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A Game of Deception

Exploring Sportswashing's Effect on Supporters' Attitudes
through an Elite Soccer-Club Purchase

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1. Introduction

Sportswashing is a relatively new described phenomenon that, not least in 2022, has taken a prominent place in the media. This is because the World Cup in Qatar occurred at the expense of several human rights violations and limited rights of workers, women, and people within the LGBTQ specter. Although the term is new, the phenomenon goes back to the 1934 World Cup hosted by then-fascist Italy and the 1936 Olympics hosted by Hitler's Nazi Germany. (Fruh, Archer and Wojtowicz, 2023)

The word "sportswashing" comes from the related terms "whitewashing" and "greenwashing" and generally means washing over a negative image of a country by using sport (Kobierecki and Strożek, 2021). Since the aim is to change the perception of the actor in question and thereby legitimize its actions, the phenomenon is further said to have the power to change conceptions among the intended audience (Boykoff, 2022). The existing research investigates this alleged connection between sportswashing and shaping attitudes by using cases related to "mega sports events" hosted within the country of issue. For example, during the Olympics in Beijing, a study was conducted on American attitudes toward China (Gries, Crowson and Sandel, 2010). There have also been studies on the 2022 World Cup in Qatar (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018) and the 1978 World Cup in Argentina (Scharpf, GLÄßEL and Edwards, 2022). Together, the results leave little evidence for an increase in any positive associations.

These results are explained to occur because events of a large scale tend to receive extensive media coverage, which makes them susceptible to soft disempowerment through criticism regarding regime or human rights violations (Brannagan and Giulianotti, 2018). However, there are other forms of sportswashing as well, like purchasing an elite soccer club in another country – but these have not yet been researched. While the purchase of sports clubs might attract media and criticism as well, they enact different factors relating to fandom – causing a different effect on awareness and perception of the actor (Boykoff, 2022).

There is additional empirical evidence supporting this theory. In 2021, Newcastle United was purchased by Saudi Arabia amidst objections due to the country's numerous human rights violations. However, while currently being the lowest-ranked team in Premier League, the club became the wealthiest soccer club in the world. Consequently, the favorable outcomes of the acquisition outweighed the criticisms, prompting thousands of Newcastle supporters to celebrate the deal by waving the Saudi Arabian flag and even donning traditional thawbs and gutha clothing (Sky Sports, 2021).

In 2018, a British academic, Matthew Hedges, was imprisoned for life for spying in the UAE after a five-minute trial without legal representation (Ronay, 2018). Followingly, the justice process created questions of doubt and unease among British observers. However, social media users criticized the validity of Hedges' story despite the initial concern. Skeptical voices arose in support of the Emirati justice system and debated the matter as a controversial sports decision. Behind these accounts were Manchester City supporters, that according to Ronay (2018), showed symptoms of the effect of sportswashing.

In what follows, I argue, in line with Boykoff, that the effect of sportswashing might differ between hosting a mega-sport event and purchasing a soccer club in a different country, owing to the relationship between supporter and team. A hypothesis is formulated by connecting research on sportswashing with research on sports communities to grasp the mechanisms behind the suggested correlation, guiding the design of this paper. This will thereby be investigated throughout this thesis using a quantitative method of opinion data and a method of difference-in-difference, which gives this paper a unique opportunity to measure attitudes on a local level close to the observations. This provides this paper with information on what the assumed supporters think compared to the rest of the countries as well as measurements in differences between attitudes on a local and national level before and after the clubs received their state owners. Therefore, this analysis offers a valuable counterfactual comparison of outcomes.

1.2 Research Question and Purpose

Based on the discussion above, the explicit purpose of this study is to research the effect sportswashing has on supporters' attitudes toward an external state that purchases an elite soccer club. This is based on the idea that the supporter will be affected when the state becomes connected to their fan identity. Using research on the supporter community and research on sportswashing, this thesis further aims to contribute to a more extensive understanding of the effects of sportswashing in general and through the tool of owning soccer clubs more specifically. It investigates whether the phenomenon can change attitudes toward ideas related to that state, also reaching for increased knowledge about *which* attitudes can be expected to change.

There are several reasons why such an understanding is essential. If sportswashing changes attitudes among supporters, this study will raise several questions about the acceptance and normalization of non-democratic values and human rights violations. This is further a phenomenon that is becoming more and more common. The currently purchased clubs are additionally succeeding in dominating national and international football leagues, which increases the possibility for interest among other clubs to follow in the same footsteps.

Based on what's stated above, the following explanatory research question was formulated to both explore the effects on supporters and identify the attitudes that are related to those effects: *How does sportswashing through an elite soccer club purchase affect supporters' attitudes toward values connected to the characteristics of the external state-affiliated ownership?*

This is further answered by investigating the cases of Manchester City (City) and Paris Saint-Germain (PSG), purchased by The United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

1.2.1 Limitations

The paper will also exclusively focus on the cases where a state or a person strongly connected to the state purchases a soccer club. There are several cases of sponsorship deals between autocracies and companies related to them and other elite-sport clubs, but these will not be researched. This is further motivated under section 4.2.

2. Previous Research

This part will present research on sportswashing and sport communities separately to get an overview of both areas and grasp how this type of sportswashing might affect supporters.

2.1 Sportswashing

Sportswashing is generally defined as a method to wash over a negative image of a country by using sport. For example, the negative picture often involves a bad human rights record and is therefore often associated with countries like Russia or Qatar (Kobierecki and Strožek, 2021). It is a phenomenon where political leaders use a space related to the sport to increase appearances of legitimacy while deflecting attention from different domestic problems. Sportswashing is also described as a social relationship that can evoke multiple audiences on different levels, both simultaneously and separately. It is further explained to have the power to reflect the past and shape the future. This is based on its function to subtly manipulate the public's perception of the actor by reputational repair through sport and its related culture. It destabilizes and regenerates conceptions of fandom, allegiance, and human rights (Boykoff, 2022). This is also what this study aims to investigate.

The effect of sportswashing have been researched, but often through the context of hosting sports mega-events and its consequences on the international image of the state and its soft power. Kobierecki and Strozek (2021) provide a literature overview of the results of such events and conclude that hosting them can have positive, negative, and neutral effects on the image of the country. For example, a study on the 2008 Olympics in Beijing proved that the attitudes toward China only marginally improved during the games. In some dimensions, it even worsened (Gries, Crowson and Sandel, 2010).

Kobrierecki and Strozek (2021) further suggest that the effects will depend on the event and its success. They further analyze to what extent hosting sports mega-events allows the state to increase familiarity and international visibility. This is done by measuring fluctuations in Google searches related to eight events organized in seven states, both democratic and non-democratic ones. They find that hosting can create an opportunity for a positive image to be spread, and all studied cases increased the general interest and familiarity in the hosting country. However, the effect seems to be more prominent in democratic countries. They find that using the term sportswashing often negatively affects states as it is used as an accusation.

Since it is also significantly used in the context of autocratic regimes, mega events hosted by such countries can create adverse effects, leading to a backlash.

This phenomenon is further explained by Brannagan and Giulianotti (2018), who discusses the world cup in Qatar through the events leading up to it. They argue that while Qatar previously succeeded in pursuing a high-profile image as a growing vital actor in the international arena, the world cup might result in a “reversed case of soft power.” The intention behind this mega event was to position Qatar as an attractive global tourist destination – washing away the state's image as a human rights violator. However, by only looking at the media outrage related to the announcement and early stages of the cup construction, Qatar has unintentionally drawn attention to its human rights record instead. The authors highlight that the case clearly illustrates that soft power strategies like these can have weakening consequences and, instead, produce what they call “soft disempowerment.” If the perception of the state is somewhat connected to unlawful behavior, it becomes harder to gain soft power successfully. This is simply because awareness of a state's soft disempowerment creates a reaction within the audience, challenging the state's efforts to appear credible.

