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Soft Power and Discursive Control in FIFA's 2023 Disciplinary Regulations: A Critical Discourse Analysis Approach

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Abstract

In recent years, FIFA, as a global organization in the realm of football, has assumed a role beyond merely organizing football tournaments and has transformed into one of the influential actors in global legal, political, and cultural domains. One of the key tools of this institution in exercising power is its disciplinary regulations; regulations that, on the surface, are formulated to preserve order but intrinsically embody discourses of legitimacy, domination, and representation. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to conduct a critical analysis of these regulations with a focus on their discursive functions within the global sports legal system. This study was carried out qualitatively, employing the critical discourse analysis approach. The complete text of FIFA's Disciplinary Regulations (2023) was analyzed as the primary dataset. The theoretical framework was a combination of Norman Fairclough's and Teun van Dijk's models, emphasizing the linguistic, semantic, and social dimensions of the text. The analyses indicated that FIFA's disciplinary regulations, beyond their legal-textual nature, function as instruments for reproducing authority, controlling narratives, setting boundaries of legitimacy, and silencing opposing voices. Concepts such as justice, equality, or ethics are utilized primarily in the service of authoritarian order rather than structural reform. FIFA's disciplinary regulations have transformed the legal order into an instrument of soft power and discursive control. In the absence of transparency and genuine participation, this order is largely symbolic and reproduces inequalities. Hence, discursive analysis of these regulations provides a pathway to uncover the hidden layers of domination within the global sports legal system.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, FIFA, Football, Disciplinary Regulations

1. Introduction

The Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) has long occupied a complex and often controversial position as the governing body of global football. Beyond its administrative responsibilities, FIFA increasingly functions as a transnational regulator with substantial authority over legal, political, cultural, and ethical dimensions of the sport. Its disciplinary regulations, in particular, have become a central instrument through which it establishes legitimacy, consolidates power, and enforces normative standards across borders. The disciplinary framework of FIFA cannot be separated from the wider phenomenon of normative pluralism, in which multiple overlapping legal and ethical systems compete and interact within global sport. Scholars have argued that sporting integrity must be understood within this pluralistic context, where rules are not



only technical but also deeply normative in their implications (Abanazir, 2024). FIFA's disciplinary system exemplifies this tension, as it blends internal regulatory power with the recognition of external legal norms, while still seeking to assert itself as the ultimate arbiter. This reflects broader trends in which private transnational organizations construct autonomous legal orders that interact uneasily with public authorities.

The idea of "constitutionalizing FIFA" captures the promises and challenges of embedding legal principles within what remains a private association (Bützler, 2020). While the disciplinary code offers a quasi-constitutional structure governing conduct across the football world, its legitimacy is often questioned because of the lack of democratic accountability and susceptibility to arbitrary enforcement. These challenges echo long-standing criticisms that FIFA, despite claims of neutrality, perpetuates systemic inequities and fails to adequately safeguard vulnerable actors. For example, scholars highlight how FIFA has consistently struggled to address discriminatory practices, particularly those embedded in structural and institutional processes rather than in individual misconduct (Covo, 2019).

One dimension of this critique relates to gender equality and representation in world football. Analyses of bidding processes for major events, such as the Women's World Cup, reveal how discourses of equality are mobilized strategically but often lack substantive transformative effect (Desjardins, 2021). Similarly, in the realm of human rights, FIFA's disciplinary framework has been scrutinized as part of a larger research agenda addressing the responsibilities of sports organizations toward international norms of justice and dignity (Duval & Heerdt, 2020). The intersection of sport and human rights underscores how disciplinary codes cannot be viewed merely as internal mechanisms, but as instruments with global socio-political consequences.

These debates are connected to larger theoretical questions about power, authority, and legitimacy in international sport governance (Freeburn, 2018). FIFA's regulations embody the paradox of a private entity exercising public-like powers, compelling compliance through disciplinary threats while enjoying limited external oversight. The growth of supporter activism and demands for stakeholder inclusion further illustrate how governance structures that once treated fans as passive consumers now face pressure to incorporate them as legitimate voices within regulatory frameworks (García & Welford, 2015). This growing demand for accountability reflects a wider recognition that FIFA's disciplinary authority has societal as well as sporting implications.

