

## Journalists' Dilemma: Human Rights Coverage During the Argentinian 1978 World Cup

Amanda Gibson

*Journalism*  
*Elon University*

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements in  
an undergraduate senior capstone course in communications

### Abstract

*A large body of literature shows the manner in which mega-events, such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup, are often covered by journalists without challenge (Roche, 2003; Rivenburgh, 2004). This study expands on that literature by investigating the manner in which journalists approached covering the crossroads of human rights conflicts and sport during the 1978 World Cup in Argentina. During the time of the World Cup, Argentina was run by a military regime in a country torn apart by violence. This study sought to find if journalists prioritized sports or human rights in their coverage over three time periods: two months before, the month during, and two months after the tournament. Using both a quantitative and qualitative comparative content analysis, the study examined news coverage in two newspapers, one from the United States and the other from France. The study found that, ultimately, French coverage of the Cup prioritized the political unrest within Argentina while American coverage focused primarily on the competition itself. Frames applied by journalists within the coverage included international reactions, subversion, and regime stability.*

### I. Introduction

The World Cup football championship brought a unique set of conditions to Argentina, the host country, as the tournament began in 1978 (Archetti, 2006). Even as the competition among 16 national teams began in the stadiums of Buenos Aires and other cities, with local fans bursting with national pride, the nation's leaders were involved in a cover-up they tried to hide from the world (Robben, 2005). The roars of the fans at Estadio Monumental stadium, for instance, could be heard at the torture camp just a short distance away where Argentine military held, tortured, and killed political prisoners known as the *desaparecidos*, the disappeared (Di Paolantonio, 1997). It was in these conditions that journalists found themselves on the fringe of a human rights issue and were presented with choices on how to cover the mega-event at hand – the highly followed international football tournament – and whether to dive deeper into the political issues around them. Sportswriters were forced to face the question of what their role entailed during the 1978 World Cup: Was their job to chronicle the wins and the losses and the drama of an eventual championship? Or was it to explore the evidence on the streets that suggested something much more sinister and dangerous at play? This study focuses on their dilemma.

---

**Keywords:** journalism, framing theory, sports, human rights  
Email: agibson16@elon.edu

---

## II. Literature Review

Mega-events are events such as the World Cup, the Olympic Games, and other sporting events that are meant to be global celebrations, promoting peace, prosperity, sportsmanship, and global status. For host countries, such mega-events yield the chance to show off successes and to impress other nations (Rivenburgh, 2004). In Argentina in 1978, government leaders understood the importance of presenting a façade of stability and peace to international journalists who arrived from countries around the world to cover the matches. Those same government leaders, however, were also making efforts to hide the human rights conflicts in which citizens were tortured because of their college educations, certain occupations, or political opinions differing from – and perhaps critical of – the existing government. This yielded a tale of two stories, where journalists were left to decide which one to tell: the story of human rights issues or the story of matches played between two goals. While some journalists and citizens remained silent in their reporting and actions, others used the mega-event as a site of contestation, to raise questions of sociological realities, political happenings, and human-rights violations (Archetti, 2005; Curran & Liebes, 1998; Smith, 2002). Journalists leveraged the power of the press in various ways, some to overlook or silently aid in the cover-up of these violations, others to issue calls of action to reform their own government's practices.

*Regime, junta, and government* are all used interchangeably in reference to the Argentinian dictatorship in power in 1978 as a result of a military coup two years earlier. This regime was responsible for not only hosting the 1978 World Cup, but also the disappearances and repression of its citizens. *Los desaparecidos* is a term referring to 30,000 people, often labeled by the government as subversives, who disappeared in a span of eight years mostly under the junta's rule. These Argentinians disappeared and were abducted, tortured, or killed in clandestine detention camps across the country (Robben, 2005). They were known as *Los Desaparecidos* because "the abducted were never publicly acknowledged as detainees once they disappeared into the hundreds of secret detention centers known as 'pits' (pozos) and 'black holes' (chupaderos)" (Robben, 2005, p. 129). While some of those who disappeared were eventually released back into society and lived in a state of exile, most were killed and their bodies dumped into Río De la Plata or the Atlantic Ocean during what were commonly known as "death flights" (Rein & Davidi, 2009). This was the junta's most common way of silencing the enemy – arresting individuals with few legitimate charges, if any, and refusing to tell family members where they were being kept. Most were never heard from again. Human rights activist groups, such as Abuelas de la Plaza (Grandmothers of the Plaza), formed to protest these kidnappings and demand knowledge of their family members' detention or death.

This paper uses the terms *mega-event* and *media-event* interchangeably, as their meanings are similar and highly relevant to this study. Throughout history, events like that of the World Cup and the Olympic Games draw international attention. Roche (2004) uses the term "mega-event" to describe the patterns of both the "Olympic movement and the amateur and professional sports movements were generally connected with the development of various forms of the press and journalism" (p. 165). The very definition of a mega-event implies that it will have "significant consequences for the host city, region or nation in which they occur, and second, that they will attract considerable media coverage" (Horne, 2007, p. 81). Roche (2003) classified this media coverage and analysis into three categories. The primary level of coverage is basic event coverage – the who, what, when and where of the event where coverage focuses primarily on the action of the event itself. The secondary zone of coverage also provides context to the event. This secondary mega-event coverage focuses on the impacts of the event politically, economically, and underlying factors of the event. The third level of coverage, which Roche calls the "event horizon" (p. 167), focuses on understanding of the past and future implications of said event.