2.2 Sport Communities

Giulianotti (1999:70) writes that football club supporters are connected through an “imagined community” where the supporters never will be able to meet or encounter each other.

Nevertheless, the collective identity created through this imaginary community remains undiminished. Similarly, Hobsbawm (1990:142) argues that football significantly reinforces this imagined collectivity through a sense of belonging.

The importance of such collectivity has been researched by Stott et al. (2007), that analyzed collective behavior among English supporters attending Euro 2004 in Portugal. Using semi-structured observations and interviews before and after the tournament they managed to show that supporters are guided by the group's norms connected through the team. When the “fan identity” is activated, the current norms become important factors driving individual behavior. Furthermore, based on controlled experiments, it has also been proved that when an individual categorizes themselves according to that group, it has shown to be sufficient to encourage them to make “ingroup-favoring responses” – even in the most stripped-down conditions. This means that they, in most cases, prioritize the group in favor of themselves. Additionally,

individuals achieve or maintain good self-esteem by positively differentiating their group from other groups, which is especially prevalent in sports rivalries (Rees *et al.*, 2015).

Accordingly, in an overview article on football fan rivalries written by Benkwitz and Molnar (2012), research has proven that rivalries like the ones discussed by Rees can create social change in attitudes – thus also affecting society. These changes have consequently shown to be both positive and negative. Rivalries can emphasize prejudice, competition, and bias through binary thinking. It can even foster “socially divisive attitudes,” which can cause social conflict and, in some cases, violence. However, it can also create an arena for social interaction across different backgrounds, helping break down barriers between people (Benkwitz and Molnar, 2012).

The fact that soccer can enact positive social change in attitudes has been proved by Alrababa’h et al. (2021). They investigate how exposure to celebrities from stigmatized groups can reduce prejudice – using the elite Muslim soccer player Mohammed Salah as an example. By measuring data on hate crimes in England and analyzing the content of tweets of supporters, they found that hate crimes in the Liverpool area decreased by 16 % after Salah joined Liverpool F.C.

Lastly, to put this study in relation to the former research, the aim is to connect the two research areas described above. To the best I know, no current research exists between sportswashing as state-owned clubs and its effect on supporters’ attitudes toward that regime.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study consists of two components: sportswashing used through the club purchase tool and the relationship between supporter and team as a mechanism for forming attitudes. Thus, the framework is patched together to contribute to an extensive understanding of how sportswashing works, and in which situations it might create an impact.

The theoretical definition of the independent variable is accordingly taken from the literature on sportswashing, while the mechanism explaining why x leads to y is grounded in literature from both areas - constituting the basis of the hypothesis in 3.3. Consequently, the dependent variable is also based on both areas to predict what attitudes are expected to change,

3.1 Sportswashing as a Purchase of an Elite Sports Club

Since the research on sportswashing is limited, the phenomenon has suffered from definitional imprecision. This is nonetheless something that Jules Boykoff (2022) aims to resolve by conceptualizing the word and thereby creating a theoretical ground for it. Her definition of sportswashing is built on the soft power approach used to investigate mega-events. The theoretical definition used in this thesis will combine two of her premises: one more general definition regarding sportswashing and a description specific to the version where a regime purchases a sports club.

Her definition of sportswashing is as follows:

[...] a phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human-right woes on the home front.
(2022:342)

She further describes sportswashing through the tool of state-owned sports clubs as controversial regimes that purchase professional sports clubs in putative democracies (2022:347).

Therefore, the definition used for sportswashing in this study is: a phenomenon whereby a controversial regime purchases a professional sports club in a putative democracy. This to

appear essential or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human rights woes on the home front.

3.2 Mechanisms

3.2.1 Sportswashing Through External State-ownership of Sport Clubs

Boykoff (2022) writes that the concept of sportswashing overlaps with soft power and references that definition to Joseph Nye – as an ability to shape the preference of others. Moreover, she provides a theoretical basis for how sportswashing might work in different forms and contexts. Cases where authoritarian countries purchase elite sports clubs, are further described as a new and “qualitatively divergent” version of sportswashing. This works by persuading everyday fans that support their team’s success to change their opinion of the country, simultaneously strengthening the reputation of the authoritarian governments. Hence, she explains that sportswashing can work through a deeper ideological function where the authoritarian state exploits established fandom communities and their complex relations. This form of sportswashing enables new factors than mega-events, where the fandom plays a considerable role, taking advantage of the fact that supporters perceive their team and community as a part of something bigger. This makes both athletes and supporters pawns in a political game.

3.2.2 The social identity theory

This part will be grounded in the study made by Rees et al. (2015), which outlines a social identity approach to sport psychology based on social identity and self-categorization theories. This combined approach is meant to provide a comprehensive analysis of how the individual psychology structures and gets structured by the dynamics of the group life available through sports. Groups are not merely a part of the sports arena – they play a significant role in creating the individual identity, affecting sport-related behavior. This approach will accordingly be used to understand the mechanisms by which sportswashing can cause effects the attitudes of supporters described by Boykoff (2022)– and thereby form a hypothesis. This is in cases where the perception of a state becomes blended with the reputation of an elite-football club with a related fan-based community.

Firstly, Reese et al. (2015) ground the approach in the so-called social identity theory from Henri Tajef and his colleagues in the 1970s. The idea itself focuses on the role of three key elements that structure social identification and group behavior. These are the perceived *stability* and *legitimacy* of the ingroup's position in relation to other groups, as well as how *strong* the perceived boundaries of the group are. If the status of the ingroup is somewhat unclear about another group, the members will engage in social competition to define themselves as superior. This is especially prevalent in sports competitions where teams naturally fight for a higher status position in the form of league champions. If the group boundaries instead are stable, the groups with higher status will tend to define their group on "status-defining dimensions" by stating that they are the best team.

Simultaneously, the groups with a lower status will try to enhance their position by using social creativity related to "status-irrelevant dimensions." This is highlighted by a case where an ice-hockey team was placed last in a regional league. To compensate for their lower performance, they claimed that they played more fairly in relation to other groups – which was far from the truth. No matter the situation, the ingroup will try to gain a positive perception of their collective identity – increasing their status by different means (Rees *et al.*, 2015:1085).

Secondly, the approach is also grounded in a "self-categorizing" theory that focuses on "the dynamic workings of the self, " with three key insights. First, social identity is the foundational ground on which group behavior occurs. Group behavior is substantiated by self-stereotyping, in which the perception of the self becomes categorically interchangeable with other members of the ingroup. This causes people who identify with a particular social identity, like a supporter of a specific team, to interpret the meaning of this category and discover what is associated with that group. Accordingly, they will also seek to enact that meaning and strive to be associated with those characteristics. Second, the self is explained to reflect a categorization process where others are viewed according to and recognized by membership.

The sports fandom perpetuates this by viewing fans of the same club as "us" and opposing fans as "them", reinforcing homogeneity within the ingroup and outgroup. Third, a shared identity causes social influence. Meaning, that the people within the ingroup, in this case, fans of the same team, will strive to actively co-ordinate the behavior to activities that correlate with the identity. Even at the most general level, this phenomenon can turn individual

opinions or a player's skills and aspirations into higher-order group commodities – like creating shared beliefs or a particular culture (Rees *et al.*, 2015:1085–1086).