The discursive construction of football as a global cultural language is also central to FIFA's regulatory practices. Critical discourse analyses of FIFA's communication strategies—such as during the 2022 World Cup—show how official narratives frame compliance, unity, and moral standards while simultaneously marginalizing dissenting perspectives (Ghaffori, 2023). Such discourses reinforce FIFA's legitimacy while concealing asymmetrical power relations. Indeed, FIFA functions as a private legal order, developing and enforcing its own rules across national boundaries with limited checks from public authorities (Gomtsian, 2018). The disciplinary regulations are emblematic of this order, serving both as legal text and as instruments of discursive control.

The potential of interdisciplinary research, especially approaches rooted in linguistics and discourse analysis, has been highlighted as crucial for uncovering the ways in which inequalities, particularly gendered ones, are reproduced within football's regulatory and cultural structures (Graf, 2023). Understanding FIFA's disciplinary texts through such frameworks illuminates how language encodes power and reinforces institutional hierarchies. Likewise, broader international analyses of FIFA stress that its role extends far beyond sport, shaping global governance debates and exemplifying the hybrid nature of private authority (Henson, 2018).

The rise of FIFA as a quasi-sovereign regulator reflects wider patterns of private order-building, where the state assumes the role of civil society while organizations like FIFA exert authority akin to states themselves (Hock, 2018). As such, FIFA has also emerged as a diplomatic actor, capable of exerting influence over nation-states and using football as a tool of soft power (Kobierecki, 2019). These dynamics complicate the boundary between sport and politics, underscoring the importance of analyzing how disciplinary regulations function within this global network of influence.

Legitimacy, however, remains a recurring concern. Scholars of transnational corporate crime point out that establishing enforcement legitimacy against global elites is one of the most difficult tasks in governance (Lord, 2016). FIFA's handling of



corruption scandals and disciplinary matters has often been criticized for inconsistency, undermining the credibility of its enforcement mechanisms. Its ability to resist state intervention and maintain authority over national governments further illustrates the paradox of private institutions wielding public-like sovereignty (Meier, 2015).

The controversies surrounding FIFA have also been interpreted through the lens of postcolonialism and sportswashing, particularly in the case of Qatar's hosting of the 2022 World Cup (Nielsen & Dahl, 2023). Here, disciplinary and governance frameworks intersect with geopolitical strategies, allowing states and organizations to sanitize reputations through football mega-events. These developments heighten the urgency of exploring mechanisms for greater accountability, as recent research has emphasized (Rutgersson, 2024). Without robust accountability structures, FIFA's regulatory practices risk reinforcing inequality and perpetuating legitimacy crises.

FIFA's disciplinary framework also shapes the competitive environment of football. Analyses of the Women's World Cup, for example, reveal how policy and political determinants influence competitive balance, with disciplinary and governance practices shaping not only fairness but also the long-term development of the women's game (Scelles, 2021). Yet, these practices unfold within a broader organizational crisis of credibility. Scholars have documented how FIFA's motto, "For the Game. For the World," has increasingly come under scrutiny, as corruption scandals and governance failures expose the gap between rhetorical commitments and institutional practice (Tomlinson, 2016).

From a legal perspective, disciplinary regulations themselves raise questions about their status within international law. Their hybrid nature—private rules with quasi-public consequences—complicates the boundaries of legal authority (Van Kleef, 2014). This has implications for how disciplinary decisions are recognized and enforced across jurisdictions, highlighting the need to situate FIFA's rules within broader frameworks of transnational law. Similarly, debates about corporate governance and social responsibility in multinational enterprises find resonance in FIFA's case, as its regulatory structures intertwine with questions of ethical accountability and organizational legitimacy (Webber, 2016).

Taken together, this body of scholarship underscores the necessity of a critical discourse analysis of FIFA's 2023 Disciplinary Regulations. Such an approach illuminates not only the internal structure of the regulations but also their role in reproducing authority, shaping legitimacy, and managing narratives within the global football system. By examining how language encodes ideology and power, the analysis contributes to an understanding of FIFA as a transnational regulator whose disciplinary system embodies the tensions of normative pluralism, private legal authority, and contested legitimacy. The 2023 regulations are not merely technical instruments but discursive and normative tools that sustain FIFA's symbolic order. They illustrate the paradox of an institution that claims universality while being mired in contestation, simultaneously projecting soft power and facing persistent crises of credibility. This study, therefore, aims to advance the scholarly conversation by uncovering the hidden layers of discourse, ideology, and power in FIFA's disciplinary order.