These definitions of mega-events reveal the power these events afford a host country in managing its international image. Political leaders, aware of the increased media coverage their country will reap, can use such an event as an opportunity to manipulate their world image. Hiller (1998) expands on Roche's concepts to further explore the impacts on host cities of mega-events. His analysis uncovers the tourism impacts of mega-events and the national branding opportunities for host cities and nations. During these mega-events, the news media play the roles of historians, giving special attention and coverage to events that might not otherwise be given (Hiller 1998; Roche, 2003). In this sense, the media help play a role in defining the society, in which it can both "over-react to as well as exaggerate (amplify) social concerns or social issues and also, at times under-react and downplay (deny) others" (Horne, 2017, p. 20). Because mega-events are pre-planned, event coverage is often skewed to be positive. In some cases though, the journalists dispatched to cover an event find themselves coincidentally uncovering unfavorable truths from human rights violations to economic disasters (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998) – a consideration for this research.

---

## ***Framing Theory***

Scholars have studied the way in which media organizations tell their stories, and how their story frames might affect audiences' perceptions of issues and events. The premise of framing theory, as presented by Entman (1991), Goffman (1974), and Scheufele (1999), among others, is that media narratives, or stories, will necessarily focus on certain issues and present them to an audience offering perspectives the storytellers choose. The "frames" they select will privilege certain assumptions, facts, and observations while downplaying or omitting others. The chosen "frame" subsequently affects the manner in which the audience processes the information and places importance on the issue. Scholars have defined media frames as "a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events" (Gamson & Modigliani, 1987, p.143). The frame identifies what the controversy is and the main point of the issue at hand. Mass media have a "strong impact by constructing social reality" through the framing of stories (Scheufele, 1999, p. 105). The idea that journalists create these frames to help add context and levels of understanding allows the public to interpret and discuss public events.

These frames are not necessarily presented in malicious ways, but nonetheless they are present. In fact, the frames are largely invisible both to the public and the journalists applying the frames (Gitlin, 1980). Despite that, the "unspoken and unacknowledged" frames serve to "organize the world both for journalists who report it and in some important degree for us who rely on their reports." (Gitlin, 1980, p. 7). Entman (1993), meanwhile, asserts that frames create a social hierarchy of issues: "To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p. 52). Because of the manner in which frames can assign importance to some issues more than others in the eyes of the audience, the notion of framing raises questions about the inherent capacity of journalists to present disinterested reports.

Though frames can sometimes be problematic, they are a necessary part of media communication in providing context and the creation of meaning behind stories. While journalism strives to be balanced and objective, scholars understand and explain the reality that fairness is an ideal more than a reality. Inevitably, journalists produce reports, even about mega-events, that differ in perspective and in weighing the relevance of circumstances and events. Framing theory brings a sophistication to the study of news coverage. It accepts that difference is predictable because journalists will frame the same sets of activities according to their own needs and values. Relying on this theory, this study identifies and analyzes the frames found in the coverage of the 1978 World Cup, with attention to how these frames assigned importance to human-rights issues.

## ***Mega-Event Coverage***

Hosting the games comes with a number of potential benefits. Rivenburgh (2004) explains that one goal of any host country is to create positive media coverage and promote a positive image of the country worldwide. However, changing a country's image through a mega-event like that of the World Cup is difficult, as the host country is dependent upon independent international media. The media has shown distinct patterns when reporting these events (Alexander & Jacobs, 1998; Szymanski, 2011). Gambarato and Teixeira (2017) argue that pre-planned events are often covered in a positive manner with more of a public relations slant, rather than as a neutral pursuit of the truth (Gambarato & Teixeira, 2017). Often, the months leading up to the mega-event involve reporting about "security, the costs surrounding the Games, commercialism, drugs, and – significant to the host's global image-making goals – a constant evaluation of hosting preparation" (Rivenburgh, 2004, p. 12). Early coverage of mega-events also includes that of local protests and efforts of the government to "clean up" lower-income areas as a way to put their "best foot forward" for the games.

However, once the games actually begin, media coverage focuses on the sporting spectacle itself, often leaving cultural norms and impacts of the games behind. Rivenburgh (2004) points out this is often because of "the fact that media personnel covering the [Olympic] Games are most often sports journalists who may be uncomfortable with providing cultural or political commentary" (p. 12). Similarly, Curran and Liebes (1998) suggest that these events are "generally reported uncritically by broadcasters" because sports journalists are so passionate about the competition itself, rather than the context and political impacts surrounding the mega-event.