3.3 Hypothesis

Boykoff (2022) creates a theoretical foundation for the possibility of change in conception regarding the supporter's fandom and attitudes toward states of ownership. However, the articles investigating the effect of sportswashing through mega-events provide little evidence for this to be true. Although, based on the “new factors” described by Boykoff (2022:348) and the literature on the collective identity that exists through sports, cases like PSG and City are likely to produce a different effect on supporters than sportswashing through mega-events. When a state hosts the Olympics or the World Cup, it should become part of the rivalry as the outgroup in the perception of the rest of the world. This means that a fan can support their team without supporting the hosting of that regime. According to the social identity theory, it would even be natural to criticize that country to differentiate and boost its own perceived image as a team – increasing the risk of soft disempowerment to the actor using sportswashing.

However, when purchasing an elite soccer club that already holds a formed “imagined community,” the perception of the state becomes blended with the already constructed “collective identity”. This means that it is more likely that the purchase is used to promote the group compared to its opponents – making ingroup-favoring arguments to increase their status and appear superior. Based on Reese's (2015) article, this further means that beliefs and culture can develop to favor the ideas and values related to the country's regime by social influence. Supporters will strive to coordinate their behavior with the activity that correlates with the fan identity.

H1: If the local football team has an external state-affiliated owner, supporters of the team will more likely be positive to values/characteristics of the owner-state.

3.4 What contentious characteristics are likely to be attributed to UAE/Qatar?

Based on the arguments presented in our hypothesis, the potentially affected attitudes toward sportswashing are related to the state-owners. Section 3.4.1 and 3.4.2 is therefore devoted to discussing what characteristics are likely to be connected to the UAE and Qatar.

3.4.1 Increased Acceptance of Authoritarian Values

Both clubs are owned by controversial regimes – United Arab Emirates (City) and Qatar (PSG). The owner of City, Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, has close links to the regime in the country and has even been elected vice president since the investment took place (Britannica, 2023). UAE has a long history of human rights abuses, with torture and ill-treatment against human rights defenders, discrimination against their native-born population, and minimal rights for women and LGBTQ+ (Amnesty International, no date). Based on the Freedom House list of global freedom statuses, the country is deemed not free, scoring 18 out of 100 (Freedom House, no date).

The owner of PSG is Qatar Sports Investments and Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of Qatar (Britannica, 2023). Here forced labor is a huge issue, and domestic workers endure some of the harshest working conditions and abuses. They further discriminate against women and LGBTQ+, and there is almost no freedom of expression due to harsh laws that quiet critical voices (Amnesty International, no date). They have the equivalent of 25 points out of 100 on the Freedom House list. (Freedom House, no date).

Based on these grounds, both states are controversial, and the perception of the states is neither connected to characteristics of democratic values nor justice. On the contrary, the two countries are clearly attributed with the opposite – an autocratic rule and several human rights violations. Therefore, based on the above arguments, a change in attitudes should relate to an increased acceptance toward authoritarian values.

3.4.2 Increased Acceptance of Muslims

Additionally, the social identity theory and former research on the supporter community predict additional attitudes to change. Both states have strong characteristics connected to

Islam juridically and ideologically, and the club's owners have a strong Muslim identity. One even being an Emirati (Britannica - *United Arab Emirates*, 2023; Britannica - *Qatar*, 2023).

According to the arguments in 2.2 and 3.4, the purchase should produce similar outcomes to the Mohammed Salah case – enacting positive social change through counteracting prejudice with increased acceptance of Muslims.

4. Research Design

In this section I will present how this study has been conducted. In 4.1 I will explain the choice of method. This is followed by a motivation of the chosen cases in 4.2 and a presentation of the data used to answer the research question in 4.3. In 4.4 I will present the operationalizations along with the variables and used coding, and in 4.5 I will do the same with the used control variables. Lastly in section 4.6, I will engage in a critical analysis of the research design while simultaneously motivating the reasons behind the chosen approach.

4.1 Method

To examine the impact of sportswashing on supporters' attitudes, the chosen method for this study is a quantitative regression difference-in-difference (DiD). This method provides measurement according to differences in attitudes between ownership of the clubs, as well as a separation between geographic areas of fans to these clubs (the treated sample) and other parts of England and France (the control sample). Data will additionally be measured over time, before and after the treatment. Therefore, this method is advantageous when analyzing differences in trends with a precise breakpoint of expected change, which the purchase of City and PSG, according to our theory, is (Angrist and Pischke, 2009, pp. 232–234).

This method is inspired by the research conducted by Alrababa'h et al. (2021). They use a similar case, the purchase of Mohammed Salah, to measure the effect on attitudes against Muslims among Liverpool FC fans. Using the difference-in-difference method, they pinpoint a difference in attitudes among the regions where supporters of Liverpool are the strongest. Since the method also tracks the attitude trends' development, they isolate a casual effect and prove that the breakpoint caused a significant change in attitudes and behavior.

Accordingly, this thesis considers the chosen cases, southern Manchester, and Paris, to be treated after the United Arab Emirates purchased City in 2008 and Qatar purchased PSG in 2011. This is based on the assumption that there are a concentrated group of supporters locally related to the clubs. If the hypothesis is correct, we can estimate a different attitude change in these areas compared with other parts of these countries before and after the treatment. The chosen method will thereby help isolate the actual effect of the purchase to answer the research question.

Furthermore, we need a contrafactual difference to establish and isolate a causality. The remaining regions in France and England will therefore separately represent our control groups. The key here is the assumption that the attitude trends in Manchester and Paris would be the same as the rest of each respective country if the purchases did not happen. For the analysis, the regression is used to create a relation of differences over time between the treated and control groups. If a causal effect exists, treatment will induce a deviation from the expected trend. Otherwise, the differences between treatment- and control groups should stay the same over time (Angrist and Pischke, 2009).

Conclusively, this method enables functions to measure attitudes of the assumed group of supporters on a local level as well as differences within them. It further provides the possibility to achieve knowledge on differences in attitudes between a local and national level, both before and after the clubs received their new owners - which provides an opportunity to gain a clear understanding of the impact of this change. This is in line with the aim of gaining deeper knowledge of the impact of sportswashing on supporters.

4.2 Cases

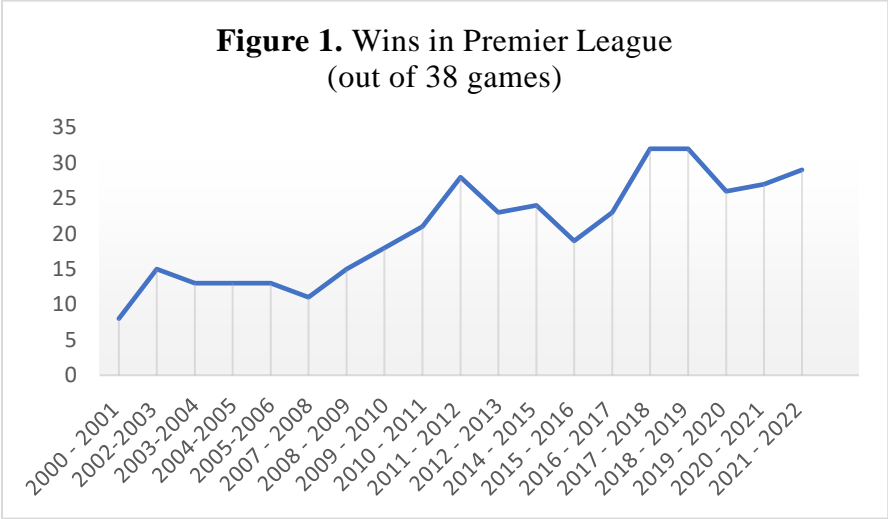
This section is devoted to motivating why City and PSG were chosen as cases and why they are categorized as cases of sportswashing. Firstly, they are the most "high profile" purchases of clubs, which further has caused a lot of debates. This means that if ownership has any impact, it is more likely to be visible in "big" clubs as they can be assumed to have larger numbers of more committed supporters. Therefore, they both match with the aim of the study. To research if there is an effect and how it might impact supporters, there is a need for cases where such a relationship would be prevalent.