2. Methods and Materials

The present research is based on the critical discourse analysis approach; an approach whose purpose goes beyond the surface level of the text to uncover hidden layers of power, ideology, and mechanisms of domination embedded in language and semantic structures. In this study, FIFA's Disciplinary Regulations are examined as a legal and discursive text that articulates legal order and reflects the logic of domination, authority, representation, and identity construction within the global structure of football. At the first stage, from the perspective of purpose, this research is both fundamental and applied. On the one hand, it attempts to identify and analyze the conceptual and theoretical foundations within the Disciplinary Regulations, relying on the theoretical bases of discourse analysis; and on the other hand, it seeks to present its findings in an applied context aimed at reinterpreting structural power in international sports institutions. From the perspective of data type, this study is qualitative. Unlike statistical or survey methods, discourse analysis relies on interpretation, deep understanding, and examination of linguistic and semantic contexts of texts. The data of this study include the full text of FIFA's Disciplinary Regulations, officially published and recognized as the global reference disciplinary document. In this research, the entire text was treated as a single unit, and all analyses were conducted based on this text.

Regarding data collection, content analysis and structural critical reading were employed. In other words, after extracting the different provisions of the Disciplinary Regulations, these provisions were analyzed separately, with an effort to identify



the dominant discourse, sub-discourses, linguistic indicators of power, and hidden semantic layers in each case. In this regard, legal provisions, as legal propositions, were analyzed as linguistic and cultural elements that reproduce power structures through legal concepts. From the perspective of analytical tools, the theoretical framework of the study was based on combining two key approaches in critical discourse analysis: first, Norman Fairclough's model, which emphasizes three levels—textual analysis, analysis of production processes, and analysis of the social context; and second, Teun van Dijk's perspective, which emphasizes the role of ideology and the reproduction of power in the text. By integrating these two perspectives, the present study sought to address both the internal structure of the regulations from linguistic and semantic perspectives (micro-analysis) and the position of these regulations within the global order of football and FIFA's relations with other actors (macro-analysis).

In this context, the unit of analysis was the legal provisions. Each provision, as an independent semantic unit, has its own specific structure and carries a discourse that, while distinct from other provisions, serves a coherent discursive whole. At the analysis stage, each provision was first examined independently; then, intertextual links and inter-provision relationships were analyzed to extract the overall discursive structure. In cases where the language appeared neutral and technical, the focus was placed on key vocabulary, syntactic structures, processes of omission and emphasis, and the degree of presence of human or institutional agents, in order to reveal FIFA's perspective on power, violation, responsibility, and justice.

With respect to validity and reliability, in qualitative research such as discourse analysis, validity refers to whether the interpretations and results are genuinely consistent with the data and the main text. In this study, to enhance validity, established theories of discourse analysis (such as the perspectives of Fairclough and van Dijk) were applied, and efforts were made to ensure that the analyses were entirely grounded in the linguistic evidence within FIFA's Disciplinary Regulations rather than personal or subjective interpretations. Moreover, analyzing all provisions, examining key terms, and applying a clear analytical framework contributed to coherence and precision. Reliability, on the other hand, refers to whether the analytical process is sufficiently accurate, documented, and transparent so that another researcher analyzing the same text would arrive at similar conclusions. To achieve this goal, all stages of analysis—from the selection of provisions, categorization of discourses, to final conclusions—were conducted step by step, while avoiding ambiguous or unmeasurable interpretations.

Accordingly, the analyses were conducted from the perspective of critical linguistics and the theory of power. The aim of the study was not to provide legal solutions or judicial interpretations of the regulations but to identify the mechanisms through which FIFA stabilizes and reproduces its power and legitimacy. Thus, the judgments and conclusions presented are rooted in an analytical-interpretive approach. Regarding the limitations of the study, it should be noted that discourse analysis, due to its interpretive nature, is always exposed to criticism of subjectivity. To address this issue, the present study sought to minimize the impact of the researcher's subjective assumptions by adopting a clear theoretical framework, relying on authoritative methodological sources, and maintaining semantic coherence throughout the analysis process. Furthermore, the focus on an official, documented, and published text was among the advantages that enhanced the credibility of the data.

