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NOTES

VAR CHECK: VISA REQUIREMENTS FOR THE 2026 FIFA WORLD CUP

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ABSTRACT

"We are bullish about the power of football (soccer). It will become the number one sport in North America" —FIFA President Gianni Infantino

Canada, Mexico, and the United States will host the 2026 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup. While the tournament is expected to generate more than $40 billion in economic activity across the continent, FIFA's decision to award hosting rights to North America coincides with Gianni Infantino's stated goal of dethroning American football as the most popular sport in North America. While billions of dollars and a healthy dose of soft power await North America on the other side of the tournament, these named beneficiaries first need the event itself to go well, something which, to this point, has been glossed over and treated like a minor detail. Although a sizeable portion of FIFA's revenue comes from the sale of broadcast and media rights, it may be a shock to learn that host cities like Seattle and Guadalajara in fact need fans to come to town for the matches these cities will host in order to reap the benefits of what is supposed to be an economic windfall. However, for that to happen, fans from all over the world first need to get approval to travel inside the borders of Canada, Mexico, and the United States. This is where the problems begin. FIFA, a world football mainstay, the Colombian men's national team ranked thirteenth in the world in December of 2025. As of December of 2025, the wait time for a B-2 visa interview at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá is 398 days. Türkiye, ranked twenty-fifth in the world, finished third in the 2002 FIFA World Cup. At one point recently, the wait time for a B-2 interview in Ankara was 560 days. No team has won the African Cup of Nations more times than Côte d'Ivoire. As of March 2025, the processing time for a Canadian Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) for an applicant applying from Côte d'Ivoire was 433 days. Ranked nineteenth in the world, Senegal figures to make a deep run in the 2026 tournament. To be approved for a Mexican visa, all one must do is provide the requisite documents during an in-person appointment. For a Senegalese supporter living in Dakar, the nearest Mexican Embassy is located a cool 1,850 miles away (35 hours by car, both ways) in Rabat, Morocco. Need this list continue? FIFA expects to generate $11 billion from the 2026 World Cup cycle. The sixteen cities hosting matches across the continent in 2026 have committed themselves to hundreds of millions of dollars in investments toward infrastructure and transportation. North America has given the rest of the world permission to place the continent under a global magnifying glass while a spotlight the size of the Empire State Building is attached to it. There are major players involved, and they are all counting on the tournament to be a massive success. However, there remain far more questions than answers. The research for this Note began in the fall of 2023. At that point, these logistical concerns had received little to no attention. While that was of concern, it felt too early to sound the alarms. Now in late 2025, very little has changed since the beginning of this project. While some commentary has cropped up in recent months, the three host countries have yet to take any concrete or meaningful steps

toward addressing the issues outlined in this Note. Now it's time to sound the alarms.

I. INTRODUCTION

Canada, Mexico, and the United States are set to host the 2026 Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) World Cup.[1] The infamous international tournament, drawing billions of viewers every four years,[2] will take center stage once again in June and July of 2026.[3] One hundred and four matches will play out over the course of six weeks in sixteen cities across the continent, including Los Angeles, Mexico City, and Toronto.[4]

The fact that North America will host the upcoming competition is a massive achievement.[5] Bids to host the competition begin to materialize years in advance,[6] and the opportunity for a country to have FIFA World Cup tournament fixtures played on its soil is universally coveted.[7] Further, coverage of the event shines a global spotlight on host countries and generates significant economic activity.[8]

Although the modern version of the sport in Canada, Mexico, and the United States traces back as far as the late 1800s and early 1900s,[9] South America and

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[1] *United Bid Selected to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, U.S. SOCCER (June 13, 2018), https://www.ussoccer.com/stories/2018/06/united-bid-selected-to-host-the-2026-fifa-world-cup. *See generally FIFA – Soccer's World Governing Body*, U.S. SOCCER, https://www.ussoccer.com/history/organizational-structure/fifa (last visited June 7, 2025) (providing the background on FIFA as an organization).

[2] *FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™*, INSIDE FIFA, https://inside.fifa.com/tournament-organisation/world-cup-2022-in-numbers (last visited June 7, 2025).

[3] *View the FIFA World Cup 26™ Match Schedule*, FIFA, https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/canadamexicousa2026/articles/match-schedule-fixtures-results-teams-stadiums (last visited June 7, 2025).

[4] *Id.*

[5] Neil Davidson, *The 2026 World Cup Is Coming to Canada: FIFA Votes in Favour of North American Bid over Morocco*, NAT'L POST (June 13, 2018), https://nationalpost.com/sports/soccer/newsalert-canada-part-of-winning-world-cup-bid-for-2026-mens-soccer-showcase (explaining the Canadian Soccer Association President Steven Reed called the FIFA Congress decision to select the 2026 North America bid "an extraordinary honor and privilege[,]" and the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF) President Victor Montagliani called the vote a "monumental victory").

[6] *Analyzing How the World Cup Bidding Process Works*, WORLD SOCCER TALK (Nov. 18, 2022), https://worldsoccertalk.com/news/analyzing-how-the-world-cup-bidding-process-works/.

[7] Davidson, *supra* note 5.

[8] *See generally* Aidyn Bibolov et al., IMF, *2022 FIFA World Cup: Economic Impact on Qatar and Regional Spillovers*, IMF SIP/2024/011 (Feb. 21, 2024); *see also Hosting the 2026 FIFA World Cup™ Could Create More than $5 Billion in Economic Activity for North America*, U.S. SOCCER (Feb. 8, 2018), https://www.ussoccer.com/stories/2018/02/hosting-the-2026-fifa-world-cup-could-create-more-than-5-billion-in-economic-activity-for-north-amer.

[9] *Ontario: The Early Years*, CANADIAN SOCCER HIST., http://www.canadiansoccerhistory.com/Ontario/Ontario-%20The%20Early%20Years.html (last visited June 7, 2025); *Mexico Soccer: A Passionate and Competitive National Sport*, KIDS PLAY SOCCER, https://www.kids-play-

Europe have dominated the most watched competition in the world since the tournament's inception in 1930.[10] In fact, no team from any country outside of Europe or South America has advanced to the final match of the FIFA World Cup in the tournament's long and storied history.[11]

How, then, did North America land such a coveted opportunity? There was a market for growth. The "most powerful man in sports[,]" FIFA President Gianni Infantino, did not mince words while discussing Canada, Mexico, and the United States in light of their selection as hosts for the 2026 tournament:[12] "We are more than bullish (about the tournament's potential success), we are convinced that the impact of the game will be massive. We are bullish about the power of football (soccer). It will become the number one sport in North America."[13] FIFA's decision to bring the tournament to Canada, Mexico, and the United States in 2026 reaffirms its commitment to making soccer more popular in North America, and football's governing body is banking on all three countries to work together and put on a successful event.[14]

Hosting an international spectacle of this magnitude generates many questions. Are Canada, Mexico, and the United States prepared to facilitate the arrival of millions of international visitors in June and July of 2026? Do Canada, Mexico, and the United States' temporary travel laws, regulations, and processes permit such an influx of arrivals? The occasion is unlike any sporting event Canada, Mexico, and the United States have ever seen.[15] What's more, the occasion is unique from previous FIFA tournaments,[16] as the 2026 FIFA World Cup marks the first time in history that three countries will jointly host the competition.[17] This makes an already difficult task even more complex: Not only

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soccer.com/mexicosoccer.html (last visited June 7, 2025); *U.S. Soccer Timeline*, U.S. SOCCER, https://www.ussoccer.com/history/timeline (last visited June 7, 2025).

[10] *See World Cup*, BRITANNICA (Dec. 22, 2025), https://www.britannica.com/sports/World-Cup-football.

[11] *Id.*

[12] *Gianni Infantino*, FORBES, https://www.forbes.com/profile/gianni-infantino/?sh=7c9f4a05448c (last visited June 7, 2025).

[13] Jacob Whitehead, *FIFA Convinced Soccer Will Become No 1 Sport in North America — Gianni Infantino*, N.Y. TIMES: THE ATHLETIC (Dec. 16, 2022) (citation omitted), https://theathletic.com/4008118/2022/12/16/fifa-north-america-infantino-world-cup-2026/.

[14] *See id.*

[15] Jennifer Vazquez, *'World Stage': NYC, NJ Kick Off FIFA World Cup 2026 Host City Efforts*, NBC N.Y. (May 18, 2023, 10:39 PM), https://www.nbcnewyork.com/news/local/world-stage-nyc-nj-kick-off-fifa-world-cup-2026-host-city-efforts/4346019/; *see* Press Release, U.S. Travel Association, New Report Details Necessary Travel Reforms Before FIFA World Cup, Olympics, Mega-Decade of Events (Feb. 19, 2025), https://www.ustravel.org/press/new-report-details-necessary-travel-reforms-fifa-world-cup-olympics-mega-decade-events.