Secondly, the clubs connect to England and France, both of which are among the five biggest leagues in Europe (and therefore the world)(Mecca, no date). This means that they have global interest based on attendance and TV deals. In France and Spain, private ownership of clubs is less common, and in Italy, there is no club with owners from the Middle East. If a state is to succeed in changing the perception of them in the global arena, these factors are essential. The only other club that on these grounds would be relevant is Newcastle United which was bought by Saudi Arabia only last year – making it too early to measure the exact effects.

Thirdly, according to Kobriecki and Strozek (2021), the cases successes are further important factors in determining the effectiveness of the sportswashing. Through their literature review, they found a recurring pattern where successful events hold more potential to enhance the actor's perception. As mentioned above, to investigate its effect on supporters' attitudes, its essential to find cases where such effects could appear. Accordingly, both PSG and City have excelled after the purchase, making them a good fit for this study. This is motivated below:

In figure 1, we can see the success rate of City in the Premier League since 2000. Notably, since the purchase, the success rate has significantly increased. Prior to 2008, the club had a low success rate, winning only around ten games per season between 1996 and 2007. However, things changed for the better in 2008. Between the season 2011-12 and 2021-22, they won Premier League six times in a row (Premier League, no date). This success has further been questioned due to the financial aid of the Emirati owner. City's net transfer spending on players, which equals transfer spending minus transfer proceeds, has, according to data from 2022, mounted to 1.44 billion euros. In terms of expenditures, this club surpasses all others in the world, making it superior (Richter, 2022)

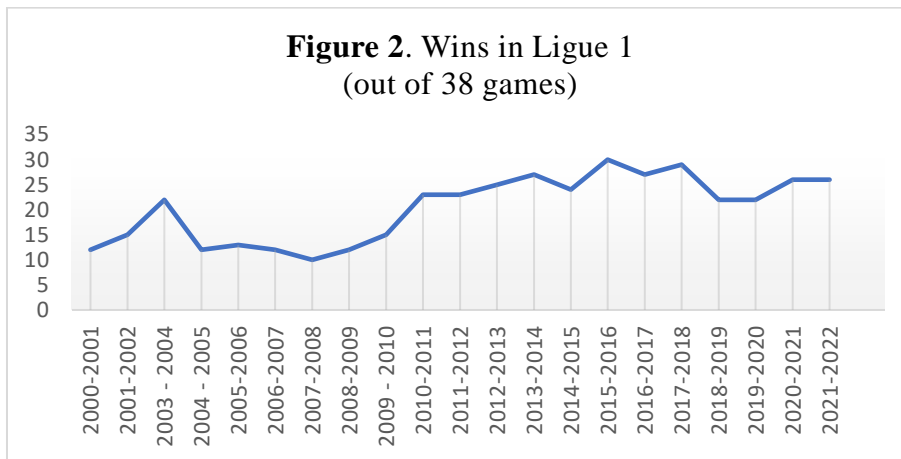
Manchester City's wins in Premier League per season (2000-2022)



(Manchester City FC Statistics / Premier League, no date)

Regarding transfer spendings, PSG ranks third in the world with 985 million euros spent since 2008. Prior to their purchase in 2011, the club had only won two Ligue 1 titles. However, they have since won a total of eight titles with the help of big names like Thiago Silva, Zlatan Ibrahimovic, Neymar Jr, Kylian Mbappe and most recently, Lionel Messi (Mukherjee, 2022). Figure 2 reveals that although not as sudden as City, there is still a notable change after the purchase - transitioning from a fluctuating pattern to a consistently high level.

Paris Saint-Germain wins in Ligue 1 per season (2000-2022)



(Source: *Data from Ligue 1: Paris Saint-Germain*)

Furthermore, the cases are also motivated according to the theoretical definition. The claim that the purchase of PSG and City is intended as sportswashing is hard to prove since it's not something the UAE or Qatar themselves would ever confess to. But I refer to a quote by Amnesty International: "The UAE's enormous investment is one of football's most brazen attempts to 'sports wash' a country's deeply tarnished image," – which points to claims of several exploited labor and human rights cases of abuse. In the case of Qatar, the opinion that the country uses sportswashing through PSG is shared by many (Ronay, 2019). They own PSG and sponsor several teams like Bayern München, trying their best to alter their image and devalue potentially damaging information (Ganji, 2022).

The purchase is lastly in two putative democracies, Great Britain and France. In the regression analysis, these two will be measured separately to isolate contextual differences.

4.3 Data

This thesis is based on data from the European Values Study (EVS), a large-scale, cross-national, and longitudinal survey research program focusing on fundamental human values. Each survey includes data on three levels for the 47 European countries: NUTS 1, NUTS 2, and NUTS 3. This paper will further use two surveys conducted in waves between 2008-2017 with a focus on France and England, where data on NUTS 3 (small areas for specific diagnosis) levels will be used (Eurostat, no date). This is to get close to the group that hypothetically will be affected and isolate Manchester and Paris as "treated."

The EVS data were collected through face-to-face interviews using standardized questionnaires. In 160 surveys, more than 224000 respondents from 49 countries/regions were interviewed. The survey was then repeated every nine years, starting in 1981. These are also conducted through five waves, collecting every round over several years. Therefore, the studies were conducted in 1983, 1990, 1999, 2008, and 2017 (EVS, 2018). However, only the two last waves have information on a NUTS-3 level, which is required to isolate Paris and Manchester. Therefore, in this dataset, the data from the 2008 wave represent a pre-treatment period, and the data from 2017 describe the post-treatment period. Together these consist of 6720 observations. In the case of City, the data is collected over the same year as the purchase from the UAE. But, since the acquisition happened in August, the effects should likely have yet to start.

There are several reasons why I choose EVS surveys to answer the research question. It is one of the few questionnaires that both provide data that can outline trends over time and data on a sub-regional level, which is essential for the difference-in-difference method. However, there is an issue considering the time between treatment and the following conducted survey. For the case of City, the difference is nine years, and for PSG, it is six. This makes tracking the actual trend in attitudes more challenging since the period could include other triggers for change. This is further a general weakness of performing the difference-in-difference method.

4.4 Operationalization

4.3.1 Independent variable: Measured Areas

Based on the method, the independent variable is measured as a dummy variable that consists of our treated group (the cases) and our control group before and after the treatment of a controversial regime's purchase of an elite soccer club. Therefore, Paris and southern Manchester will be coded as 1, and our remaining areas as 0.