---

## **Journalistic Norms**

Journalism norms and standards across the globe differ, but as Alexander and Jacobs (1998) argue, media autonomy is a key aspect of democratic civil society. The mass media play a crucial role in constructing images of other societies, and contribute to people's understanding – or misunderstanding – of other countries (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986). Each country's journalists had their own perceived notions of the Argentine coup based on foreign policy of their home country before arriving in Argentina to cover the tournament. Bennett (2007) pointed out the failures of journalists to fulfill their "watchdog" role to hold government leaders and systems accountable. Rather, he finds that news organizations, in their coverage of international issues, often reflect the narratives and positions of their national government interests (Bennett, 2007). Other studies have shown that coverage of other countries can vary throughout a period of years, ranging from favorable to unfavorable, depending upon the conditions within a journalist's country (Gitlin, 1980; Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993). The coverage can depend upon economic relationships with the other and contexts related to national interest (Gitlin, 1980; Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993). When national interests are highly aligned with the country being covered, that coverage more likely will be positive. Yet when national interests are not at issue, the volume of the coverage will likely decrease, and news reports are more likely to carry a negative tone (Saleem, 2007; Ovsiovitch, 1993).

This study analyzes coverage from the United States and France. These countries and their subsequent publications were chosen because of their self-proclaimed standards of strong journalism (Benson, 2004; Strychacz, 1994), or their national interests in the host country Argentina. In France, citizens promoted a boycott of the Cup as a result of the human rights violations taking place, and welcomed many Argentine exiles (Franco & Pérez, 2007). While the U.S. did not have a team competing in the tournament, the American public carefully followed the World Cup results.

## **Purpose and Research Questions**

Politics inherently seep into sport. This study of 1978 Argentina analyzes coverage to evaluate the extent to which journalists looked beyond the dramatic on-field events of the soccer matches to tell the story of the disappeared and their families who clamored for news of their missing loved ones. At issue, then, is the ways that reporters assigned to the World Cup chose to focus on aspects the "proceso de reorganización," which refers to the regime's efforts to silence and rid the country of its critics.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions in regard to newspaper coverage of the 1978 World Cup:

RQ1: Does the coverage prioritize human rights or sport?

RQ2: What does the wording and location of the reference to the regime reveal about the importance of the issue to the journalist or publication?

RQ3: What types of media frames appear before, during and after the games in *The New York Times* and *Le Monde*?

RQ4: How does coverage from *The New York Times* differ from that of *Le Monde*?

## **III. Methods**

This study applied a content analysis as its primary research method. The content for the analysis came from newspaper articles published in the United States and France during three periods: a month before the tournament, during the World Cup, and a month following the championship.

### **Quantitative Content Analysis**

To delve deeper into *what* the journalists reported, this study used a quantitative approach. Quantitative analysis is the "the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics" that can be applied to "written text, transcribed speech, verbal interactions, visual images, characterizations, nonverbal behaviors, sound events, or any other message type" (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1, 24). This method

---

has been demonstrated as reliable for other researchers to replicate results for future studies (Smith, 2002). The researcher read, analyzed, and systematically coded each article in search of keywords and phrases that signal certain frames and patterns. To answer RQ1 and RQ2, the quantitative method examined the number of articles overall in which the dictatorship was the primary focus of the article versus articles in which references to the dictatorship were embedded in coverage of the soccer matches. The analysis coded for the type of source and keywords to understand how journalists digested the events around them and reported on it, and then compared the differences in coverage between the countries. Keywords included *disappeared*, *Montoneros*, *dictatorship*, *military regime*, *Perón*, *violence*, *terrorism* among others. Additionally, the study also systematically identified the date of articles published compared to the timeline of the matches to see whether or how events had impacts on newspaper coverage from that country.

### **Qualitative Analysis**

This study then used a qualitative analysis as outlined by scholars like Lincoln & Guba (2014) and Boeije (2002) to address RQ3. The qualitative analysis sought to summarize the purpose of each article to understand the themes and patterns emerging from the coverage. This method implies that “individual constructions can be elicited and refined only through interaction *between and among* investigator and respondents [data],” (Lincoln & Guba, 2014, p. 111), resulting in an informed and sophisticated discovery. Additionally, this study relies on thematic content analysis theory, which as explained by Joffe and Yardley (2012) is similar to a content analysis but pays greater attention to the qualitative details of content, and requires a more in-depth analysis. To do this, two rounds of coding were conducted that allowed the researcher to make inductions based on the manifest content. The analysis identified the topics journalists investigated and how they framed them. RQ4 was answered in the discussion section, through a comparison of both quantitative and qualitative findings.

### **Sample**

This research focused on the comparison of newspaper coverage from the United States and France. Although the United States did not have a team participating in the competition, its history of high standards of journalism as a model for other countries to follow makes coverage from the country relevant to the study, as it influenced other journalists around the globe (Stavitsky & Dvorkin, 2008). *The New York Times* was analyzed from the United States. French coverage comes from *Le Monde*, which is similar in approach to *The New York Times* (Benson, 2004). These publications were selected for the sample because they were among those with the most coverage about the competition that made reference to the dictatorship and human rights violations. The articles from the *Times* were read in English. The French paper, *Le Monde*, was translated using Google’s translation service from French to English prior to coding.