3. Findings and Results

In this section, an attempt has been made to examine FIFA's Disciplinary Regulations with greater precision from semantic and content perspectives. The purpose of this examination is not merely to describe the articles and provisions; rather, the focus is on the meanings, messages, and orientations hidden behind the official language of these regulations. To achieve this objective, different provisions of the regulations were analyzed separately, with each treated as an independent unit.

Article 1: Objective: This article, through the use of formal structures and categorical propositions, seeks to define the conceptual framework of FIFA's disciplinary regulations. The use of terms such as “description,” “determination,” and “regulation” reflects FIFA's effort to establish itself as a supranational legal authority in the field of football. Such language reflects a discourse of legal authority aimed at strengthening institutional legitimacy and institutionalizing disciplinary order at all levels of professional football. In this respect, the discourse of the first article is not merely legal but also sovereign; in other words, FIFA introduces itself as the superior institution above all relevant entities and individuals, employing the discourse of law to reinforce this position.

Article 2: Scope of Application: Substantive Rights: The discourse of this article emphasizes broad inclusivity and expansion. By stating that its disciplinary regulations apply not only to competitions under its direct supervision but also to other football-related activities, FIFA seeks to expand the scope of its authority. This article, through formal and generalizing



language, extends FIFA's jurisdiction beyond specific events and limited entities to the entirety of the football ecosystem. Furthermore, the reference to violations of statutory objectives and other provisions that cannot be categorized within institutional frameworks reflects a discourse of domination embedded in flexible legal structures. In this way, FIFA, through this article, implements a multilayered regulatory mechanism in international football.

Article 3: Scope of Application: Persons Covered: In this article, FIFA's discourse of disciplinary authority emerges prominently through the explicit and purposeful listing of covered groups. By naming individuals and entities such as players, referees, clubs, leagues, and even those appointed by FIFA, this article seeks to consolidate FIFA's pervasive institutional dominance over all official and semi-official football actors. Its linguistic structure is mandatory and inflexible, reflecting a discourse of comprehensive surveillance and structural control. Moreover, the simultaneous emphasis on both individual and institutional responsibility illustrates a managerial and legal strategy that attempts to institutionalize disciplinary order within FIFA through a combined individual-centered and institution-centered perspective.

Article 4: Scope of Application: Temporal Application: This article conveys a discourse of dynamic and continuous legal oversight that extends beyond the present to encompass the past and future as well. The emphasis on covering past violations provided they result in lighter sanctions indicates FIFA's effort to standardize disciplinary approaches across time. Furthermore, determining the status of persons who have left FIFA's jurisdiction but were subject to it at the time of violation highlights the continuity of responsibility and the enduring legal bond between individuals and FIFA. From a discursive perspective, Article 4 shows FIFA's attempt to sustain its power structure temporally through legal principles, thereby preventing discontinuities in the disciplinary process.

Article 5: Applicable Law: In this article, FIFA relies on two levels of legal sources in an effort both to maintain regulatory independence and to utilize national legal capacities (particularly Swiss law). The use of terms such as "primarily" and "secondarily" constructs a hierarchical structure of legal sources, where priority is given to FIFA's internal documents but, when necessary, reference is made to external legal systems. This model not only reinforces FIFA's internal legal legitimacy but also reflects a discourse of legal interaction with the international order. Such a strategy places FIFA in a position where it can exploit the soft power of comparative law while simultaneously preserving its disciplinary authority.

Article 6: Disciplinary Measures: This article, by precisely delineating various disciplinary measures for both natural and legal persons, constructs a discourse of multilayered control and targeted deterrence. The differentiation between individuals indicates, on the one hand, FIFA's structural recognition of role differences and, on the other hand, the tailoring of regulatory mechanisms to the nature of each actor. The prevailing discourse here is one of codified and predetermined punitive order, where a wide range of potential measures is envisioned to ensure that any violation, depending on circumstances, is met with an appropriate response. The range of sanctions—from written warnings to suspensions and heavy financial penalties—demonstrates FIFA's attempt to keep its comprehensive disciplinary system effective, deterrent, and applicable on a global scale by combining symbolic, financial, and executive instruments.