For City's case, the rivalry club issue is solved by looking at data centered on Manchester areas connected to the two clubs. A survey by the local Manchester Evening News found that the support for City is most vital in Tameside, Stockport, Oldham, and Wigan, while the support for United centers around Bolton, Bury, Rochdale, Salford, and Trafford (Handler, 2012). In more general terms, this means that the southeastern part of Manchester is connected to City and the northwestern region to United. Manchester is further divided into

two areas in the earlier dataset according to the European NUTS 3 system: north and south. Therefore, this study isolates the southern part of Manchester as the treated group using the NUTS code UKD31 (EVS, 2018). The most recent dataset divides the area into four regions, including the southeast. However, since this study compares data over time and in relation to each other, using data on a different level will produce errors in the results. Therefore, we use the codes UKD34 and UKD34, representing Manchester's southwestern and south-eastern parts.

Paris is measured according to the NUTS 3 code FR101, which indicates the inner area of Paris as a city.

4.3.2 Dependent variable: Attitudes Toward Values Connected with the UAE and Qatar

As mentioned in section 3.4, this thesis will measure attitudes toward characteristics related to the UAE and Qatar.

Accordingly, three different questions will represent acceptance of values connected to authoritarian attributes to achieve a nuanced measurement and, to a broader extent, capture which attitudes are expected to change. These ask what the respondent thinks about “having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections” and “having a democratic political system”. For both questions, the respondents can choose between the answers: very good, fairly good, fairly bad, and very bad. Furthermore, since the first question is stated opposite toward the other, with a higher number for thinking that a strong leader is bad, this variable is inverted in the dataset. This is to create an index where all the variables measure attitudes in the same direction with a higher value for authoritarian attitudes.

Followingly, these questions are categorical variables on an ordinal scale, where the answers can be ranked but lack equidistance. Technically, this creates problems of interpretation when executing a regression analysis. Nonetheless, I refer to praxis, and I will keep the different categories in the dataset – to approximate an interval scale and a more linear effect in the results.

The last used question is “Which of the following would you say is most important” with the following options listed below: maintaining order in the nation, giving people more say in important government decisions, fighting rising prices, and protecting freedom of speech. If the respondents mention maintaining order in the nation as the most important, they are given

a 1 in the dataset, while the rest of the options are re-coded as 0. The option “fighting rising prices” is removed since it doesn’t correlate with the other options as authoritarian or democratic values. Responses with no answers or with the answer “don’t know” are removed from this and all other relevant variables in the dataset.

Furthermore, the purchase is predicted to increase acceptance toward Muslims. This will be measured separately using a question where the respondents pick out various groups of people they don’t want as neighbors from a set list. The answers are coded as 1 in the dataset if they mention Muslims and 0 if they do not. Note that while the hypothesis predicts a social change in a positive direction, the used measurement is inverted as “not wanting Muslims as neighbors”. To switch the coding of 0 and 1 would be misleading since 0 represents not mentioning the group and not the opposite of wanting them as neighbors. If our hypothesis is correct, the results are expected to be negative.

Lastly, since this paper uses a difference-in-difference method, time is measured as a dummy variable, where aggregated data on attitudes pre-treatment is coded as 0 and post-treatment as 1.

4.3.4 Control Variables

Control variables are commonly used to control for factors that might affect both our independent and dependent variables (Teorell, 2007). However, based on this research design, it is hard to find variables that would affect the independent variable – that the UAE and Qatar purchased the clubs. Instead, we use difference-in-difference, where the purchase is handled as a treatment that affects the attitudes in southern Manchester and Paris over time. Since the context further is the same in both areas in 2007 and 2017, the method automatically controls for everything that could make the correlation spurious. Since the rest of each country is handled as a control group that also controls for general changes and events over time (Keele, Stevenson and Elwert, 2020:1-13).

However, there is an additional factor that needs to be considered. Since the material used is a survey, there are individual factors that could affect the measured attitudes. This could also be argued to be controlled for using difference-in-difference, and if the same people answered the questions in each round – it would. But this is not the case. The people answering the samples are based on a random sample each time, creating compositional changes between the different waves of surveys. This means that we cannot be sure that there is exactly the

same number of men, older people or with the same education in both samples. Therefore, this thesis controls for individual features that may influence attitudes toward authoritarian values and Muslims, to control for such insecurities. Otherwise, such features could affect the mean for the group, thus also affecting the results. This will accordingly not be a central point of discussion in the result section since the design in itself provides what is necessary for answering the research question (Wysocki, Lawson and Rhemtulla, 2022). What will be discussed is if the effects on our measured attitudes are reasonable to ensure that the data is not skewed in any way.

For one, most football supporters in both countries are male. France and Great Britain are the countries in Europe with the most significant gap between male and female game attendance (Statista, 2016). In addition, former research has shown that women are generally more positive toward democracy and immigration (Cordero and Simón, 2016; Spierings and Zaslove, 2017). Therefore, gender is a variable that is controlled for and is coded as 0 being male and 1 female.

Paris and Manchester are further urban areas with a high density of people per hectare. Various published data prove that urban residence is associated with a more liberal stance (Fischer, 1975). This is controlled for using a variable on the size of the town with the categories: under 2000, 2-5000, 5-10000, 10-20000, 20-50000, 50-100000, 100-500000, and 500000 and more. Educational level is further controlled by the same premises, where a higher education often is connected with a more liberal values and vice versa (Heller *et al.*, 2022:469). The variable used separates education into three levels, recoded from a country specific measurement. These are lower, middle, and upper.

Manchester City fans have a solid connection to the working class, which remains today despite the club's wealth (Hughes, 2009). To control for this, a variable on income is used based on the premise that a low income is correlated with lower levels of interpersonal trust (Heller *et al.*, 2022:469). This is measured using a variable that separates income based on eleven steps, where the respondent provides an approximate amount that the interviewer later places in accordance with the steps. The lowest step equals 1 in the dataset and the highest 11.

Age is further tested on the same grounds, where older age also is accompanied by lower levels of interpersonal trust (Heller *et al.*, 2022:469). This is measured in groups of 15-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65 and more.

PSG has a corresponding historical relation to far-right political parties and will therefore be controlled using a variable where the respondents place themselves on a political scale from left to right (1-7) (Luck, 2020). Left equals 1 in the dataset, and right equals 7.

Lastly, all the above variables are recoded in the dataset to remove five additional categories, including missing and unapplicable answers.

4.5 Potential Criticism of the Research Design

4.5.1 Measuring Paris and Southern Manchester as Treated

A disadvantage of using the whole of Paris and south Manchester as one data unit is that not everyone will identify as a fan of PSG, City, or even of football. Considering the case of Manchester, the data will also include the attitudes of the supporters of the rival club Manchester United. This paper will accordingly not be able to isolate who is a supporter and not correctly. Consequently, if there is a causal effect between sportswashing and a change in supporters' attitudes, the measured effect will probably appear smaller than the real one, meaning there is a high risk of underestimating the actual results. Unfortunately, this means that the validity between the theoretical definition of sportswashing and the operationalization in 4.3.1 will be affected, creating a systematic measurement error.

An alternative method would have been to conduct an own survey. This would have made it possible to include a question about which team the respondents supported and if they even liked football in the first place. However, since the method makes it possible to measure attitudes locally, the assumption that more supporters are related to each team than in the rest of the counties may not be so far off. Even though both clubs have supporters spread throughout the world, both countries have several big and established clubs in other parts of the two countries – making it more likely for the remaining English and French to support the local club in their region. This is also confirmed by a survey created by the FREE Project that aims to explore how people across Europe feel about football (The Free Project, 2014). A majority in both countries answered that the most important reason why they support their chosen football team is that it is their local club. Based on the same survey, 67,5% of respondents in France and 75.1% in Great Britain answered that they are “very interested” in Football. This is based on a span between “not interested at all” and “very interested”.