The sampling strategy involved selecting articles referring to the World Cup in any manner within three different date ranges: 1) May 1978; 2) the 25 days of the tournament (June 1 to June 25, 1978); 3) and the month after the matches (June 26 through the end of July). This study found 227 articles that fit the search criteria.

### **Procedure**

In both the qualitative and quantitative analysis, one unit of analysis was equivalent to one newspaper article. Several items in each article were coded.

The qualitative analysis used coding to measure several elements in terms of framing. Specifically, the articles were coded to see if political activity related to the regime was central to the article and the main message of the story. Coding was also used to understand frames used to describe the government and its resistance. These frames helped yield insight into the opinion of journalists towards the idea of a repressive government or one that is maintaining stability, and the resistance as terrorists or catalysts for change. The researcher also looked for narratives relating the political conflict to outside and international sources.

Headlines and bylines were also used to understand the frame presented by the reporter. The researcher used two rounds of qualitative coding. The first, open coding, sought to identify and record any topic found in the coverage relating to the dictatorship. In a second round of axial coding, the researcher sought to make connections and collapse some categories into more general groupings, that as a whole, reduced themes into more relevant categories and exhausted the range of framing activities (Glaser &

---

Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

For the quantitative portion of the study, the researcher first coded for the type of story. There were three types of stories: tournament story, political story, and match/game story. Then, the dictatorship was coded to see whether it was mentioned, and if so, where it was located: in the lead, the top five paragraphs, the middle, or the end of the article. The number and type of words relating to topics was then coded, with 15 words being used to reference the junta and its activities. These words included *disappeared, kidnapping, abduction, government sponsored and military rule, terrorism, violence, torture, execute or assassinate, Montoneros, guerillas, leftist, human rights violations, image, Perón*. There was also another category for words that appeared often and that incorporated any areas that seemed relevant to coverage of the World Cup in reference to the political conflict occurring during the regime. Some words that appeared within the “other” category were “subversive,” “Jewish,” and “communism.” Additionally, the number of sources and type of source was coded. Sources ranged from Las Abuelas/Madres de la Plaza, to members of the military junta, government, citizens, fans or FIFA organizing committee. Finally, the date of each article was coded in relation to match days.

## IV. Findings

This study asked whether coverage from *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* prioritized human rights or sports. To answer RQ1, the researcher found that *Le Monde*'s coverage heavily focused on human rights issues and political happenings within Argentina surrounding the events of the World Cup. Meanwhile, the majority of coverage from *The New York Times* focused its coverage on the outcome of games, and surrounding implications of the Cup on the country.

### Framing the World Cup

This study found five frames within coverage from *Le Monde* and *The New York Times*. Frames ranged from the manner in which the sport was described to how the journalists approached covering the tournament in the context of the regime. The frames are detailed below.

#### *Frame 1: International Reactions to the Regime*

The first frame that was found within the coverage revolves around international reactions to the regime. This frame was presented within the news stories when journalists framed the World Cup or the regime in comparison to foreign sources. This type of frame was most commonly found in coverage from *Le Monde*. Journalists from the French paper put the Cup in context of human rights problems in the country. Additionally, they outlined the Cup in terms of foreign government relations with Argentina. An example from *Le Monde* reported on the U.S. ambassador's relationship with Argentina. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* used this frame when analyzing President Jimmy Carter, seen as a champion of human rights, to suggest he was not acting proactively to the situation in Latin America.

#### *Frame 2: Regime Stability*

This frame appeared when journalists presented the regime in a positive light, blaming past presidencies and left-wing guerillas for the violence and instability in Argentina. By using this frame, the journalists presented President Videla and his military regime as a solution to the violent problem in Argentina, and a method for providing stability and peace within the country. This frame commonly appeared in the coverage leading up to the games, rather than during the games themselves. Journalists from *The New York Times* presented information in this frame far more frequently than those of *Le Monde*.

This frame mostly appeared in the days leading up to the start of the Cup. Journalists from *Le Monde* acknowledged the negative perceptions of the regime, but instead focused on the positives and progress the regime has made to improve conditions in the country in an article published on June 2, 1978:

It is also not a city under siege, even if the extraordinary security measures taken on the occasion of the Global may give the opposite image, and even if serious incidents are far from being excluded in the days to come. It is no longer a city where armed bands carry out in broad daylight, with all impunity, kidnappings of citizens; nor the city where corpses are found every day in the streets, in the surrounding woods or on the neighboring beaches... The number of habeas corpus applications for missing persons a good indicator - has declined dramatically in recent months.

The frame, though, did continue throughout the Cup, focusing on Argentine police efforts to arrest militants, and seeks to provide evidence to the guilt of the “militants” rather than the regime. This is seen in another *Le Monde* article published June 20, 1978:

In their pockets, police found compromising documents, including plans to sabotage of World Cup stadiums. Among the three men is Mr. Carlos Pablo Bergeldors, an engineer who had participated in the construction work of some stadiums. The party Argentinian communist denounces there a plot.