[16] Jhasua Razo & Marco Chacón, *The 2026 World Cup in Numbers*, CNN (Dec. 18, 2022), https://www.cnn.com/interactive/2022/12/world/the-2026-world-cup-in-numbers/.

[17] *Id.* While the multinational nature of the 2026 World Cup remains significant, FIFA has since gone three steps further into uncharted territory. On October 11, 2023, FIFA

will international visitors need approval to visit one of these three countries but fans from many countries will require prior approval to travel amongst two or even all three host countries over the course of the tournament to attend their home country's matches as the tournament progresses.[18]

The question boils down to this: Are the immigration and temporary travel laws and regulations of Canada, Mexico, and the United States capable of accommodating the unprecedented, ongoing, and fluid travel of more than eight million fans across their borders?[19] This Note seeks to answer that question through an analysis of the laws, regulations, and processes governing immigration and temporary travel in Canada, Mexico, and the United States.

II. BACKGROUND

On June 13, 2018, FIFA announced that Canada, Mexico, and the United States will host the 2026 edition of the FIFA World Cup.[20] The successful joint bid, submitted by the Canadian Soccer Association, the Mexican Football

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announced that Morocco, Portugal, and Spain will host the 2030 FIFA World Cup. *FIFA World Cup 2030™: Morocco, Portugal and Spain Joint Bid Is Sole Candidate to Host*, FIFA (Oct. 11, 2023), https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/articles/world-cup-2030-spain-portugal-morocco-host-centenary-argentina-uruguay-paraguay. Additionally, as part of the 2030 competition, three "centenary celebration" matches will take place in Argentina, Paraguay, and Uruguay to commemorate what will be the 100th anniversary of the FIFA World Cup. *Id.* The 2026 FIFA World Cup will see matches played in three different countries; and just four years later the 2030 FIFA World Cup will consist of matches played on three different continents. *See id.*

[18] Ryan Tolmich, *Revealed: World Cup 2026 Nations Will Be Separated into Regional 'Clusters' to Limit Travel*, GOAL (May 18, 2023), https://www.goal.com/en-us/news/revealed-world-cup-2026-nations-separated-into-regional-clusters-to-limit-travel/blt3c1c3e3cb855147a (noting FIFA plans to divide host cities into three different "clusters" to limit travel in the early stages of the tournament). Although "clusters" will mitigate some international travel early in the tournament, it is inevitable that supporters from the countries that progress into the later stages of the tournament will be required to travel from Mexico and Canada into the United States. On February 4, 2024, FIFA announced that the 2026 World Cup Final will be played on July 19, 2026, at MetLife Stadium in East Rutherford, New Jersey. Joshua Hoyos, *FIFA Announces 2026 World Cup Details, Including Host Stadium for Final*, ABC NEWS (Feb. 4, 2024, 6:01 PM), https://abcnews.go.com/Sports/new-jersey-metlife-stadium-host-2026-world-cup-final/story?id=106937005.

[19] *See* Kyle Feldscher, *Trump Creates White House Task Force to Oversee Preparations for 2026 World Cup*, CNN (Mar. 7, 2025, 6:57 PM), https://www.cnn.com/2025/03/07/sport/white-house-task-force-world-cup/index.html.

[20] *United Bid Selected to Host the 2026 FIFA World Cup™*, *supra* note 1; *World Cup*, *supra* note 10 (defining the "World Cup" as a "quadrennial tournament of men's national teams that determines the sport's world champion" and stating "[i]t is likely the most popular sporting event in the world, drawing billions of television viewers every tournament").

Federation, and the United States Soccer Federation,[21] was a groundbreaking effort, as the 2026 FIFA World Cup will be the first in its storied history to feature matches played in three different countries.[22] On June 16, 2022, FIFA announced that the 2026 FIFA World Cup matches would take place in sixteen different cities across the continent[23]—two cities in Canada, three cities in Mexico, and eleven cities in the United States.[24]

Hosting this event comes with a myriad of questions and complications, particularly for fans seeking to travel to North America to support their country's team and for the three host countries, which must accommodate this sudden and sustained influx of international visitors. There are numerous components and variables which must be accounted for. The forthcoming analysis seeks to assess whether Canada, Mexico, and the United States are prepared to successfully navigate the obstacles that accompany hosting a historic influx of visitors from all over the world.

For Canada, Mexico, and the United States, there are two primary considerations that underscore the gravity of the 2026 event: There is an economic angle, and there is a geo-political and humanitarian component, with plenty at stake in both categories.

A. Economic Impact

Hosting the most popular tournament in the world is a privilege. The economic impact derived from the event and enjoyed by each host country is massive,[25] which is why countries make bids to host the event years in advance.[26] For example, the deadline to submit "expressions of interest" to host the 2034 FIFA World Cup closed on October 31, 2023.[27] Additionally, officials reported that the 2018 FIFA World Cup added $14 billion to the Russian economy,[28] and

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[21] Razo & Chacón, *supra* note 16.

[22] *Id.*

[23] *View the FIFA World Cup 26™ Match Schedule*, *supra* note 3.

[24] *Id.* The Canadian host cities are Toronto and Vancouver. *Id.* The Mexican host cities are Guadalajara, Mexico City, and Monterrey. *Id.* The American host cities are Atlanta, Boston, Dallas, Houston, Kansas City, Los Angeles, Miami, New York/New Jersey (East Rutherford, NJ), Philadelphia, San Francisco Bay Area (Santa Clara, CA), and Seattle. *Id.*

[25] *U.S. Soccer Timeline*, *supra* note 9.

[26] *Analyzing How the World Cup Bidding Process Works*, *supra* note 6.

[27] *Australia Pulls Out of Running for 2034 FIFA World Cup Hosting Rights*, MINISTRY OF SPORT (Nov. 1, 2023), https://ministryofsport.com/australia-pulls-out-of-running-for-2034-fifa-world-cup-hosting-rights/.

[28] *Id.*; Mike Rowbottom, *World Cup 2018 Added $14 Billion to Russian Economy, Organisers Report*, INSIDE THE GAMES (Oct. 23, 2018), https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1071384/world-cup-2018-added-14-billion-to-russian-economy-organisers-report (indicating the $14 billion figure was revealed in a report on the economic, social and environmental impact of the tournament by Alexey Sorokin, the chief executive of Russia's World Cup Organizing Committee).

while no official figures have been released, pre-tournament projections estimated that the 2022 event would add $17 billion to the Qatari economy.[29]

Similar levels of economic activity are anticipated for the FIFA World Cup in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Initial reports indicated that the 2026 event could bring as much as $14 billion in economic activity to North America,[30] with some host cities expecting an economic boost of over $500 million as a direct result of hosting matches.[31] Canada is expected to gain $2.65 billion dollars of positive economic output,[32] and projections from the International Trade Association suggest a $3 billion dollar injection into the Mexican economy.[33]

On March 7th, 2025, FIFA President Gianni Infantino publicly placed a projected dollar figure on the 2026 FIFA World Cup for the first time.[34] Before describing the 2026 event as "three Super Bowls every day for one month[,]" Infantino stated that the tournament will "create around 200,000 jobs and have an economic impact of around $40 billion."[35]

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[29] Logan Carney, *The Economics Behind the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022*, BUS. REV. AT BERKELEY (Nov. 14, 2022), https://businessreview.studentorg.berkeley.edu/the-economics-behind-the-fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022tm/.

[30] *Economic Impact of FIFA World Cup*, ANGELOU ECON. (June 18, 2018), https://angeloueconomics.com/keep-up-with-ae/economic-impact-of-fifa-world-cup-angeloueconomics/.

[31] Press Release, Gavin Newsome, Governor of California, ICYMI: 2026 World Cup to Generate over $1 Billion in Economic Activity Across California (July 9, 2024), https://www.gov.ca.gov/2024/07/09/icymi-2026-world-cup-to-generate-over-1-billion-in-economic-activity-across-california; *see Bay Area Host Committee Releases Economic Impact Report Estimating Positive Effect of NBA All-Star, NFL Super Bowl and FIFA World Cup*, BAY AREA HOST COMM. (June 13, 2024), https://bayareahostcommittee.com/news/bahc-releases-economic-impact-report; *see also* Press Release, Visit Seattle, Visit Seattle Announces Preliminary $929 Million Economic Impact Projection for FIFA World Cup 26 Seattle™ (Dec. 10, 2024), https://visitseattle.org/press/press-releases/fifaworldcupeconomicimpact2024/.