Also, I need surveys with data over time covering non-supporters and supporters (or the areas that most likely consist of the two groups). Specific surveys could only have been made after the purchase, too, since it's simply impossible to predict. We could then tell differences in attitudes among supporters, but it would be hard to identify the cause. Even if City supporters were proved to have a greater acceptance toward authoritarian values, there is a chance that those attitudes follow a trend in which such values are more common in that area – and were before the purchase. By measuring pre- and post-treatment and between treatment and control, we cannot only tell differences in attitudes between regions – but we may also be able to tell from where they originate. This means we can identify the trends compared to other regions and the treatment. For example, if attitudes were more accepting in Manchester before the treatment than in the remaining areas, we can still identify an eventual deviation when the purchase occurred. This is called a constant difference in outcomes, which creates two parallel outcome trends that, before treatment, are assumed to follow the same fluctuations (Angrist and Pischke, 2009). This is especially handy when using cases like Paris that are expected to differ from the general trend. This furthers the most prominent argument for why this method is chosen over conducting a survey. When comparing the areas where most PSG/City fans live with the rest of France and England, the method makes it possible to isolate treatment against broader societal trends.

4.5.2 Measuring Characteristics Connected to UAE and Qatar

The definition and operationalization of measuring characteristics related to Qatar and the UAE become an indirect way of measuring the effects of sportswashing. The perfect research design would include data that measures attitudes toward UAE and Qatar precisely. Instead, this thesis will calculate the acceptance of values typically related to such regimes as authoritarian attitudes. But the choice of material was also motivated by several reasons—first, the need for data pre- and post-treatment, as mentioned before. Second, since the purchase of the clubs has been controversial and provided several examples of why the owners of the clubs are authoritarian, it can be assumed that fans of the clubs are more likely to think of these countries when they think of authoritarian states. Third and most important, the research that this design is inspired by his previously measured attitudes toward a broader group (Muslims) based on an example of an Egyptian Muslim man (Salah) (ALRABABA'H

et al., 2021). Together with the social identity theory, this provides incentives for the fact that the sports community can change attitudes in favor of the ideas that the states stand for.

Also, the choice to measure these attitudes corresponds with the aim of the study, which is to research the effect sportswashing has on supporters' attitudes and to contribute to a greater understanding of the phenomenon. It also provides the possibility of understanding the impact on a deeper level than the previous studies, investigating to what extent the attitudes change, unveiling complexities in accepting related values. To truly understand the consequences of sportswashing, I argue that it is essential to evaluate what those attitudes consist of. Suppose the hypothesis is correct, and the result determines a change in acceptance of un-democratic values and Muslims. In that case, we can condition both negative and positive outcomes of sportswashing— the former undermining democracy, but the latter providing inclusion and counteracting prejudice.

5. Results and analysis

5.1 Regression difference-in-difference: France

Table 1 below presents the results of regression difference-in-difference on French supporters' attitudes toward different values related to Qatar, with sportswashing as treatment. The dependent variables are presented in separate columns, with varying effects on time and group. Starting with variable (1), attitudes toward having Muslims as neighbors: post-treatment is measured as a dummy variable, meaning that the results are interpreted about pre-treatment. This is a positive correlation, where a step from pre- to post-treatment increases attitudes of not wanting Muslims as neighbors with 0.0556 on a scale from 1-4. This level of statistical significance means that the probability of the coefficient being positive holds for an estimated 99,9% of potential samples drawn from the survey. It further provides evidence that our sample is representative of the population. Substantially this means that prejudice against Muslims has increased between the periods in France in general.

The same reasoning applies to the treated group, Paris, which, as a dummy, is measured against all other areas in France. This coefficient for variable (1) instead points to a negative correlation, where attitudes in Paris generally are more favorable toward Muslims than in the rest of France. The connection lacks statistical significance, meaning we cannot be as confident that this estimate is a consequence of randomness regarding the sample. The same goes for our difference-in-difference estimator. The treated group in post-treatment is meant to present the difference between the estimated trend (contrafactual change) and treatment effect – which, accordingly, is the most critical measurement in this analysis. While the estimator is negative in line with our predictions, this study cannot confirm that this is due to the treatment and not randomness. There is not enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis, namely that there is no correlation.

Following the reasoning above, the only other significant results are connected to variables (3) and (4). For variable (3), the b-coefficient for the treated group is -0.380. Mechanically, this means that when moving from the control group to the treatment group, the attitudes toward not wanting a democratic system decrease with -0.380 on a scale from 1-4.

Substantially, this interprets that the people in Paris seem more favorable toward wanting a democratic system than the rest of France, where the explained difference has a significance level of 99.9%.

The most interesting result relates to the variable (4), which measures the choice to prioritize the order in the nation above the democratic values of freedom of speech and citizens' involvement in decision-making. Starting with post-treatment, the b-coefficient is negative, suggesting that the attitudes have decreased with -0.0654 on a scale from 0-1 from the pre-treatment period. This change has a significance level of 95%. This means there is a general negative trend where fewer people seem to prioritize the order in the nation over democratic values. Furthermore, compared to the control group, the b-coefficient for our treated group, Paris, is also negative. The difference between the two groups is -0.315 on a scale from 0-1 – which is a relatively notable change on almost 1/3 of the maximum effect. People in Paris generally prioritize democratic values over the order in the nation more than the general trend in France. With this statistical significance, the probability of the coefficient being negative holds for 99,9% of potential samples drawn from the survey. As discussed in section 4.5.1, this highlights a constant difference in outcome trends between Paris and the rest of France.

This variable also holds the only significant diff-in-diff estimator, where the difference between the treated group and the estimated trend is 0.322 on a scale from 0-1. Which, again, is a considerable change. Also, this effect has a significance level of 99.9% which suggests that there is some evidence to support a causal relationship between the treatment and its impact on attitudes. It is further positive, which means that the treatment has induced a positive effect on the treated group. Even though Parisians, in general, tend to prioritize democratic values more than the rest of France, this estimate point to an increase within the group after treatment. Meaning, that attitudes shift in line with our second hypothesis, where the attitudes toward prioritizing the order in the nation increase with close to 1/3 of the maximum effect—pointing to an increase in authoritarian attitudes and even developing in the opposite direction as the general attitudes between the two periods.

Even though the rest of the diff-in-diff estimators are statistically insignificant, it is worth noting that all variables, but variable (2), measure a change in the same direction as our hypotheses predicted.

Table 1. *Regression DiD of French supporters' attitudes toward values connected w. Qatar.*

	(1) Not wanting Muslims as neighbors	(2) Wanting a strong leader w/o elections	(3) Not wanting a democratic system	(4) Prioritizing order in nation above democratic values
Post-treatment	0.0556*** (0.0160)	0.123 (0.0651)	-0.0904 (0.0479)	-0.0654* (0.0254)
Treated group (Paris)	-0.0132 (0.0513)	-0.130 (0.155)	-0.380*** (0.114)	-0.315*** (0.0896)
Treated group in post-treatment	-0.0423 (0.0653)	-0.130 (0.199)	0.224 (0.148)	0.322** (0.113)
Year survey	-0.00575*** (0.000728)	-0.0171*** (0.00397)	-0.00254 (0.00293)	0.000303 (0.000873)
Constant	11.63*** (1.456)	36.31*** (7.963)	6.711 (5.878)	-0.165 (1.741)
Observations	5946	4736	4757	5083
R^2	0.016	0.010	0.011	0.005

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

The regression in Table 2 shows the effects of controlling for other independent variables like gender, age, sports membership, and political scale (left-right).