Article 7: Directives: This article extends beyond sanctions to articulate FIFA's preventive and reform-oriented discourse. Directives here are treated as instruments of behavioral guidance, whose objective is not only punishment but also correction of conduct. Its distinctive feature is that its structure is mandatory, though not in the form of penalties but within a framework of norm-setting. This means that FIFA, alongside its punitive legal structure, has designed parallel corrective mechanisms. Moreover, FIFA's discretion in determining how directives are implemented indicates flexibility in the exercise of authority. The dominant discourse of this article combines soft and structural power through which the central institution seeks to institutionalize a culture of accountability and adherence to ethical and behavioral standards.

Article 8: Responsibility: This article, by emphasizing the principle of accountability, establishes a system of collective and individual responsibility that considers the roles of institutions and individuals simultaneously and equally. The discourse here moves away from being purely punitive and instead advances mechanisms where responsibility transcends individual liability and extends to organizational, institutional, and even vicarious levels. The stipulation that clubs and federations remain accountable for the behavior of their affiliates even in the absence of direct fault reflects a disciplinary discourse more reliant on structural control and assumptions of institutional culpability. Furthermore, rendering "attempt" and "complicity" punishable broadens the scope of responsibility and reinforces the discourse of deterrence at a preemptive level.

Article 9: Referees' Decisions: This article solidifies the discourse of respecting referees' authority on the pitch by drawing a clear boundary between technical and disciplinary decisions. The emphasis on the finality and non-reviewability of referees'



decisions, particularly in technical aspects, establishes a structural separation between the playing field and the disciplinary institution, where FIFA refrains from direct interference in instantaneous decisions. However, allowing review in cases such as “clear error” or “mistaken identity of a player” signals a discourse of legal flexibility that simultaneously seeks to preserve order and fairness. Such a balance, while safeguarding referees’ independence, also ensures procedural justice in the disciplinary process. This article clarifies the boundary between referees’ authority and FIFA’s legal system.

Article 10: Statute of Limitations for Prosecution: The governing discourse of this article is grounded in recognized principles of criminal law that define limitation periods as an instrument to balance the right to prosecute with procedural justice. By classifying different violations by nature and assigning differentiated timelines to each, FIFA seeks to anchor its disciplinary system in legal rationality. Moreover, the emphasis on suspending and recommencing the limitation period upon the undertaking of procedural actions reflects a controlling discourse that leverages classic legal tools to render the disciplinary process dynamic. This article likewise indicates that, through recourse to traditional legal structures, FIFA aims to design mechanisms that preserve equilibrium between the institution’s right of inspection and individuals’ psychological security.

Article 11: Duty to Report: In this article, FIFA transforms the responsibility to report violations from a discretionary duty into a disciplinary obligation. Its discourse rests on transparency, accountability, and active participation of individuals in the administration of disciplinary justice. The requirement to report “immediately,” and the use of terms with strong semantic charge such as “any violation or attempt to violate,” demonstrate FIFA’s intention to expand the scope of oversight through the system’s own actors. In addition, the threat of sanctions for submitting “groundless or irresponsible claims” signals FIFA’s desire to curb informal discourses and control narratives in the disciplinary sphere. This article offers a clear example of blending an ethical discourse (truthfulness and responsibility) with a legal–punitive discourse.

Article 12: Duty to Cooperate: Article 12 embodies a discourse of compulsory cooperation within FIFA’s disciplinary system, where cooperation is no longer optional but a prerequisite for legitimizing adjudicatory processes. Phrases such as “good-faith conduct,” “providing information,” and “responding to requests” show that FIFA seeks an ethical–organizational order in which the parties simultaneously play the roles of actor and obligee. At the same time, the explicit possibility of imposing sanctions for non-cooperation indicates that the ethical discourse of this article is backed by a legal–disciplinary foundation and does not remain at the level of moral recommendation. This provision endeavors to institutionalize a cohesive culture in which transparency, accountability, and answerability are treated as mandatory norms.