*The New York Times* applied this frame in a way discussing the regime’s ability to stage the World Cup successfully to bring Argentine citizens together:

The patriotic zeal that seems to have gripped all Argentines is transported from the stadiums to the streets every time Argentina wins a match. There is a never-ending honking of horns and beating of drums as fans dance and parade into the early hours of the morning, wrapped up in huge white and sky-blue Argentine flags.

### *Frame 3: Instability from Violence and Terrorism*

This frame highlighted the actions of what the regime called subversives. The regime blamed violence in Argentina on former President Juan Perón and his followers, now called Montoneros. Journalists referred to these subversives as “left-wing” guerillas causing violence and kidnappings in the street. *The New York Times* often used this frame to help show the regime in a better light. *Le Monde* occasionally used this frame to show the bigger picture of instability within the country, while recognizing that violence and kidnappings were occurring by both the left-wing subversives and the regime itself. In one *New York Times* article, journalist Juan de Onis wrote in favor and practically praised the regime lead by President Jorge Videla. Instead, he criticized past leaders for the violence that exists in the country:

Government forces have crippled the left-wing guerrillas whose assassinations, kidnappings and assaults on police and army garrisons helped bring down the elected Peronist government in 1976. Moderate officers, including President Jorge Rafael Videla, whose term was extended last week until 1981, now talk less about “annihilation” and more about “rehabilitation” and “dialogue” so as to rally civilian support for what seems to be a long period of military rule.

Other journalists from *The New York Times* used this frame to show violence created by subversives, or Montoneros, as seen in the article published on May 10, 1978:

They said they had been warned by an anonymous call that there was a bomb in the building. A bomb squad located the device in a car parked in the garage underneath the complex, and it exploded while being carried to an armored vehicle.

*Le Monde* was less likely to use this frame, unless providing it in a larger context and acknowledging regime’s contribution to violence as well. An example of this is shown in an article published on June 5, 1978 in which the journalist addresses the violence that subversives have been part of in the past but frames it as a method of resistance to the regime. Additionally, the frame applied here shows the subversives as providing instability, but working towards trying to create peace for the sake of the Cup:

---

The declared objective is to “maintain the armed resistance,” given the refusal of the authorities soldiers from Buenos Aires to respond to the “proposal for a temporary truce” which had been made to them. Limits are, however, provided for “military resistance operations” that may be to undertake the sympathizers of the movement: “It is strictly prohibited, specifies the declaration, to carry out any type of action whatsoever within 600 meters of the stadiums; are prohibited operations that may harm the physical integrity of Argentinian or foreign journalists, or that of players or representatives of football teams.

#### *Frame 4: Silencing the Opposition*

This frame presented information regarding the regime’s methods for silencing the subversives, or rather the violence against those who spoke out against the regime. These tactics included torture, kidnapping, and other forms of violence to act against the “left-wing” guerillas. In this frame, journalists acknowledged the regime at fault, rather than the subversives as the instigator of the problem. This frame rarely appeared in coverage from the United States. On the other hand, the French paper, *Le Monde*, went as far as to interview sources who had been tortured and silenced at the hands of the regime. This frame appeared heavily throughout all time periods the study analyzed and increased during the actual 25 days of the tournament. One article, published on June 7, includes the perspective of a doctor treating tortured patients of the horrors experienced at the hands of the regime:

Anyway, I believe that torture, especially in the particularly savage and murderous forms practiced in Argentina, is the worst threat to man and that, as such, no doctor has the right to remain neutral. As doctors, we probably don’t get involved in political imprisonment or apartheid. But institutionalized torture, the assassination of honest citizens, political refugees, entire families, are horrors which should indignantly offend one doctor more than many others.

Another article goes quotes a source who had been held captive and tortured. The man, a self-proclaimed Peronist and Christian, details a method of torture called the “submarine,” in which a plastic bag is placed over an individual’s head to prevent them from breathing:

This method was applied (and is still applied) to most of the people who are there... and are still there. I suffered from the most ruthless and savage methods. So did the two French nuns. I had the opportunity to speak to Sister Alice Domont when she was transferred to the third floor of the officer’s room where I was detained myself.

#### *Frame 5: Aspects of the Game*

The fifth frame featured coverage that emphasized the action of the game through play-by-plays and interviews with coaches, or that focused on spectators who were watching matches of the World Cup. Though the United States did not have a team competing in the Cup, coverage from *The New York Times* focused heavily on the outcome of the games and the action itself. Similarly, *Le Monde* applied this frame to cover the outcomes of games and focused on the activity through the lens of players, coaches or spectators. In an article published on June 19, journalist Catherine Humblot provided the perspective of fans watching in a sports café:

The boss, who isn’t really a boss (but it serves to drink while yelling clichés on sport, football and television) turns into referee of the match taking place on TV. Two screens placed on benches broadcast the same games, but the soundtracks are different. At the same time, we hear the swell of the crowd when teams arrive and start playing, are added, overlapped, other voices, voiceovers consumers who give their opinion on football, on the referee, on the price of Platini..., coffee reflections commensurate with the daily violence that mingle with the confidences in voice of the arbitrator, to those, direct, of the boss-arbitrator, false and real consumers in the bistro.