Looking at the coefficients related to age, it can be concluded that a higher age indicates more prejudice (as predicted) and more authoritarian attitudes. This with positive coefficients on variables (1), (2), and (4), all with a significance level of 99,9%. Notably, the third coefficient is negative, indicating the opposite of wanting a democratic system. Table 1's findings may only be relevant if the appropriate variables are controlled for.

The variables size of the town and education displayed an anticipated negative correlation, indicating a more liberal stance in larger cities and among people with a higher education. As further predicted, being situated on the far right of the political spectrum is associated with a negative correlation across all variables. This is evidenced by increased prejudice toward Muslims and authoritarian attitudes.

What is a bit unexpected is the relation between gender and our dependent variables, which partially opposes the former research. Women in France tend to favor un-democratic values more than men.

Table 2. *Regression of French supporters' attitudes toward values connected with Qatar (w. control variables)*

	(1) Not wanting Muslims as neighbors	(2) Wanting a strong leader w/o election	(3) Not wanting a democratic system	(4) Prioritizing order in nation above democratic values
Year survey	-0.00677*** (0.000755)	-0.0213*** (0.00398)	-0.00257 (0.00294)	-0.00373* (0.00147)
Gender	-0.0145 (0.00835)	-0.0117 (0.0279)	0.0770*** (0.0206)	0.0499*** (0.0150)
Age	0.00160*** (0.000236)	0.00324*** (0.000789)	-0.00261*** (0.000580)	0.00399*** (0.000424)
Size of town	-0.0110*** (0.00269)	-0.0199* (0.00895)	-0.0377*** (0.00660)	-0.0154** (0.00484)
Political scale (left- right)	0.00804*** (0.00138)	0.0343*** (0.00474)	-0.00454 (0.00348)	0.0176*** (0.00250)
Education	-0.0381*** (0.00606)	-0.227*** (0.0192)	-0.232*** (0.0140)	-0.139*** (0.0108)
Constant	13.60*** (1.509)	44.43*** (7.970)	6.996 (5.896)	7.680** (2.934)
Observations	5798	4728	4747	4162
R ²	0.036	0.033	0.030	0.055

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

5.2 Regression difference-in-difference: UK

Table 2 presents the results of a regression DiD on British supporters' attitudes toward values connected with the UAE after purchasing Manchester City. For Britain, the only significant results are the differences between pre-and post-treatment periods. Based on the analysis, the b-coefficient of variable (1) is -0.0452, which suggests a negative correlation. This means that the attitudes between the pre-and post-period decreased by 0.384 points on a scale of 1-4. Substantially fewer people mention Muslims when answering the question of whom they do not want as neighbors, indicating a general decrease in prejudice. This is statistically significant on a 95% level, meaning that the probability of the coefficient being positive holds for an equal estimated percentage of potential samples drawn from the survey.

Regarding variable (2), there is a decrease of -0.164 on a scale of 1-4 when comparing the post-period to the pre-period – the change is significant on a 99% level. The B-coefficient for variable (3) decreases correspondingly with -0.270, with a 99.9% significance level. This means that people generally tend to want a strong leader less than before, instead favoring a democratic political system. The adverse development in variable (4) also supports this line of change, where people again tend to favor democratic values over order in the nation with a decrease of - 0.0264 from the pre-period on a scale from 0-1. This change has a significance level of 95%. In summary, this concludes a generally negative trend considering authoritarian attitudes and an equivalent positive trend in democratic attitudes.

However, most importantly, the DiD estimates are insignificant, which means that we cannot conclude that the differences between contrafactual differences and the actual outcome are caused by sportswashing rather than by chance. All estimates except the one for variable (4) even measure a change in the opposite direction than the one predicted from our hypotheses.

Table 3. *Regression DiD of British supporters' attitudes toward values connected w. the United Arab Emirates*

	(1) Not wanting Muslims as neighbors	(2) Wanting a strong leader w/o election	(3) Not wanting a democratic system	(4) Prioritizing order in nation above democratic values
Post-treatment	-0.0542*** (0.0146)	-0.164** (0.0613)	-0.270*** (0.0471)	-0.0264 (0.0223)
Treated group (southern Manchester)	-0.129 (0.0859)	0.147 (0.276)	-0.0850 (0.204)	0.0666 (0.138)
Treated group in post-treatment	0.0699 (0.101)	-0.211 (0.319)	-0.0775 (0.240)	0.00567 (0.161)
Year survey	-0.00174** (0.000614)	0.00774 (0.00415)	-0.00123 (0.00321)	-0.00151* (0.000716)
Constant	3.621** (1.228)	-13.60 (8.317)	4.174 (6.433)	3.379* (1.429)
Observations	5805	4003	3993	4699
R^2	0.018	0.002	0.037	0.005

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

In addition, only considering statistically significant results, size of the town and education seem to have the same effect on liberal values as in France. The impact of gender is also somewhat similar to the one in France. While women tend to favor the option of not wanting a democratic system more than men, the results also show that women tend to have less prejudice against Muslims.

The results for age are, however, somewhat mixed. With a higher age, prejudice seems to grow towards Muslims when measuring which group the respondents do not want as neighbors. The same effect equals for prioritizing order in the nation above democratic values. However, there is a correspondingly negative development over age, considering wanting a strong leader and not wanting a democratic system, instead pointing to more democratic values. The same effect applies to income as a variable. Higher income seems to negatively

affect wanting a strong leader and not wanting a democratic system. This means that people with higher incomes in Britain tend to have more democratic values than people with less income. However, the opposite applies to variable (4) – where a higher income instead means that you generally prioritize order in nation above democratic values.

It is further hard to determine what these mixed attitudes depend on, but could, for example, be due to reliability issues in interpretation. The interpretation of questions can impact one's perspective on what a democratic system means. Different individuals may have varying definitions, with some considering order in the nation as part of it, which could explain how one group could favor variable (4) and not (3). There are additionally contextual differences between England and France, causing differences in effects between table 2 and 4.

Nonetheless, most variables produce reasonable effects on attitudes for both France and England.

Table 4. Regression of British supporters' attitudes toward values connected w. the United Arab Emirates (w. control variables)

	(1) Not wanting Muslims as neighbors	(2) Wanting a strong leader w/o election	(3) Not wanting a democratic system	(4) Prioritizing order in nation above democratic values
Year survey	-0.00297*** (0.000699)	0.0126* (0.00503)	0.00397 (0.00376)	0.000634 (0.00124)
Gender	-0.0263** (0.00941)	0.0233 (0.0343)	0.0737** (0.0257)	-0.00595 (0.0174)
Age	0.00233*** (0.000271)	-0.00270** (0.000995)	-0.00527*** (0.000743)	0.00397*** (0.000510)
Size of town	-0.0157** (0.00514)	-0.0318 (0.0223)	-0.00507 (0.0186)	-0.00583 (0.00910)
Income	-0.000177 (0.00177)	-0.0573*** (0.00655)	-0.0487*** (0.00491)	0.00889** (0.00322)
Education	-0.0477*** (0.0125)	-0.201*** (0.0303)	-0.315*** (0.0162)	-0.0125 (0.0123)
Constant	5.984*** (1.396)	-22.85* (10.08)	-5.771 (7.536)	-1.156 (2.472)
Observations	4373	3093	3086	2967
R ²	0.041	0.037	0.087	0.024

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

6. Discussion of Results

Based on our theoretical framework that combined research on sportswashing with research on sports communities, this study hypothesized that supporters of PSG and City would support the state purchase and change attitudes in favor of the state to gain a positive and superior picture of the ingroup compared to outgroups. The attitudes expected to change related to the characteristics of Qatar and the UAE and therefore consisted of acceptance toward authoritarian values and Muslims. However, as discussed above, the results are inconclusive and show little to support the hypothesis and its predictions. The findings showed that people in Paris generally were more positive to democracy than the rest of France. But, the deviations caused by the treatment showed effects in line with the theory, where the attitudes in Paris changed with decreased prejudice toward Muslims and increased authoritarian values (with not wanting a strong leader as an exception). However, the treated group only showed one statistically noteworthy divergence from the contrafactual change, as Parisians demonstrated a greater prioritization of national order above democratic values upon treatment. Hence, it cannot be deduced that the remaining estimates of difference were caused by the purchase and not by coincidence.