[32] *FIFA World Cup 26™ to Deliver Estimated CAD 3.8bn in Economic Output for Canada*, FIFA (Dec. 10, 2024, 12:00 PM), https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/news/fifa-world-cup-26-to-deliver-estimated-cad-3-8bn-in-economic-output-for-canada?requester=MediaHub&entryId=2s1Vqr1OmKzSEz9QGup5nF. This Note uses an approximate conversion of CAD to USD from March 24, 2025.

[33] *Mexico World Cup 2026 Opportunities*, INT'L TRADE ADMIN. (June 18, 2024), https://www.trade.gov/market-intelligence/mexico-world-cup-2026-opportunities. The U.S. International Trade Administration acknowledges that the host countries and their economies project to benefit in a multitude of ways, beyond just the dollar-for-dollar transactions that fans will rack up during the tournament, stating "the Mexican technology market is projected to grow at an annual rate of 7.5% from 2023 to 2026, indicating robust opportunities for U.S. tech firms offering innovative solutions such as IoT devices, cybersecurity, and AI-powered applications." *Id.*

[34] *See* Feldscher, *supra* note 19.

[35] *Id.*

The three-country format is not the only feature making its debut in the summer of 2026.[36] Thirty-two teams competed in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, as has been the case for the last seven tournaments dating back to 1998.[37] However, a new era has now arrived. As FIFA surges ahead with its stated mission to grow the game in the Western Hemisphere, FIFA is taking concrete steps to grow their financial game while doing so. More countries, fans, games, social engagement, television broadcasts, and media rights to sell all translate to more money for FIFA, but FIFA frames this as "more games, more excitement, and more teams."[38] For the first time ever, the 2026 FIFA World Cup will consist of forty-eight teams.[39] The 2026 tournament will feature a total of 104 matches, 40 more than the 64 matches played in Qatar in 2022.[40] FIFA announced in their 2022 Annual Report that during the 2022 FIFA World Cup four-year cycle (2019–2022), it generated a record $7.6 billion in revenue,[41] most of which came from the FIFA World Cup.[42] In that same 2022 Annual Report, FIFA also announced that it expects to earn $11 billion in revenue during the 2026 FIFA World Cup four-year cycle (2023–2026).[43] Given the economic activity generated by prior tournaments and the expanded field of the 2026 competition, it's no secret that Canada, Mexico, and the United States will make a lot of money, but so will FIFA.

B. Humanitarian/Geopolitical Implications

For a country seeking to host the FIFA World Cup, there is more at stake than purely economic and financial implications. Playing host is more than a country or region jumping at an opportunity to give their economy a shot in the arm.[44] As

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[36] *World Cup Host Countries*, TOPEND SPORTS (Mar. 10, 2025), https://www.topendsports.com/events/worldcupsoccer/hosts/index.htm.

[37] *The History of FIFA World Cup*, FOOTBALLHISTORY.ORG, https://www.footballhistory.org/world-cup/index.html (last visited June 7, 2025).

[38] *How the FIFA World Cup 26™ Will Work with 48 Teams*, FIFA (Mar. 1, 2023), https://www.fifa.com/fifaplus/en/articles/article-fifa-world-cup-2026-mexico-canada-usa-new-format-tournament-football-soccer.

[39] *Id.*

[40] *Id.*

[41] *FIFA Council Highlights Record Breaking Revenue in Football*, FIFA (Feb. 14, 2023, 11:00 AM), https://inside.fifa.com/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/fifa-council-highlights-record-breaking-revenue-in-football.

[42] *2022 Financial Highlights*, FIFA, https://publications.fifa.com/en/annual-report-2022/finances/2019-2022-cycle-in-review/2022-financial-highlights/ (last visited June 7, 2025).

[43] *FIFA Council Highlights Record Breaking Revenue in Football*, *supra* note 41.

[44] *See* Adam Lyjak, *The Finances Behind the 2022 World Cup*, MICH. J. ECON. (Jan. 10, 2023), https://sites.lsa.umich.edu/mje/2023/01/10/the-finances-behind-the-2022-world-cup/ ("For a wealthy nation like Qatar, the overarching goal hope [sic] of hosting this tournament is not centered around the amount of money they will make.").

the eyes of the world converge on the hosts, a healthy dose of soft power also hangs in the balance.[45]

The 2026 FIFA World Cup presents an opportunity for Canada, Mexico, and the United States to show off their cities and cultures to the rest of the world in a unique way. In 2018, FIFA announced that a combined 3.57 billion viewers—more than half of the global population at the time, aged four and over—tuned in to the 2018 competition.[46] The global in-home TV audience who watched at least one minute of coverage totaled 3.262 billion, with an estimated 309.7 million more watching "on digital platforms, in public viewing areas or in bars and restaurants."[47]

The final between France and Croatia on July 15, 2018, attracted a live audience of 1.12 billion people.[48] FIFA garnered an average of 191 million viewers across the 64 matches played.[49] FIFA's efforts continued, and the 2022 tournament managed to reach new heights. The 2022 FIFA World Cup engaged five billion fans across all media,[50] including linear TV, digital, social media, and FIFA platforms.[51] The total reach of the 2022 World Cup final between France and Argentina was the highest of all time, with 1.422 billion viewers.[52] However, the record-setting viewership of the final isn't the headline—FIFA saw its most significant increases, compared to 2018, on FIFA's official social media

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[45] *See* Rhys Crilley et al., *'Russia Isn't a Country of Putins!': How RT Bridged the Credibility Gap in Russian Public Diplomacy During the 2018 FIFA World Cup*, 24 BRIT. J. POLS. & INT'L RELS. 136, 140 (2022) ("The 2018 World Cup created a favourable perception of Russia and its tournament, which surprised many who expected that the event would come short of passing the credible attraction filter and result in soft disempowerment for the host state.").

[46] *More than Half the World Watched Record-Breaking 2018 World Cup*, FIFA (Dec. 21, 2018, 8:35 AM), https://inside.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/2018russia/media-releases/more-than-half-the-world-watched-record-breaking-2018-world-cup.

[47] *Id.*

[48] *Id.*

[49] *Id.*

[50] FIFA ET AL., WORLD CUP QATAR 2022: GLOBAL ENGAGEMENT & AUDIENCE DETAILED REPORT 2 (2023), https://digitalhub.fifa.com/m/336c30db79dafa93/original/FIFA-World-Cup-Qatar-2022-Global-Engagement-Audience-Executive-Summary.pdf (defining those who "engaged" with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 as people who: "watched any live coverage of a match/matches (any device, any platform, any location); watched any highlight/delayed coverage of a match/matches (any device, any platform, any location); watched coverage featured in news broadcasts on TV, or heard of any coverage on the radio; watched on-demand clips or highlights online (e.g. on a website or streaming service); watched clips or highlights on a social media platform; read about the event on a website, or in a newspaper or magazine; or attended the event in Qatar to watch a match/matches in person").

[51] *Id.* at 6.

[52] *Id.* at 5.

channels.[53] FIFA social media channels generated 15 billion total impressions,[54] 811 million total engagements,[55] and 3.6 billion total video views.[56] These figures demonstrate that consuming coverage of the tournament has become increasingly accessible, making it more convenient for people to keep up with the tournament, no matter where they are on the planet.

While there are countless concerns about the tournament and the roles that the three host countries will play as the competition unfolds,[57] perhaps none pose more pressing questions than those surrounding incoming foreign nationals and whether all three host nations will be able to adequately accommodate fans from all over the world.[58] Put simply, all three host countries have a chance to either shine or suffer massive failures on a global stage.[59] However the event turns out—good, bad, or ugly—and, maybe just as importantly, however Canada, Mexico, and the United States stack up with one another, could have significant implications for their global perception and reputation.[60]

III. TWO BIG PROBLEMS

Two primary problems threaten the successful hosting of the tournament.

A. Visitor Visa Timelines

The first and most glaring issue is the length of U.S. visa interview wait times and the Canadian visitor visa processing wait times.[61] Although the Biden

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[53] *Id.* at 6.

[54] *Id.* (depicting a 113% increase from 2018 FIFA World Cup).

[55] *Id.* (portraying a 448% increase from 2018 FIFA World Cup).

[56] *Id.* (outlining a 202% increase from 2018 FIFA World Cup).

[57] *See, e.g.*, *World Cup 2026: An Opportunity to Lead on Human Trafficking*, POLARIS PROJECT (June 23, 2022), https://polarisproject.org/blog/2022/06/world-cup-2026-an-opportunity-to-lead-on-human-trafficking/.