#### *Frame 6: Argentina’s Image*

The final frame dealt with concern for Argentina’s image. This frame differs from international reactions to the regime, as this frame addresses directly concern for the government’s image, rather than

---



international interactions with the government. *Le Monde* applied this frame most heavily and consistently throughout the three time periods this study analyzed, as seen below:

The general admitted that Argentina's international image is a cause for concern for the government. The existence of campaigns in Western Europe and North America "creates quite difficult situations," he said. The government is committed to erasing the causes that could produce this unfavorable image and develop, on the other hand, the psychological action adequate to put an end to this campaign, which really affects Argentina, concluded the General Viola (L79).

*The New York Times* addressed the use of the World Cup for image purposes as well. Juan de Onis addressed this in an opinion piece describing what the hope for a positive image is supposed to hide:

The World Cup represents the highest level of competition in what is perhaps the world's most popular sport. It should not be transformed into a public-relations tool designed to diminish public concern over the imprisonment and torture of innocent men and women. It is imperative that those who believe the ideals fostered by sport cannot be separated from a commitment to human rights make known to the Government of Argentina that it cannot enhance its international prestige by hosting or winning soccer matches as long as its practice of political imprisonment and torture continues.

### ***Le Monde* Activity Compared With *The New York Times***

Quantitatively, it was clear that *Le Monde* consistently covered the political issues surrounding the 1978 tournament. Evidence of this can be seen in Table 1. A majority of coverage from *Le Monde* was focused on politics, even during the duration of the World Cup matches. In fact, stories categorized as "mainly political" increased during the duration of the event. While an increase was also observed for *The New York Times*, overall, the American publication had few stories that focused on politics.

**Table 1: Type of Story**

#### **Le Monde:**

	Political	Tournament	Match	Total
<b>Before</b>	25 (80.6%)	6 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)	31
<b>During</b>	27 (54.0%)	17 (34.0%)	6 (12%)	50
<b>After</b>	13 (92.8%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (7.2%)	14
<b>Total</b>	65 (68.4%)	23 (24.2%)	7 (7.3%)	95

#### **The New York Times:**

	Political	Tournament	Match	Total
<b>Before</b>	4 (50.0%)	4 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	8
<b>During</b>	6 (15.7%)	21 (55.2%)	11 (28.9%)	38
<b>After</b>	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.6%)	0 (0.0%)	3
<b>Total</b>	11 (22.0%)	27 (54.0%)	11 (22.0%)	50*

\*one story was uncategorized

**Table 2: Is human rights conflict central to the story?**

**Le Monde:**

Time Period	Number of Articles
Before	28
During	22
After	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>58</b>

**The New York Times:**

Time Period	Number of Articles
Before	3
During	2
After	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>

While some articles might have been politically oriented, fewer had the regime as a central focus. Again, 61 percent of *Le Monde* coverage centered on the regime and political unrest in Argentina. This was a stark difference from *The New York Times*, in which less than 9 percent of articles were focused on the regime. It is interesting to note that both newspapers had multiple journalists on the ground in Argentina covering the World Cup and surrounding issues.

The study also revealed a large difference between the publications in the number of articles focusing on human rights conflict (Table 2). To understand the level in which human rights was prioritized, the study also sought to analyze keywords related to the regime and understand the meaning of the prevalence of these words throughout the coverage. The study found that *Le Monde* was more direct when mentioning human rights conflict, using words that directly addressed the issues happening in Argentina, including “disappeared,” “government rule,” and “torture.” In fact, as shown in Table 3, *Le Monde* increased the use of direct language during the event. (The percentages in Table 3 represent the frequency the particular word was found in each period, in relation to the total use of the word over the entirety of the study).

**Table 3: Keywords used in Coverage in Reference to Regime****Le Monde:**

	Before	During	After	Total Mentions
<b>Disappeared, Kidnapping, Abduction</b>	42 (37.8%)	58 (52.3%)	11 (9.9%)	111
<b>Government Rule/ Junta</b>	29 (51.8%)	26 (46.4%)	1 (1.8%)	56
<b>Terrorism, Violence</b>	7 (63.6%)	1 (9.1%)	3 (27.3%)	11
<b>Execute / Assassinate</b>	15 (62.5%)	9 (37.5%)	0 (0.0%)	24
<b>Montoneros, Peronist</b>	7 (24.1%)	20 (67.0%)	2 (6.9%)	29
<b>Guerillas, Leftist</b>	4 (36.4%)	6 (54.5%)	1 (9.1%)	11
<b>Human Rights Violations, Torture</b>	42 (38.5%)	55 (50.5%)	12 (11.0%)	109

