoming sister cities. This has been a fascinating World Cup to follow, not just for football, but for how it's reshaping the conversation around what these tournaments can mean economically and culturally for host countries.

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