[58] *See* Josh Wildes, *2026 Fifa World Cup and United States Immigration Law*, WILDES & WEINBERG, PC, https://www.wildeslaw.com/immigration-resources/latest-immigration-news/2026-fifa-world-cup-and-united-states-immigration-law/ (last visited June 7, 2025); *see also* Breanna M. Moe, *An Analysis of Immigration Law and Potential Recourse for World Cup 2026 Players*, 31 MARQ. SPORTS L. REV. 343, 345 (2021); *see also* Steph Yang & Jeff Reuter, *2026 World Cup: The Issues Across the U.S., Mexico and Canada that Could Impact the Tournament*, N.Y. TIMES: THE ATHLETIC (Feb. 2, 2023), https://theathletic.com/4150786/2023/02/02/2026-world-cup-concerns/.

[59] *See* Wildes, *supra* note 58; *see also* Moe, *supra* note 58; Yang & Reuter, *supra* note 58.

[60] *See* Crilley et al., *supra* note 45, at 149; *see also* Rowbottom, *supra* note 28 (noting that 84% of foreign visitors "changed their opinion of Russia for the better" after visiting for the 2018 World Cup and 90% stated that they would recommend visiting Russia).

[61] *See Global Visa Wait Times*, TRAVEL.STATE.GOV (Jan. 7, 2025), https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/global-visa-wait-times.html (on file with the Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law); *Check Processing Times*, GOV'T OF CAN. (June 3, 2025),

administration made some progress in 2024 towards reduced wait times for visa interviews, the amount of time required to secure an interview remained excessive in early 2025 for visitors from many countries.[62] More importantly, the outlook remains grim for fans from many of the countries expected to participate in the 2026 FIFA World Cup.[63] As of January 7, 2025, wait times for B-2 visitor and tourist visa interviews at various U.S. embassies or consulates are as follows:

- 121 days in Algiers, Algeria;
- 560 days in Ankara, Türkiye;
- 700 days in Bogota, Colombia;
- 280 days in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire;
- 220 days in Guayaquil, Ecuador;
- 333 days in Lagos, Nigeria;
- 442 days in Lima, Peru;
- 277 days in Merida, Venezuela; and
- 281 days in Quito, Ecuador.[64]

Note that the above figures merely represent the amount of time an individual can expect to wait for an interview. These figures do not include the time required to complete the Online Nonimmigrant Visa Application, Form DS-160, nor do they include the time required for administrative processing after the interview.

The outlook is also bleak for many of those who wish to get a Temporary Resident Visa (TRV) in order to travel to Canada.[65] The Canadian government defines expected "processing time" as the day the Canadian government receives a "complete application," to the day a "decision" is made by the Canadian government for TRVs.[66] The numbers are gaudy for foreign nationals from many of the countries ranked inside the top forty-eight of FIFA's world rankings,[67] averaging more than 223 days among certain nations:

- 148 days in Argentina;
- 107 days in Brazil;

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https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/application/check-processing-times.html. To see the Canadian wait times, choose "Temporary residence (visiting, studying, working)" from the "select an application type" dropdown; then choose "Visitor visa (from outside Canada)" from the "Which temporary residence application?" dropdown; then choose the applicable country from the "Where are you applying from?" dropdown; then click "Get processing time"). *See id.*

[62] *Compare Long Visa Wait Times Are a De Facto Travel Ban*, U.S. TRAVEL ASS'N (May 18, 2023), https://www.ustravel.org/sites/default/files/2022-10/visafactsheet-oct2022.pdf, *with Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[63] *See Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[64] *Id.*

[65] *See Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61.

[66] *Id.*; *Latest Men's World Ranking*, INSIDE FIFA (Apr. 3, 2025), https://inside.fifa.com/en/fifa-world-ranking/men.

[67] *Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61; *Latest Men's World Ranking*, *supra* note 66.

- 166 days in Uruguay;
- 400 days in Senegal;
- 118 days in Iran;
- 161 days in Ecuador;
- 379 days in Ukraine;
- 343 days in Serbia;
- 111 days in Panama;
- 145 days in Nigeria;
- 433 days in Ivory Coast; and
- 159 days in Venezuela.[68]

Note that these processing times do not include time required to send an application from a visa application center to the Immigration, Refugees, and Citizenship Canada offices, nor do these processing times account for the time required to provide applicant biometrics.[69]

While processing times for Mexican visas are of less concern,[70] a different type of issue prevails. As visa applications and fees must be delivered in person, problems arise for those who do not have a Mexican embassy or consulate in their country or even in their entire region. For example, the closest Mexican Embassy to Cameroon—which has qualified for more FIFA World Cups than any other African team—is located in Abuja, Nigeria.[71] The distance between Abuja, Nigeria, and Yaoundé, Cameroon's capital city, is more than 700 miles.[72] The multi-national format presents another domain of issues discussed further below, but it is evident that getting the requisite approval to travel to any one of the three host countries will be a tall task for many fans of the participating countries.

B. The FIFA Lottery System

The second key issue is FIFA's ticket distribution timeline for fans who want to support their home country. Due to the demand for tournament tickets, FIFA employs a system where fans enter their names into a lottery with the hopes of

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[68] *Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61; *Latest Men's World Ranking*, *supra* note 66.

[69] *Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61.

[70] *See Mexico Visa*, VISAGUIDE.WORLD, https://visaguide.world/mexico-visa/ (last visited June 7, 2025).

[71] *Embassy of Mexico in Nigeria*, SECRETARIA DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES, https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/nigeria/index.php/en/embassy (last visited June 7, 2025).

[72] *Abuja, Federal Capital Territory, Nigeria to Yaound, Cameroon*, GOOGLE MAPS, https://www.google.com/maps/dir/Abuja,+Federal+Capital+Territory,+Nigeria/Yaound%C3%A9,+Cameroon/@6.4521866,6.8866483,7z/data=!3m1!4b1!4m14!4m13!1m5!1m1!1s0x104e745f4cd62fd9:0x53bd17b4a20ea12b!2m2!1d7.4985259!2d9.0562646!1m5!1m1!1s0x108bcf7a309a7977:0x7f54bad35e693c51!2m2!1d11.5202292!2d3.8616853!3e0?entry=ttu&g_ep=EgoyMDI1MTEyMy4xIKXMDSoASAFQAw%3D%3D (last visited Nov. 30, 2025).

securing tickets.[73] For the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, the event received 23 million requests for the 3.4 million available tickets, demonstrating a nearly 7-to-1 demand-to-supply ratio.[74] Although ticket supply will almost triple to approximately 10 million in 2026,[75] the expanded format and the larger stadium capacities will also drive significantly higher demand to attend matches in North America.

At first glance, the solution to this particular problem seems obvious. Because fans know that FIFA will not announce lottery results until just a few months before the tournament, any fan who requests tickets should just begin the visa application process two years in advance for all three host countries. However, the solution is not so simple. The visa application process is expensive and time consuming. The Canadian TRV processing fee is CA$100 plus a CA$85 biometrics fee,[76] the Mexico visa fee is $54,[77] and the U.S. nonimmigrant visa application fee is $185[78]—all of which are non-refundable.[79]

Additionally, fans have extremely low chances of receiving tickets through the lottery process. At the close of the final "random selection draw period" before the 2022 FIFA World Cup, fans had submitted 23.5 million ticket requests.[80] After the 2022 tournament, FIFA announced that 3.4 million total attendees filled the stands throughout the event in Qatar.[81] Expecting a rational person to invest significant time and more than $360 in nonrefundable fees, while knowing that FIFA's lottery system selects only a small fraction of applicants, is unreasonable.

FIFA's delayed ticket distribution presents unavoidable challenges unless the calendar for World Cup qualifiers undergoes significant changes. With 211

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[73] *Understanding the Right to Buy (RTB) for FIFA Tournaments*, FIFA COLLECT, https://collect.fifa.com/rtb (last visited June 7, 2025).

[74] *Id*.

[75] Feldscher, *supra* note 19.

[76] *Canada Immigration Processing Fees*, CANADIM (Mar. 7, 2025), https://www.canadim.com/processing-fees/.

[77] *Visas (English)*, SECRETARIA DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES (July 30, 2025), https://consulmex.sre.gob.mx/boston/index.php/visas-english#:~:text=Mexico%20does%20not%20apply%20the,of%20visa)%20is%20%2454%20USD.

[78] *Fees for Visa Services*, TRAVEL.STATE.GOV, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/visa-information-resources/fees/fees-visa-services.html (last visited June 7, 2025).

