6-20-2014

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World Cup Begins with Diminished Protests, Increased Security, and Debates Over Legacy

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Category/Department: Brazil
Published: 2014-06-20

Brazil opened the 2014 World Cup in São Paulo on June 12 with a 3-1 win against Croatia that featured two historic firsts for the quadrennial soccer tournament. Brazil, which with five trophies has more than any other country, had never before scored an own goal (an accidental goal against itself) in a World Cup. In addition, it was the first time that the president of the host country and the president of FIFA, the sport’s world governing body, did not officially open the event.

President Dilma Rousseff of Brazil and FIFA president Sepp Blatter both attended the match but did not appear before the public during the opening ceremony, a decision that highlighted the unpopularity of both the Brazilian government and FIFA with respect to the organization, execution, and cost of the event. Anti-FIFA graffiti is visible in many of the 12 host cities, especially Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and fans booed Rousseff as well as chanted a vulgar derogatory phrase when she was shown on the Itaquerão Stadium’s screen.

At least eight host cities saw protests on the day of the opening match, although with numbers in the hundreds to thousands, far below the tens to hundreds of thousands that flooded Brazilian streets in June 2013 (NotiSur, Aug. 23, 2013). In São Paulo, home to the largest opening-day protest, a few thousand organized under the banner "Não Vai Ter Copa" (There will be no Cup) clashed with military police and shock troops, which fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Several journalists were injured, including a CNN reporter live on screen and an Argentine photojournalist.

Following the São Paulo protests, the minister of the Secretaria de Direitos Humanos, Ideli Salvatti, defended the actions of the police in breaking up the gathering. "The right to protest cannot impede the right of people to go to the event," she said at a press conference with UNICEF to highlight efforts to fight sexual exploitation of children. She claimed that the secretariat’s ombud had already registered complaints about excessive use of force by police.

However, on June 15, the date of the first game played in Rio de Janeiro, multiple media sources reported that riot police and a plainclothes police officer used live fire to disperse a small crowd of protesters outside Maracanã Stadium.

Protesters balance fandom with concerns, reject Rousseff’s arguments

On June 10, Rousseff appeared live on national television to defend the World Cup against the principal critiques from protesters, that the money spent on the mega-event should have been used for education and health care, among other needs. She highlighted that public resources for the tournament stadiums amounted to R$8 billion (US$3.6 billion), while national, state, and local investments in education and health care from 2010, the year stadium construction began, through 2013 amounted to R$1.7 trillion (US$76.2 billion), or 212 times as much.

Michael Amaro, a programmer from Itaboraí, a municipality in greater Rio, attended the June 12 downtown protest and was unconvinced. "The government spent R$1.3 trillion on health care and education and it’s still as bad as it is? It’s not 10% as efficient as it should be," he said.
The protest, which numbered in the hundreds to perhaps 1,000, was largely peaceful with only one person injured and six arrested. Signs read, "Cadê a mobilidade urbana?" (What happened to urban mobility?) and "A Copa das Remoções" (The World Cup of forced evictions). In contrast to the black blocs, masked protesters who have provoked conflict with police during Brazilian protests and were present in São Paulo, the Rio protest featured a Carnival atmosphere, with costumed protesters in pink tutus and glitter sporting water guns.

Icaro dos Santos, a designer and DJ who lives in Rio, explained that the group, organized under the name Carnavandalização (a portmanteau of "Carnaval" and "vandalization"), sees the festive costume approach as strategic. "The police beat us less and the press take more pictures, which they end up having to caption with the name of the costume—corrupt politician, exploitative construction company—further getting our point across," he said. At the protest, the group arranged a mock marriage between government officials and construction firms that have benefitted from lucrative stadium contracts in order to highlight cost overruns and corruption.

In Cantagalo, a favela near the Copacabana neighborhood of Rio, where TV broadcasters have set up their World Cup analysis studios and FIFA Fan Fest broadcasts matches live, every bar was tuned to the game. At Bar do Virada, on the principal access route to the community, plastic chairs and tables spilled into the street under the watchful eye of the UPP (pacification police), suspected in the recent death of a local resident (NotiSur, May 9, 2014).

During halftime, Felipe Ferreira, an electrician who lives in Cantagalo, was adamant both in favor of the home team and in his concerns about the issues plaguing the country. "Brazilians are passionate about soccer," he said. "But thousands of people wait in line when they go to the emergency room. For me, they're two different things."