The Manchester case did not provide much evidence to support the hypothesis either. In fact, the results even indicated that attitudes in the treated group changed in the opposite direction from what was predicted by the theory. However, neither these results were significant enough to conclusively prove that the change was, or was not, due to coincidence. Therefore, we cannot definitively determine whether the treatment impacted Paris or Manchester in any direction. Again, this thesis cannot discard the null hypothesis, meaning that we cannot discard the possibility of there being no correlation between sportswashing and supporters' attitudes.

This can further mean two things: either there is no connection between sportswashing through the purchase of an elite sports club and supporters' attitudes toward the owning state, or this study has failed to capture it. While the first option is possible, several things point to the second. Firstly, as mentioned in 3.3 and 3.4, the expected attitude change relates to accepting regimes such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates and their corresponding values. While this might undermine democratic values like the ones measured in the dataset, there is a distinction between accepting and legitimizing other states with a different rule and changing attitudes entirely in favor of such ideas. The social identity theory provides

incentives for a change in attitudes. City and PSG supporters are likely to use the success after the purchase to differentiate themselves from other clubs positively – and to paint a positive picture of their owner to legitimize that. On the other hand, a change of attitudes favoring a controversial state does not necessarily mean they would want to live in an authoritarian state themselves. The development is, therefore, unlikely to connect to the domestic political climate. It is accordingly doubtful that supporters start to bias a change toward an authoritarian rule in their own country after the purchase. Although our analyzed variables are connected to opinions that usually relate to authoritarian governments, like having a strong leader that does not need to worry about elections, they are formulated to capture views on the own national context. One option would therefore be to instead measure acceptance of the existence of such regimes and values.

For future research, one could measure more direct attitudes toward the regimes in question by creating a survey on supportership. Previous research has done this, like Gries et al. (2010), who measures American attitudes toward China after the Olympics by explicitly asking what they think of the country. While this study could not conclusively demonstrate significant differences either, it could possibly yield different results when examining the acquisition of elite sports teams. However, due to the selected method and data availability, this alternative approach was a possible option for this thesis. Either such questions were only available for specific periods, or the data existed exclusively on a national level of analysis. Since this study aims to research the effect of sportswashing explicitly, surveys that ask the same questions over time and provided data on a NUTS 3 level were needed.

On the other hand, the operationalization of the dependent variable still fits a vital function in line with the aim of this paper. The theoretical framework for this study provided a good reason to investigate whether sportswashing could change supporters' attitudes in favor of authoritarian values, not only accepting their existence. The study aimed to research changing attitudes connected to controversial regimes and contribute to a greater understanding of which attitudes can be expected to change.

But what about our one significant estimator? Since Manchester does not provide a significant estimate of a difference considering variable (4), generalizing the results from France is difficult. However, based on the critical points of this analysis like measuring attitudes toward the states indirectly and problems with isolating who is a supporter and who is not – there might not be a reason to expect significant results either. For example, the results could be due to a substantial underestimation of the effect by not isolating the right group as treated. It

is therefore possible that the lack of significant answers in the analysis of Paris and Manchester is due to the inclusion of non-supporters, which could weaken the effect. This problem is especially prevalent in Manchester, where there is a high possibility of measuring conflicting attitudes from non-supporters and rival United supporters. If the social identity theory is correct, each community of supporters will try to differentiate themselves from their rival teams positively. As argued before, City fans will likely use it to their advantage. However, United fans, being one of the main rivalries to City, will most likely use the same purchase to press down on City in their fight for local status and superiority – pointing to all the negative values related to the UAE. In that case, the conflicting effects and attitudes would take each other out and might even produce results contradictory to the predictions of this thesis. If this is true, measuring rival supporters in Manchester could explain why the difference-in-difference estimates for Manchester don't align with our hypotheses.

Meaning that the difference in difference estimates that align with our theory in France may still be of some value. While some of the estimators may not be statistically significant, they still offer valuable insights into the sample. By considering the significance level, we can determine the level of certainty in the correlations and their representation of the population. Even though we cannot exclude the possibility of the effect being a coincidence, it is worth debating the opposite as well. Nonetheless, it is important to note that we should not wholly disregard our hypothesis since it appears that accurately assessing it may be hindered by significant measurement errors. There is simply too much uncertainty to establish a conclusion in either direction.

Likewise, it's essential to acknowledge that there may be other possible explanations for the results besides the one stated. For one, the displayed results could be due to the “soft disempowerment” explained by Brannagan and Guiliotti (2018). The unlawful behavior of both states could create a reaction within the audience, challenging the state's credibility. If this is the case, the social identity theory could work by supporters encouraging other parts of the club to seem superior, like good sportsmanship. However, City and Newcastle United provide clear cases where supporters accept and support their controversial owner by supporting the Emirati justice system and wearing Saudi Arabian thawbs and guthas.

Moreover, the outcomes may be influenced by various factors beyond sportswashing. Due to the gap in time between the surveys, our one significant difference-in-difference estimate could be symptoms of another phenomenon that has happened between the pre- and post-periods. Implicating that the measured results of this analysis might have captured symptoms

another cause, for example a local reform. Even though the method isolates for bigger societal changes, this gap leaves a void where other factors could affect a deviation from the contrafactual change for our treated group. In order to exclude such effects or chocks, it would for future research be better to use data that is closer in time to our hypothesized treatment.

7. Conclusion

By connecting research on sportswashing and sport communities, the idea throughout this paper was that if a local football team has an external state-affiliated owner, supporters of the team will more likely be favorable to the values/characteristics of the owner-state. Thereby producing different outcomes than hosting a major sport event in the domestic context of an authoritarian country – which by former research, has been proved to produce effects of soft disempowerment. How does sportswashing through an elite sports club purchase affect supporters' attitudes toward values connected to the characteristics of the external state-affiliated ownership? This was the research question that followingly guided this thesis's design and was answered by a regression difference-in-difference of Manchester City and Paris Saint-Germain as treated groups.

The inconclusive results provided only marginal statistical evidence to support the hypothesis upon initial examination. However, due to several systematical errors in measurement, the same inconclusiveness gained some points of importance based on what can be expected of the results. Thereby not providing enough evidence to emasculate the hypothesis entirely – leaving the explanation open to both sportswashing and completely different factors of cause.

Even though a clear conclusion is beyond this paper, it is within reach for further studies. The unsettled questions left by this thesis provide openings for future research. Is there a correlation that still needs to be captured? Is there no correlation at all? Or can sportswashing through state affiliation of a sports club even create an opposite effect than the intended one, causing soft disempowerment?

Nonetheless, a step has been taken toward a more extensive understanding of such effects. This is done by diving deeper into potential theoretical mechanisms and testing which attitudes can change in relation to the phenomenon.

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