[79] *Canada Immigration Processing Fees*, *supra* note 76; *Visas (English)*, *supra* note 77; *Fees for Visa Services*, *supra* note 78.

[80] *Sales Period Concludes as FIFA Registers Enormous Interest for Qatar 2022™ Tickets*, INSIDE FIFA (Apr. 29, 2022, 8:00 AM), https://inside.fifa.com/tournaments/mens/worldcup/qatar2022/media-releases/sales-period-concludes-as-fifa-registers-enormous-interest-for-qatar-2022-tm.

[81] Josh Corder, *How Many People Attended the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022?*, HOTELIER (Jan. 26, 2023, 9:20 AM), https://www.hoteliermiddleeast.com/qatar-world-cup/fifa-world-cup-qatar-2022-attendance (reporting that 3.4 million fans attended the 2022 FIFA World Cup); *FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022™*, *supra* note 2 (noting that of the total attendees, 1.8 million were international visitors).

member countries and a limited number of World Cup spots for teams,[82] FIFA requires a qualification process, which occurs over the course of three years in anticipation of the upcoming FIFA World Cup.[83] This extended process can leave teams and supporters uncertain about their qualification status for the tournament even after FIFA opens the ticket request lottery.[84] Though this problem will persist for the foreseeable future and the three North American host countries cannot accelerate the qualification process, they must address it and work proactively to host a successful tournament.

The overlap between these two primary concerns is significant—addressing just one of these areas of need will not resolve the other. To solve one problem, these countries must also solve the other in order to make the joint bid work and reap the full economic and geo-political benefits that host countries typically enjoy.

For fans from Türkiye, Serbia, Colombia, and Côte d'Ivoire, the timeline is nearly impossible to conform to. Last cycle, FIFA's first lottery sales period for the FIFA World Cup closed on February 8, 2022.[85] FIFA's second and final lottery sales period closed on April 28, 2022.[86] The first match of the 2022 FIFA World Cup between Ecuador and Qatar kicked off in Al Khor on November 20, 2022. This left a period of somewhere between 173 and 285 days for planning, application, approval, and travel period,[87] depending on which phase a fan received their ticket lottery results. At one point, the wait time for an *interview* for a visa at the American Embassy in Ankara was 560 days;[88] the processing time for a Canadian TRV application in Serbia was 343 days;[89] the wait time for an *interview* for a visa at the American Embassy in Bogota was 700 days;[90] and the processing time for Canadian TRV application in Côte d'Ivoire was 433 days.[91]

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[82] *See Member Associations*, INSIDE FIFA, https://inside.fifa.com/about-fifa/associations (last visited June 7, 2025).

[83] *FIFA World Cup 26 Qualifying: All You Need to Know*, FIFA (Mar. 10, 2025), https://www.fifa.com/fifaplus/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/canadamexicousa2026/articles/road-to-world-cup-26-qualifiers-usa-canada-mexico (noting that in addition to the typical qualification process, FIFA World Cup host countries get the privilege of auto-qualification).

[84] *Compare Sales Phases*, FIFA (June 1, 2021), https://www.fifa.com/en/articles/sales-phases-en (explaining the Random Selection Draw sales period of Sales Phase (1) for the 2022 FIFA World Cup opened on Jan. 19, 2022), *with* Reuters, *Costa Rica Hold off New Zealand to Become Final Team to Qualify for 2022 World Cup*, ESPN (May 16, 2023, 11:56 PM), https://www.espn.com/soccer/report/_/gameId/633779 (supporting the fact that it was not until approximately five months after Sales Phase (1) that Costa Rica defeated New Zealand to claim the final spot in the 2022 FIFA World Cup field).

[85] *Sales Phases*, *supra* note 84.

[86] *Id.*

[87] *See id.*

[88] *Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[89] *Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61.

[90] *Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[91] *Check Processing Times*, *supra* note 61.

At best, assuming the 2026 FIFA World Cup ticket drawing and distribution timeline resembles the 2022 lottery system, fans from many countries hoping to visit Canada, Mexico, or the United States to support their team will need a miracle to get their travel documents and prior approval in order if they are selected for tickets.

Furthermore, it is not just the citizens of countries halfway around the world that are suffering from excessive wait times during the visa application process.[92] Mexican citizens applying for a U.S. visa face similar challenges, as do Colombian and Turkish citizens.[93] As of January 7, 2025, the wait time for an interview was 262 days in Mexico City, 196 days in Guadalajara, and 189 days in Ciudad Juarez.[94] While these delays are much shorter than they were in May of 2023—when the average wait time across Mexico was 647 days—[95] the current state of affairs is unconscionable, especially for a neighboring country.

The three-host format creates additional challenges. Although FIFA hopes to limit team and fan travel during the tournament's early stages, organizers have already acknowledged the difficulties of hosting across three countries.[96] Visitors supporting teams that advance beyond the opening round must secure approval to travel through two or even all three host countries, depending on how far their team advances, further complicating the process.

If attendees are not adequately prepared with prior approval to travel to multiple countries, nightmare scenarios could unfold. Consider the following hypothetical: A fan from Peru travels from Lima to Guadalajara to support the national team for their third and final group stage match, with the opportunity to advance to the knockout stage on the line. Of course, citizens of Peru are exempt from any visa or prior approval requirements to enter Mexico.[97] In this hypothetical, history unfolds in Guadalajara as Peru upsets Germany, a European footballing titan, shocking the world as they advance beyond the group stage for the first time since 1978. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Hoping that the magical run continues, the hypothetical fan has no choice but to attend Peru's next match—in Boston? The hypothetical fan never could have imagined that his team would still be standing at this point in the tournament. Given the 442-day wait time for just an interview for a B-2 visa at the U.S. Embassy in Lima at one point,[98] attending the match in the United States was never a realistic option. Thinking on his feet, the fan remembers that the United States has a consulate general in Guadalajara. Hopeful, the fan goes online to schedule an appointment, only to find out that the wait time for a B-2 interview in Guadalajara is 196 days.[99]

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[92] *See Long Visa Wait Times Are a De Facto Travel Ban*, *supra* note 62, at 2.

[93] *Id.*

[94] *Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[95] *Id*.

[96] Tolmich, *supra* note 18.

[97] Embajada de México en Finlandia [Embassy of Mexico in Finland], *Visas*, SECRETARÍA DE RELACIONES EXTERIORES [SECRETARIAT OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS] (Aug. 8, 2025), https://embamex.sre.gob.mx/finlandia/index.php/traveling/visas.

[98] *Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[99] *Id.*

One need not speculate as to how the rest of story plays out, but it is clear that it does not end well. The situation does not improve if the hypothetical replaces Peru and Guadalajara with Bulgaria,[100] Toronto, or Vancouver.[101] The wait times for U.S. B-2 visa interviews in Toronto and Vancouver were 691 days and 610 days, respectively, as of January of 2025.[102]

The 2026 edition of the tournament hosted by the North American trio will also see the implementation of a revolutionary competition format, as the FIFA Council unanimously decided in favor of expanding the tournament field from thirty-two teams to forty-eight teams, beginning in 2026.[103] Not only is the expanded field set to result in more matches than ever before during the competition's 93-year history,[104] the FIFA Council further increased the number of matches to be played during the course of the tournament.[105] On March 14, 2023, FIFA announced the approval of a 104-match format in advance of the Seventy-Third FIFA Congress in Kigali, Rwanda.[106] The announcement also unveiled a new twelve group format with four teams in each group.[107] This decision represents an increase of forty games more than the number played in the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.[108]

Understanding FIFA's motivation to grow and lengthen the tournament is important. Initially scheduled to run from June 8 through July 3, 2026,[109] FIFA projected (before announcing the shift to 104 games) that they would generate $1

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[100] *Compare Entry Requirements by Country or Territory*, GOV'T OF CAN. (Dec. 16, 2025), https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/entry-requirements-country.html, *with U.S. Visa Waiver Program*, DEP'T OF HOMELAND SEC., https://www.dhs.gov/visa-waiver-program (last visited June 7, 2025). Citizens of Bulgaria are exempt from Canada's TRV requirement, *see Entry Requirements by Country or Territory*, *supra*, but citizens of Bulgaria are not eligible for the United States Visa Waiver Program. *See U.S. Visa Waiver Program*, *supra*.

[101] *Global Visa Wait Times*, *supra* note 61.

[102] *Id.*

[103] *Unanimous Decision Expands FIFA World Cup™ to 48 Teams from 2026*, FIFA (Jan. 10, 2017, 1:24 PM), https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/fifa-council-unanimously-decides-on-expansion-of-the-fifa-world-cuptm--2863100.