**The New York Times**

	Before	During	After	Total Mentions
<b>Disappeared, Kidnapping, Abduction</b>	6 (60.0%)	4 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10
<b>Government Rule/ Junta</b>	0 (0.0%)	7 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7
<b>Terrorism, Violence</b>	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.4%)	0 (0.0%)	11
<b>Execute / Assassinate</b>	2 (50.0%)	2 (50.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4
<b>Montoneros, Peronist</b>	16 (76.2%)	5 (23.8%)	0 (0.0%)	21
<b>Guerillas, Leftist</b>	7 (53.8%)	6 (46.2%)	0 (0.0%)	13
<b>Human Rights Violations, Torture</b>	2 (33.3%)	4 (66.6%)	0 (0.0%)	6

The study sought to identify the significance of the location of the first mention of the regime or human rights within a story (RQ2). As shown in Table 4, *Le Monde* addressed issues with the regime early and often in coverage. For *The Times*, any mention at all within the coverage was rare.

Table 4: Location of Mention of Regime

**Le Monde:**

Location // Time	Before	During	After
Lead	11 (35.5%)	15 (30.0%)	7 (50.0%)
Top 5	16 (51.6%)	10 (20.0%)	3 (21.4%)
Middle	3 (9.6%)	5 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)
End	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)
No mention	1	20 (40.0%)	4 (28.5%)
Totals	31	50	14

**The New York Times**

Location // Time	Before	During	After
Lead	2 (25.0%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Top 5	2 (25.0%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
Middle	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)
End	1 (12.5%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)
No mention	3 (37.5%)	34 (87.2%)	3 (100.0%)
Totals	8	39	3

**V. Discussion**

This paper sought to answer whether coverage of the 1978 World Cup prioritized human rights or sport. Based on the findings, *Le Monde* clearly focused on human rights coverage, while *The New York Times* covered the outcome of the matches. Based on previous research, it is clear that journalism often reflects foreign policy of the country at that time (Bennett et al., 2007). The findings suggest that this notion was true for both coverage from *The Times* and *Le Monde* and suggests why the French paper was able to address human rights issues more freely. While President Jimmy Carter was considered to be a champion of human rights, not all elements of the United States government were supportive of his efforts. Meanwhile, France was seeing the repercussions of the regime at home as many Argentine exiles fled to Paris and even used the city as headquarters for staging a boycott for the World Cup in the months leading up to the event (Franco & Pérez, 2007). Because of this, French journalists perhaps went to Argentina with an informed opinion of the regime, or at least were exposed to the actions of the regime, and therefore were more prepared to cover it months before being on the ground in Argentina.

Additionally, previous research surrounding mega-events like that of the World Cup indicate that coverage of these events generally remains neutral, or at least, does not challenge the events (Archetti, 2005; Curran & Liebes, 1998; Smith, 2002). The findings of this study support this claim in respect to coverage from *The New York Times*. However, findings on coverage from *Le Monde*, suggest that this may not always be true, especially in a country in which people (such as in the boycott group) had educated themselves on political activities in Argentina. *Le Monde* journalists were well exposed to the human rights issues in Argentina before arriving there to cover the Cup.

This study also sought to understand the relevance of the location of the mention of the regime as to how important the human rights were to the publication. *Le Monde* consistently mentioned these in a news story's lead, or the first five paragraphs, implying that the human rights were of utmost importance when covering the World Cup. Meanwhile, *The New York Times* mentioned the issues in the beginning of a story less than in 20 percent of all coverage, indicating less importance was placed on human rights and more on the sport itself.

The frames used by journalists during the three time periods studied (before, during, and after the games) align well with ideas proposed by previous research that sought to analyze the issues occurring around the World Cup. This study sought to understand these issues through the lens of journalists and newspaper coverage and found that the frames aligned with historical truths of Latin American instability (Robben, 2005), Argentine political power, and the Cup as a way to manipulate image (Roche, 2004; Horne, 2007; Rivenburgh, 2004).

## VI. Conclusion

This study sought to understand the way politics seep into sports coverage. Evidence suggests that coverage comes down uniquely to each news organization, as it exists inside a country where foreign policy influences thinking. Additionally, coverage is dependent upon each specific journalist and their unique circumstances.

This study found that coverage from the French paper, *Le Monde*, heavily prioritized human rights issues within its coverage of the 1978 World Cup. The U.S. paper, *The New York Times*, focused on the context of the tournament and the sport itself. Coverage from *Le Monde* consistently dove deeper than that of *The Times*, and even covered politics more during the period when the games were played. This trend was surprising, as mega-event literature suggests that the period during the event typically goes unchallenged (Roche, 2004). *Le Monde* thread politics throughout all coverage, even coverage where sport was central. Additionally, lengthy, in-depth political stories were often run side-by-side to shorter game stories.

These findings add to scholarship on mega-events and specifically a journalist's role in covering them. The findings suggest that foreign policy towards the host country is heavily reflected within the newspaper's coverage of the event. Additionally, this study provides a deeper understanding to which the journalists framed information as a way to contextualize the larger issues surrounding the World Cup.