Security operation during World Cup largest in Brazil's history

In anticipation of street protests and other possible disruptions to World Cup operations, the Brazilian government has amassed 180,000 troops at a total cost of R$2 billion (US$900 million). They include the armed forces, federal police, federal highway police, and the military and civil police of 12 states plus the Federal District. In addition, Brazilian Intelligence Agency agents will go undercover in the stands during matches. Another 30,000 Army soldiers are on standby as reserves if needed.

In addition to troops on the ground, in Rio de Janeiro alone there are several naval vessels patrolling the waters off Copacabana and Ipanema beaches, frequent helicopter flyovers, and a pioneering use in Brazil of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, or drones). All 12 host cities have some form of a central command and monitoring center that allows for real-time surveillance of traffic and street events, modeled on the Rio Command Center designed by IBM.

Ancelmo Gois, a columnist with Rio daily O Globo, pointed out that this number of troops is the largest in Brazil’s history, well over the 130,000 mobilized for Brazil’s largest military conflict, the Paraguayan War of 1865-1870.

Each host city has established an Extraordinary Committee for Integrated Regional Security (Cesir) to monitor the security situation, especially around stadiums. If the state military police, who have jurisdiction over public safety, are overwhelmed, Cesir can recommend that the governor request the help of armed forces. The president, together with the minister of defense, then determine if
armed forces will be deployed under a Law and Order Guarantee (Garantia da Lei e da Ordem, GLO).

Minister of Justice José Eduardo Cardozo declared on May 30 that the legacy of the World Cup would be a first-of-its-kind integration among security forces. "If anybody doubts that the World Cup will leave any result for Brazilians, just take a look at this command and control center. In truth, we’ve never had integration between police forces, in which everyone participates in decision making, and the World Cup has created the conditions for this to happen," he said during the inauguration ceremony for the Regional Integrated Command and Control Center in Fortaleza, the capital of Ceará and one of the host cities.

**Unions and homeless workers movement take advantage of World Cup spotlight**

If street protests have been diminished, especially in light of the overwhelming security presence during the World Cup, the labor movement and its allies in the Movimento de Trabalhadores Sem-Teto (MTST) has been exceptionally active, leveraging the global spotlight and influx of visitors to make demands. São Paulo’s subway workers led the way with a five-day strike that severely hampered mobility in the already traffic-choked city of 11 million. It was resolved two days before the opening match at Itaquerão Stadium, in the far eastern part of the city, which is best reached by metro. The subway workers union was demanding a pay raise and upset at the firing of 42 workers for purported acts of vandalism.

Rio’s subway workers voted against a transit shutdown after Metrô Rio agreed to a retroactive 8% pay raise and increased entry-level salaries. Airport workers went on a one-day strike on June 12 at Rio’s two commercial and one private airports. The strikers included check-in staff, departure-gate agents, and cleaning crews. The Agência Nacional de Aviação Civil (ANAC) made contingency plans and brought in temporary workers that prevented any impact on flight operations. However, a group of striking workers closed an access road to Tom Jobim International Airport (Galeão) that caused a few dozen passengers to miss flights.

In Natal, a bus strike pulled 70% of the fleet from city streets, which after negotiations was reduced to only half, with just a 30% reduction during rush hour. At press time, the strike is in its fifth day and is anticipated to continue at least through June 18. The strike impacted fan travel to the Mexico vs. Cameroon game on June 13 as taxi services were overwhelmed. Other than buses, there is no alternative public transportation that serves the city’s Arena das Dunas. Heavy rains have hit Natal, also complicating traffic, which has resulted in the city’s declaring a state of public calamity.

The city’s Adjunct Secretary of Urban Mobility Clodoaldo Cabral called the strike "unacceptable opportunism." He elaborated, "They [the strikers] had plenty of time to take action and decided to go on strike only during the first Cup game here in Natal."

In addition to unions, the MTST has actively pushed its agenda during the World Cup. Members joined São Paulo’s striking transit workers on June 9 and Rio airport workers on June 12. On June 4, the MTST march had 25,000 people according to organizers—12,000 according to the police—in the direction of Itaquerão Stadium.

Guilherme Boulos, national coordinator for the MTST, said in an amplified speech, "Itaquerão isn’t just for gringos! In eight days [when the Cup opens] there will only be bourgeois here. But today
this stadium is for the people." Concerned about rising prices, MTST has occupied buildings just a few kilometers from the stadium and installed families in the "Copa do Povo" (People’s Cup). From 2008 to 2011, residential apartments in the Itaquera neighborhood near the stadium increased in value by 10%. From 2011 to present, they have gone up by 50%. In light of this phenomenon, Boulos told Carta Capital in a May 2013 interview, "The biggest legacy of the Cup will be real estate speculation."

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