Article 13: Abusive Conduct and Violation of Fair Play Principles: By enumerating examples of improper conduct, this article redefines the moral and value boundaries of professional football. Its discourse is a combination of social censure, institutional care, and behavioral prevention. Here, FIFA seeks to present an ethics-centered image of football by establishing criteria such as respect for human dignity, avoidance of offensive gestures, and refraining from exploiting the sporting platform for non-sporting ends. Notably, the emphasis on “conduct that damages the reputation of football or FIFA” indicates that this provision seeks symbolic protection of the FIFA institution, not merely control of actors. From a discourse-analytic perspective, Article 13 guards the symbolic order of global football and reflects policies to preserve FIFA’s public image across media, social, and institutional spheres.

Article 14: Misconduct by Players and Officials: This article endeavors to build a coherent, hierarchical disciplinary system by precisely classifying different forms of misconduct and assigning sanctions proportionate to their severity. The prevailing discourse is deterrence through certainty of punishment; in practice, a minimum penalty is prescribed for almost every offense, leaving little room for legal leniency. Of special note is the expansion of misconduct to spaces outside the field of play, including social media, signaling a shift in the disciplinary discourse from “on-field behavior” to “the player’s social presence.” By emphasizing individuals’ media and public responsibility, this article constructs a trans-temporal and trans-spatial framework of disciplinary control in which a person’s character across their entire digital and real-life existence is subject to oversight.

Article 15: Discrimination: With a clear and resolute approach, FIFA links its legal boundaries to human and fundamental rights values. The discourse is built on the absolute rejection of racist, sexist, linguistic, ethnic, religious, and ideological behavior. The severity of the prescribed sanctions—especially a minimum suspension of 10 matches—signals the paramount priority of combating discrimination in FIFA’s value system. Another key point is holding clubs or federations responsible for the conduct of their spectators, reflecting a discourse of “institutional responsibility for individual wrongdoing.” The possibility of mitigation conditioned upon preventive programming further shows that the disciplinary discourse here is simultaneously



punitive, restorative, and reform-oriented. This article exemplifies a fusion of criminal justice, social justice, and cultural reform within FIFA's disciplinary framework.

Article 16: Matches Not Played or Abandoned: This provision advances a discourse of absolute accountability in which any disruption in the holding of a match—absent force majeure—is directly attributed to team behavior or that of relevant institutions. Terms such as “minimum fine,” “replay,” or “disciplinary defeat” carry built-in deterrent messages aimed at strict control over match organization. From a discourse perspective, this article seeks to represent competitions as a disciplined arena devoid of exceptions and disorder by intensifying responsibilities. Even determining the status of yellow cards in abandoned matches indicates FIFA's desire to establish uniform, standardized mechanisms in response to emergent situations.

Article 17: Match Order and Security: FIFA assigns direct responsibility for stadium order and security to host teams and federations. The dominant discourse blends structural prevention with organizational accountability. Phrases like “before, during, and after the match” show that FIFA's oversight is not confined to match time and instead follows a continuous temporal coverage. Emphasis on cooperation with local authorities reflects FIFA's intent to shape a bidirectional crisis-management system in which stadiums are treated as socio-political spaces. The detailed list of improper behaviors—such as throwing objects, pyrotechnics, ideological and abusive chants—reveals FIFA's aim to purge the football environment of symbols of violence or politicization.

Article 18: Protests: Article 18 represents a significant manifestation of lawful participation discourse in FIFA's disciplinary order. By granting clubs and federations a right to protest, FIFA positions itself not only as overseer and enforcer but also as the body that opens a formal path for institutional entry into adjudication. However, the 24-hour deadline and fee requirement impose a bureaucratic control over this right to prevent excessive recourse and potential abuse. Notably, the limitation of protests to specific and clear matters—such as an ineligible player, field conditions, or a clear referee error—signals FIFA's order-driven and conservative stance toward adversarial mechanisms. In this framework, FIFA seeks to combine transparency with legal efficiency.

Article 19: Use of an Ineligible Player: This article is one of the principal tools for preserving competitive fairness in FIFA's disciplinary system. Its discourse is grounded in normativity, legitimacy, and the rights of others, since fielding an ineligible player is treated as a breach of fundamental principles of fair competition. By stipulating consequences such as a disciplinary defeat, financial penalties, and possible player suspension, FIFA aims to treat this offense as a serious transgression and to deter its occurrence. Moreover, the emphasis that the Disciplinary Committee may act “on its own initiative” indicates that, within FIFA's legal discourse, the absence of a complaint does not necessarily terminate proceedings. This article reflects a discourse of transparency, equitable competition, and structural justice in international football.