[104] Dale Johnson, *What the World Cup Will Look Like in 2026: 48 Teams, More Groups, More Venues, More Games*, ESPN (Dec. 15, 2022, 5:05 AM), https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/37634727/what-world-cup-look-2026-48-teams-more-groups-more-venues-more-games.

[105] *Unanimous Decision Expands FIFA World Cup™ to 48 Teams from 2026*, *supra* note 103.

[106] *FIFA Council Approves International Match Calendars*, INSIDE FIFA (Mar. 14, 2023, 11:30 AM), https://www.fifa.com/about-fifa/organisation/fifa-council/media-releases/fifa-council-approves-international-match-calendars.

[107] Mary Omatiga, *What Is the 2026 World Cup Schedule? When and Where Are the Games? How Will It Work? What Is the Format?*, NBC SPORTS (May 27, 2025, 7:19 AM), https://www.nbcsports.com/soccer/news/when-and-where-is-the-2026-world-cup.

[108] Johnson, *supra* note 104.

[109] Omatiga, *supra* note 107.

billion in additional income and $640 million in additional profit just by expanding the tournament field from thirty-two to forty-eight.[110] Like the American National Football League (NFL), which has dipped its proverbial toe, and then some, into international waters over the course of the past two decades—Gianni Infantino made it clear: FIFA has its sights set on North America.[111] Opportunities to host a FIFA World Cup only come around every so often. After the summer of 2026, there is no telling how long it will be until football's center stage returns to North America. FIFA could not miss out on its chance to cash in. Along with the economic activity at stake,[112] this is an opportunity for Canada, Mexico, and the United States to welcome an unprecedented number of visitors and positively impact the way the world views North America.[113] Changes must be made between now and the summer of 2026. With the magnitude and the multinational nature of the 2026 FIFA World Cup in mind, the remainder of this Note will consist of two sections. First, this Note will include a brief survey of the laws and regulations governing entry and temporary travel for Canada, Mexico, and the United States. Then, this Note will describe a series of ideas and recommendations for the three countries in terms of strategies or processes that, if pursued, will allow the host countries to be better prepared to handle the influx of travelers.

IV. ANALYSIS

A. Survey of Underlying Temporary Travel Laws and Regulations

1. Canada

The foremost source of substantive law that governs the entry of foreign travelers into Canada is a set of regulations called the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations (IRPR),[114] which came into force on June 28, 2002.[115] The authority to create the IRPR comes from two enabling acts, which are the corresponding Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (IRPA) and the Financial Administration Act (FAA).[116]

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[110] Graham Dunbar, *FIFA to Expand World Cup to 48 Teams in 2026*, AP NEWS (Jan. 10, 2017, 11:12 AM), https://apnews.com/general-news-cdb47b5e3049486a825fa4905b496bf1.

[111] Whitehead, *supra* note 13.

[112] Razo & Chacón, *supra* note 16.

[113] *Cf.* Rowbottom, *supra* note 28 (suggesting the influence of the 2018 FIFA World Cup on visitors and their views on Russia).

[114] *See* Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations, SOR/2002-227 (Can.) [hereinafter IRPR].

[115] *Id.* § 365(1).

[116] *See id.* pmbl. ("[P]ursuant to subsection 5(1) of the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* and paragraphs 19(1)(a) and 19.1(a) and subsection 20(2) of the *Financial Administration Act* . . . hereby makes the annexed *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*."); *cf. List of Regulations*, GOV'T OF CAN. (Sep. 1, 2017), https://www.rcaanc-

Foundationally, IRPR subsection 7(1) maintains that a foreign national may not enter Canada to remain on a temporary basis without first obtaining a TRV.[117] Numerous exceptions apply to this baseline rule, including ones for foreign nationals who are exempt from the TRV requirement under IRPR subsection 190(1),[118] foreign nationals who hold a temporary resident permit issued under subsection 24(1) of the IRPA,[119] and foreign nationals who are authorized under the IRPA or the IRPR to re-enter Canada to remain in Canada.[120]

As of November of 2025, there are forty-six countries whose citizens are exempt from the TRV requirement under IRPR subsection 190(1),[121] including Germany, France, Italy, and Japan, among others.[122] Under IRPR subsection 7.1(1), citizens from these forty-six countries—most of which are European—are instead required to get an Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA) through a brief online application—typically processed and granted within minutes—carrying a fee of just US$7.[123] There is a select group of foreign nationals who are exempt from both the TRV and eTA requirement,[124] such as citizens of the United States and those who have been lawfully admitted to the United States for permanent residence.[125]

Save for a handful of peripheral and niche exceptions,[126] citizens of any country not exempted by IRPR subsection 190(1) are at the mercy of IRPR subsection 7(1) and may not enter Canada to remain on a temporary basis without first obtaining a TRV.[127] Nearly 150 countries fall into this rest-of-world bucket.[128] Of note, nearly half of the countries ranked inside the top forty-eight of the most recent FIFA world rankings fall into this final category requiring TRVs: Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Colombia, Morocco, Senegal, Iran, Mexico,

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cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1100100032323/1544638282290. The IRPR supplies definitions for the interpretation and application of the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. *See* IRPR, *supra* note 114, pt. 1.

[117] IRPR, *supra* note 114, §§ 7(1), 183(2) (noting the period authorized for the stay of a temporary resident is six months).

[118] *Id.* §§ 7(2)(a), 190(1).

[119] *Id.* §§ 7(2)(b), 24(1).

[120] *Id.* § 7(2)(c); *see also id.* §§ 7–9.

[121] *Id.* § 190(1)(a) (noting schedule 1.1 lists the countries that are exempt), sched. 1.1 (listing forty-six countries as of November 30, 2025).

[122] *Id.* sched. 1.1.

[123] *Id.* § 7.1(1); *Electronic Travel Authorization (eTA): About the Process*, GOV'T OF CAN. (Feb. 10, 2025), https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/eta/about.html.

[124] IRPR, *supra* note 114, § 7.1(3).

[125] *Id.* § 7.1(3)(b).

[126] *See, e.g.*, *id.* § 7.01 (noting subsections 7.01(1) and (2) extend eTA eligibility to foreign nationals of fifteen additional countries if they are traveling to Canada by air and if, at the time of application, either of the following applies: They have held a Canadian TRV in the past ten years, or they hold a valid U.S. nonimmigrant visa (NIV)).

[127] *Id.* § 7(1).

[128] *Entry Requirements by Country or Territory*, *supra* note 100.

Ecuador, Ukraine, Turkiye, Serbia, Egypt, Russia, Panama, Algeria, Romania, Peru, Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, Venezuela, and Qatar.[129]

In summary, foreign temporary visitors arriving in Canada fall into three primary categories: United States citizens and lawful permanent residents of the United States who only need a passport;[130] a modest number of foreign nationals hailing from predominately European countries, requiring only an ETA;[131] and everyone else—citizens from nearly 150 countries who must comply with the TRV requirement.[132]

2. *Mexico*

The primary source of law governing the entry of temporary foreign travelers in Mexico consists of regulations from the Secretary of Foreign Relations.[133] Former President Andrés Manuel López Obrador's administration published the most recent version of the Internal Regulations of the Secretary of Foreign Relations on June 14, 2021.[134] Former Secretary of Foreign Relations, Marcelo Ebrard, issued the Internal Regulations in an exercise of the power conferred by Article 89, Section 1 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States[135] and by Articles 14, 17, 18, and 28 of the Organic Law of the Federal Public Administration.[136]

The primary responsibilities of the Secretary of Foreign Relations, described in Article 3 of the Internal Regulations, include: executing Mexico's foreign policy in accordance with the principles established in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States; promoting, facilitating and coordinating the actions abroad of the agencies and entities of the Federal Public Administration, in accordance with the powers that correspond to each one of them; directing the Mexican Foreign Service; intervening in all kinds of treaties, agreements and conventions to which the country is a party; and supervising the fulfillment of the objectives set forth in the International Cooperation Program for Development.[137]

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[129] *Compare id.* (acknowledging qualification for the FIFA World Cup field is not determined by FIFA's world rankings, but is instructive in projecting which teams will be successful during the qualification process), *with Latest Men's World Ranking*, *supra* note 66.

[130] *Entry Requirements by Country or Territory*, *supra* note 100.

[131] *Id.*

[132] *Id.*

[133] *Embassy of Mexico in Nigeria*, *supra* note 71.

[134] Reglamento Interior de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores [RISRE], Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF] 14-06-2021, últimas reformas DOF 21-09-2023 (Mex.).