This study was limited in its scope as it was only able to analyze two newspapers. Other countries' databases did not date as far back as those in France and The United States, and thus did not provide articles from the 1970s. Future studies could expand on this study by including, for instance, elite papers from World Cup competitors such as Argentina and Germany.

## Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the advice and guidance given by her mentors, Dr. Glenn Scott and Dr. Barbara Miller-Gaither. Their guidance was instrumental throughout the publication of this article. The author also thanks the School of Communications and her friends and family for their unwavering support in her pursuit of education and scholarship.

## References

- Alexander, J. C., & Jacobs, R. N. (1998). Mass communication, ritual and civil society. In T. Liebes and J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity: A tribute to Elihu Katz* (pp. 23-41). Routledge.
- Archetti, E. P. (2006). Argentina 1978: Military nationalism, football essentialism, and moral ambivalence. In A. Tomlinson and C. Young (Eds.), *National identity and global sports events: Culture, politics, and spectacle in the Olympics and the football World Cup* (pp. 133-148). State University of New York Press.
- Bennett, W. L., Lawrence, R. G., & Livingston, S. (2007). *When the press fails: political power and the news media from Iraq to Katrina*. University of Chicago Press.
-

- Benson, R. (2004). La Fin du Monde?: Tradition and change in the French press. *French Politics, Culture & Society*, 22(1), 108-126.
- Curran, J., & Liebes, T. (1998). The intellectual legacy of Elihu Katz. In T. Liebes and J. Curran (Eds.), *Media, ritual and identity: A tribute to Elihu Katz* (pp. 3-22). Routledge.
- Di Paolantonio, M. D. (1997). Argentina after the "Dirty War": Reading the limits of national reconciliation. *Alternatives: Global, Local Political*, 22(4), 433-465.
- Entman, R. (1991). Framing U.S. coverage of international news: Contrasts in narratives of the KAL and Iran Air incidents. *Journal of Communication*, 41(4), 6-27.
- Entman, R. (1993). Framing: Toward clarification of a fractured paradigm. *Journal of Communication*, 43(4), 51-58.
- Franco, M., & Pérez, C. (2007). Between urgency and strategy: Argentine exiles in Paris, 1976-1983. *Latin American Perspectives*, 34(4), 50-67.
- Gambarato, R. R. & Teixeira L. P. (2017). Transmedia strategies in journalism. *Journalism Studies*, 18(11), 1381-1399.
- Gamson, W. A. and Modigliani, A. (1989) Media discourse and public opinion on nuclear power: A constructionist approach. *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(1), 1-37.
- Gitlin, T. (1980). *The whole world is watching: Mass media in the making and unmaking of the new left*. University of California Press.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. Harvard University Press.
- Grix, J., Brannagan, P. M., & Lee, D. (2019). Sports mega-events and the concept of soft power. In *Entering the global arena: Emerging states, soft power strategies and sports mega-events* (pp. 23-36). Springer.
- Hiller, H. (1998). Assessing the impact of mega-events: A linkage model. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 1(1), 47-57.
- Horne, J. (2007). The four "knowns" of sports mega-events. *Leisure Studies*, 26(1), 81-96.
- Horne, J. (2017). Sports mega-events: Mass media and symbolic contestation. In L. A. Wenner & A. C. Billings (Eds.), *Sport, media and mega-events* (pp. 19-32). Routledge.
- Joffe, H., & Yardley, L. (2012). Content and thematic analysis. In D. F. Marks & L. Yardley (Eds.), *Research methods for clinical and health psychology* (pp. 56-68). Sage.
- Rein, R., & Davidi, E. (2009). Sport, politics and exile: Protests in Israel during the World Cup (Argentina, 1978). *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 26(5), 673-692.
- Rivenburgh, N. K. (2004). The Olympic Games: Twenty-first century challenges as a global media event. *Culture, Sport, Society*, 5(3), 32-50. <https://doi.org/10.1080/911094208>
- Robben, A.C.G.M. (2005). How traumatized societies remember: The aftermath of Argentina's dirty war. *Cultural Critique*, 59(1), 120-164.
- Roche, M. (2003). Mega-events, time and modernity: On time structures in global society. *Time & Society*, 12(1), 99-126. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961463X03012001370>
- Roche, M. (2004). Mega-events and media culture: sport and the Olympics. In D. Rowe (Ed.), *Critical readings: Sport, culture and the media* (pp. 165-181). McGraw-Hill Education.
-

Scheufele, D. (1999). Framing as a theory of media effects. *Journal of Communication*, 49(1), 103-122.

Smith, B. (2002). The Argentinian junta and the press in the run-up to the 1978 World Cup. *Soccer & Society*, 3(1), 69-78.

Strychacz, T. (1994). American sports writers and “unruly rooters”: The significance of orderly spectating. *Journal of American Studies*, 28(1), 84-89.

Szymanski, S. (2011). About winning: The political economy of awarding the World Cup and the Olympic Games. *SAIS Review*, 31(1), 87-97.