[135] *Id.*; *see also* Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, CPEUM, art. 89, Pfo. I, Diario Oficial de la Federación [DOF] 05-02-1917, últimas reformas DOF 15-04-2025.

[136] Reglamento Interior de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, *supra* note 134.

[137] *Id.*

Mexico excepts Americans from visa requirements, maintains a reciprocal exemption for Canadians,[138] and exempts many of the same visitors from visa requirements who Canada exempts, with a few notable additions to the list, including visitors from Argentina, Colombia, Uruguay, and Paraguay.[139] As is true with traveling to Canada, there are numerous stakeholders in the football world who do not enjoy exemptions in Mexico, such as those from Cameroon, Algeria, Morocco, Russia, Turkey, Ukraine, Côte d'Ivoire, Ecuador,[140] and—a recent addition to this list—Brazil.[141] Mexico provides exemptions for more countries than its co-hosts,[142] and this will bode well for Mexico if nothing changes between now and the summer of 2026.

While Mexico exempts travelers of more than sixty countries from requiring a visa,[143] there are numerous fanbases expected to arrive in droves from countries that do not enjoy this exemption (if their country's team is drawn to play any number of matches in Mexico), including Algeria, Brazil, Ecuador, Egypt, Nigeria, Ukraine, Venezuela, and Senegal.[144] Fortunately, the question of visa-exempt or not is unlikely to be the decisive factor in the case of Mexico, as visa wait times rarely extend beyond four weeks.[145]

3. *The United States*

The pertinent sources of law governing the entry of temporary foreign travelers in the United States are federal statutes as well as regulations which the United States Department of Homeland Security and the United States Department of State enforce. Relevant federal legislation includes a wide range of applicable statutes, such as 8 U.S.C. § 1187, which established the Visa Waiver Program.[146] The Federal Register is replete with relevant regulations, such as those located throughout Title 22[147] as well as those in Title 8.[148]

The centerpiece of law governing the entry of temporary foreign travelers in the United States is 8 C.F.R. § 217.2, which concerns Visa Waiver Program

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[138] *Id.*

[139] *Id.*

[140] Embajada de México en Finlandia, *supra* note 97.

[141] Press Release, Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Gobierno de México, Mexico Modifies the Visa Application Procedure for Brazilian Passports (Aug. 3, 2022), https://www.gob.mx/sre/prensa/mexico-modifies-the-visa-application-procedure-for-brazilian-passports?idiom=en.

[142] IRPR, *supra* note 114.

[143] Embajada de México en Finlandia, *supra* note 97.

[144] *Id.*

[145] *Mexico Visa*, *supra* note 70.

[146] *See* 8 U.S.C. § 1187.

[147] *See, e.g.*, 22 C.F.R. § 40.6 (2025).

[148] *See, e.g.*, 8 C.F.R. § 217 (2025).

eligibility.[149] Subsection (a) includes a definition of "designated country"[150] for countries listed under the program and, most importantly, confers responsibility upon the Department of Homeland Security to maintain a list of designated countries. The United States "designates" or acknowledges forty-two exempted countries, which pales in comparison to the number of exempted countries in Canada and Mexico.[151] Notably, the brief list of exempted countries does not even include its co-hosting counterpart to the south, Mexico.[152] This hurdle is one which the United States should swiftly address, as many Mexican supporters will want to pursue travel plans to root on their team. Overall, the United States has the most restrictive regulations in place in terms of visa exemptions.[153]

B. A Proposed Solution

With the summer of 2026 quickly approaching, any sort of revolutionary overhaul from top to bottom in any of the three countries is unrealistic and not worth entertaining. However, quick fixes will be insufficient and could lead to

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[149] *See* 8 C.F.R. § 217.2 (2025).

[150] 8 C.F.R. § 217.2(a) (2025) (referring to any country currently designated by the Secretary for participation in the Visa Waiver Program).

[151] *Visa Waiver Program*, TRAVEL.STATE.GOV, https://travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/us-visas/tourism-visit/visa-waiver-program.html (last visited Dec. 26, 2025) (explaining citizens of the following are eligible: Andorra, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Chile, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, San Marino, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Taiwan as well as citizens of the United Kingdom with "the unrestricted right of permanent abode in England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands, and the Isle of Man"); *see also What You Need to Enter Canada*, GOV'T OF CAN. (Dec. 16, 2025), https://www.canada.ca/en/immigration-refugees-citizenship/services/visit-canada/entry-requirements-country.html#no-visa-eta; Embajada de México en Finlandia, *supra* note 97; *Visa Waiver Program (VWP)*, U.S. EMBASSY & CONSULATES IN THE U.K., https://uk.usembassy.gov/visa-waiver-program-vwp/ (last visited Dec. 26, 2025).

[152] *See Visa Waiver Program*, *supra* note 151.

[153] Recently, the Trump administration posted a proposal on the Federal Register that would set additional requirements for the applications of travelers who are coming from countries which are part of the visa waiver program. *See* Agency Information Collection Activities; Revision; Arrival and Departure Record (Form I–94) and Electronic System for Travel Authorization (ESTA), 90 Fed. Reg. 57208 (notice and request for comments Dec. 10, 2025). The proposed changes to the application involve "making provision of social media history mandatory and adding 'high value data elements,' including the person's phone numbers and email addresses over the prior five years, plus close family members' names and birth dates, along with their birthplaces, residences and phone numbers over the prior five years." Lauren Chadwick & Michael Williams, *US Plan Would Require Some Visitors to Provide Social Media Information from Last 5 Years*, CNN (Dec. 10, 2025), https://www.cnn.com/2025/12/10/us/us-visa-waiver-social-media-check.

further issues or national security concerns.[154] The focus must instead be on maximizing productivity with the time and resources available to each of the three host countries.

In order to maximize the value for the various parties involved, the host countries should not only prioritize the accommodation of fans whose countries' teams qualify and compete in the 2026 FIFA World Cup but make a pointed effort toward enabling the smooth and on-time arrival of these fans from all over the world. Although FIFA executives, the three host countries, the sixteen host cities, the players, and the fans all have diverging interests and priorities, they are united by a common thread:[155] the strong and enthusiastic presence of fans journeying from around the world to support their country's team.

FIFA executives have a significant interest in maximizing the economic boom that the 2026 FIFA World Cup is supposed to bring with it, but these executives are not alone. Local and state politicians and community leaders are in the same boat. Although each of the sixteen host cities stand to benefit from a huge economic boost in their own respective local and regional economies, each of the host cities and communities will also have to make some sort of significant financial commitment. There is no such thing as a free lunch. A big part of a successful FIFA World Cup host bid is an all-hands-on-deck attitude from leaders at every level. In order to have the privilege of hosting matches in their localities, communities are required to make significant commitments; essentially committing to certain promises if selected as a host site.[156]

With the support of the three national soccer governing bodies, local leadership in the sixteen host cities for the 2026 FIFA World Cup successfully negotiated and committed the necessary financial resources to secure their place as tournament hosts. Now, these sixteen host cities are counting on the economic windfall FIFA executives and tournament organizers likely sold them on to secure the locations.

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[154] *See* Nick Ames, *World Cup 2018: What Is a Fan ID and Do I Need One to Watch Games in Russia?*, THE GUARDIAN (Mar. 27, 2018, 5:00 AM), https://www.theguardian.com/football/2018/mar/27/world-cup-2018-russia-tickets-travel; *see also* Rob Harris, *Loophole Exposed to Get Easier Entry to World Cup in Russia*, AP NEWS (June 27, 2018, 2:46 PM), https://apnews.com/general-news-cf9d84b2a53e4cf7aafa400ceb290572. In 2018, Russia implemented a "Fan ID" system that sought to address visa efficiency concerns by essentially permitting fans to use their ticket to a match as a temporary visa. *See* Ames, *supra*. Though a success in some ways, this system was littered with problems, including national security concerns stemming from falsified tickets, while also limiting the tournament's economic impact on Russia, as the Fan ID system catered strictly to fans that happened to have success with the ticket lottery process. *See* Harris, *supra*.

[155] *Cf.* THOMAS CARLYLE, SARTOR RESARTUS 40–44 (Ashley H. Thorndike ed., The MacMillan Co. 1927) (1834).

[156] *See, e.g.*, Martin Vassolo, *Miami-Dade Commissioners Approve $49 Million Pledge for World Cup*, AXIOS MIAMI (May 14, 2024), https://www.axios.com/local/miami/2024/05/14/miami-world-cup-funding-2026.

The interests of the players competing in the tournament and the interests of fans hoping to attend are a little more straight forward. Simply put, players want to play in front of sold-out crowds in stadiums filled with their fans. Fans want to visit North America and watch their country's team play in the most important competition in the world.

Here is where the rubber meets the road: Although for different reasons, everyone wants the same thing—seats on international flights filled up, hotel rooms sold out, tourism and entertainment dollars flooding into the economy of North America and the local communities of the host cities, venues selling tickets, fans in seats, stadiums full, fans purchasing merchandise and apparel, and more. The ideal outcome ends up looking the same for everyone. If all parties know exactly what a successful tournament looks and feels like, why would all parties not do everything they can in their power to achieve that? It is not out of reach.

While reviewing past tournaments and different strategies employed by host countries in the past,[157] it became evident that even if the tournament was a "success" overall, host countries left something important on the table, whether it be tourism dollars, reliable, security measures, fan attendance, or even the opportunity to leave a legacy. The willingness of the national governments of the three host countries to be pro-active and side-step the administrative and procedural potholes that lie ahead will be what makes or breaks this tournament and this North American joint-host bid.

1. "Qualified: Embassy & Consulate Rapid Relief Teams"

Assuming the FIFA qualifier schedule and FIFA World Cup ticket lottery system dates are non-negotiable and set in stone, the remaining issues are visa related matters. What can Canada and the United States do to alleviate their respective processes that have lagged behind and gotten backed up? Enter, "Qualified: Embassy & Consulate Rapid Relief Teams." The idea works like this: World Cup Qualifying matches occur sporadically over the course of the two years leading up to the tournament. Because the process is spread out over such a long period of time, teams qualify in small bunches over the course of a period of many months.

In October of 2021, Germany was the very first team to qualify for the 2022 FIFA World Cup, cementing their place in the tournament on October 11, 2021—a full 405 days before the 2022 FIFA World Cup began.[158] Denmark qualified the very next day on October 12, 2021.[159] However, due to the spread-out nature of the qualifier scheduling, an entire month passed before Brazil became the third

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[157] Ames, *supra* note 154; *see also* Harris, *supra* note 154.

[158] *Germany First Team to Secure FIFA World Cup Berth After Hosts Qatar*, INSIDE FIFA (Oct. 11, 2021, 5:00 PM), https://inside.fifa.com/en/news/germany-secures-world-cup-ticket.

[159] *Who Has Qualified for the 2022 World Cup? List of Teams Going to Qatar, Standings*, SPORTS ILLUSTRATED (Nov. 16, 2021), https://www.si.com/soccer/2021/11/16/world-cup-2022-qualifying-teams-countries-qatar-full-list.

team to qualify on November 11, 2021.[160] Consider if Denmark was a country with excessive wait times for visa interviews and TRV processing (or was located three countries away from the nearest Mexican Embassy). Under the proposed solution, the United States, Canada, and Mexico would create a rotating team of 80 to 100 people, comprised of government employees from all three countries, waiting together on standby. The very moment that Denmark clinched their spot in the 2022 World Cup, this team of 80 to 100 people would immediately jump on a plane and fly to Copenhagen to set up an operation like a pop-up joint embassy and handle nothing but visa interviews, TRV applications, and Mexican visa applications. The individuals assigned to this team would rotate, depending on language and fluency capabilities. For example, the group of people sent to Copenhagen would have some changes and turnover, if the next destination for a pop-up joint embassy were Dakar, Senegal. While some of the core leadership would stay on for the trip to Dakar, the team would be supplemented with individuals that speak Wolof and French. This supplementation could come from employees located in North America, or if necessary, could come from the pre-existing embassy located in the capital city. This rapid relief team would not suspend or disrupt operations at pre-existing embassies in each country tended to but, instead, through a joint effort of all three host countries, would seek to alleviate some of the problems with delays and wait times.

This solution is effective because it does not require any sort of negotiating with FIFA to alter their qualifying calendar. Instead, it takes advantage of the elongated qualifying process by navigating it in a way that would actually be beneficial. Additionally, this solution would address any concerns about fluid or constant travel between multiple countries. Patrons could kill two, or even three, birds with one stone and conduct the necessary paperwork to get approval to travel to two or all three of the host countries, all while under one roof. As suggested in the hypothetical explained previously, after the rapid relief team gets things under control in Copenhagen, if another team has since qualified for the competition field, the rapid relief team would continue on to the next destination requiring assistance. If no further qualifications have come about, the rapid relief team would instead return home to North America and begin to prepare for the next trip.

Continuing on with the 2022 World Cup cycle illustration—although ten teams qualified in the span of six days between November 11, 2021, and November 16, 2021, eight of the ten were European teams that enjoy all sorts of visa waivers privileges, such as France, Switzerland, and England to name a few.[161] The two others were Brazil and Argentina,[162] two countries with large populations and remarkably dedicated fan bases. After the uptick in qualifications during those six days in November, only two teams (Iran and South Korea) went on to qualify in the period of time from November 16, 2021, to February 1, 2022. If this proposal was in place at the time, the rapid relief team of 80 to 100 people

[160] *Id.*
[161] *Id.*
[162] *Id.*

would have had ample time to devote their attention to alleviating the delays or issues going on in Brazil and Argentina before continuing on to Iran if necessary. In summary, fifteen teams qualified in the span of time from October 11, 2021, to February 1, 2022. Between February 1, 2022, and June 14, 2022, sixteen more teams qualified for the 2022 World Cup over the course of five and a half months. Even if half of the teams that qualify are countries with backed up visa processing situations, there is ample time for a rapid response team to go in and provide the requisite assistance. The point is, rather than asking FIFA to go back to the drawing board, this proposed solution turns a weakness of the FIFA World Cup Qualifying process and the FIFA World Cup ticketing process into a strength.

2. *Time Is of the Essence*

Although the solutions mentioned in the 2025 U.S. Travel Administration Report are on point and instructive,[163] a vast majority of the solutions call for long term improvements and upgrades in technology at airports and other travel hubs. While some of the solutions proffered would indeed be useful to address issues specific to the 2026 FIFA World Cup, there is simply not enough time to revamp the entire travel system before the summer of 2026 rolls around.

It goes without saying that the basic premise of the solution proposed does not directly address the needs of those who hope to travel to North America for the event from countries that do not qualify for the tournament. While that is true, it seems plausible that the proposed rapid relief team's success, as described in the Copenhagen hypothetical and beyond, would be significant enough to warrant funding and approval for additional rapid relief teams. These teams could dedicate their focus to additional countries that did not qualify for the field but still maintain high demand for visas to travel to North America for the 2026 FIFA World Cup.

V. CONCLUSION

The outlook for foreign nationals with hopes of attending the momentous 2026 event remains grim. The problems identified in this Note are just a few of many and are problems that are sure to increase in severity if not addressed proactively and thoroughly on the front end.

Canada, Mexico, and the United States must be ready and willing to explore every avenue available to them. This includes the "Qualified: Embassy & Consulate Rapid Relief Team" proposed solution spelled out above. Doubtless, a bold and dedicated solution such as the one proposed will require diplomacy and

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[163] *See* COMM'N ON SEAMLESS & SECURE TRAVEL, U.S. TRAVEL ASS'N, A VISION FOR A WORLD-CLASS TRAVEL SYSTEM IN AMERICA (2025), https://cdn.prod.website-files.com/6780148103e54a0a2029c8ff/67aceba0f2746342354c78b7_2025-Commission-on-Seamless-and-Secure-Travel-Report.pdf (noting that although the USTA Report focuses on problems and solutions that are specific to the United States, the issues identified are not unique to the United States and solutions proffered by the USTA Report can be retailored and applied to Canada and Mexico; albeit to varying degrees).

collaboration among all three host countries. However, the pot of gold waiting for Canada, Mexico, and the United States at the other end of rainbow was always going to carry the day. The solution proposed requires an investment from all three host countries, both financially and politically, but such a commitment would be a drop in the bucket compared to the investments that all three host countries already made in order to secure the right to host the tournament in 2026.

FIFA, the three host countries, corporate sponsors, host cities and the players competing in the tournament, all have a shared interest in accommodating as many fans from all over the world as possible. Attacking visa-related issues head-on by putting boots on the ground in the countries with the longest delays is a viable path to maximizing returns for everyone involved.

This issue of unprecedented international travel is one of first impression for all three countries and these host countries must be ready and willing to be proactive to avoid what could turn into a circus on the international stage. There is too much at stake, and the world will be watching—well, maybe just 5 billion people.[164]

[164] *500 Days to Go: Excitement Builds for FIFA World Cup 26*, FIFA (Jan. 27, 2025), https://www.fifa.com/en/tournaments/mens/worldcup/canadamexicousa2026/articles/500-days-to-go-milestone-excitement-builds.