Article 20: Match-Fixing and Competition Manipulation: Here FIFA adopts an uncompromising, punitive stance toward any act aimed at altering match outcomes. The discourse is anchored in the principle of “protecting the integrity of competitions,” treating deliberate interference with a match's course or result as a non-negotiable red line. The minimum five-year suspension and minimum fine of 100,000 Swiss francs reveal a maximalist approach to combating organized corruption. Extending responsibility to clubs for misconduct by their players or officials strengthens a discourse of institutional accountability. The obligation to report immediately any proposal or information about manipulation shows that FIFA sanctions not only the offense itself but also “silence” about it. Overall, this article reflects FIFA's deep concern over erosion of public trust in football.

Article 21: Non-Compliance with Decisions: This article exemplifies one of the most explicit manifestations of a mandatory and authority-asserting discourse in FIFA's legal order. The insistence on full execution of the decisions of FIFA bodies or the Court of Arbitration for Sport, without qualification or interpretation, indicates the formation of a strict, hierarchical structure in FIFA's legal relations. Within this structure, non-compliance—regardless of motive or circumstances—is treated as a breach of central order and is met with sanctions such as transfer bans, points deductions, or even relegation. The prevailing discourse consolidates the sovereignty of the superior institution over subordinate structures through disciplinary tools and disqualification. Furthermore, attributing liability to the sporting successor of an offending entity or individual signals the continuation and extension of legal responsibility to subsequent structures and relationships.

Article 22: Forgery and Falsification of Documents: This provision demonstrates FIFA's firm stance against acts that compromise the legitimacy of its legal or informational system. The discourse of Article 22 is predicated on safeguarding authenticity, transparency, and institutional trust. Forgery or use of falsified documents—regardless of outcome—is deemed a

fundamental threat that directly conflicts with justice and competitive integrity. Accordingly, prescribing at least a six-match suspension and a minimum 12-month ban, along with a financial penalty, indicates that this offense is considered not merely administrative but imbued with ethical and structural gravity. Holding a club or federation responsible for the actions of its subordinates reinforces the discourse of institutional responsibility and collective agency in FIFA's legal system.

Article 23: Special Regulations: In this article, FIFA, while acknowledging certain specialized regulations within its structure, endeavors to maintain coherence between disciplinary provisions and other specialized rulebooks. References to the Anti-Doping Regulations, rules concerning intermediaries and match officials, and the FIFA Clearing House reveal a discourse of legal interconnection. The article seeks to present FIFA's regulatory system not as a separate compilation but as an interwoven network of statutes and directives which, from a discourse perspective, strengthens the concept of a "self-sufficient legal order." In such an order, specialized mechanisms move in alignment with the central disciplinary regime and generate juridical synergy.

Article 24: Enforcement of Sanctions: Article 24 pursues a discourse of commitment to the continuity of justice over time. Setting five years as the legal period for enforcing sanctions signals FIFA's intent to preserve the dynamism and effectiveness of disciplinary rulings in the long term. The prevailing discourse implicitly underscores the importance of the disciplinary system's efficacy and seeks to ensure—through ongoing enforcement—that the educational, deterrent, and symbolic consequences are guaranteed over time. Moreover, starting the period from the date the decision becomes enforceable indicates a coherent legal approach to the temporal starting point, which, discursively, speaks to adherence to principles of fair process and the logical sequencing of punitive measures.

Article 25: Determination of Sanctions: This provision marks the entry of a judgment-based and evaluative discourse into FIFA's disciplinary structure. Selecting the type and severity of sanction based on criteria such as the gravity of the offense, intent, prior record, and level of cooperation indicates FIFA's effort to shape a system grounded in proportionality, equity, and flexibility. The possibility of imposing geographical or subject-matter limitations on a sanction signals intelligent, adaptive functions of the disciplinary system whereby a penalty is not merely punitive but also an instrument for restoring order and trust. This article moves from a norm-based discourse toward a measurability discourse, where the decision-maker plays an active role in situational analysis and the selection of an appropriate response.

Article 26: Recidivism: Here FIFA introduces recidivism as an aggravating factor in disciplinary proceedings. The dominant discourse is deterrent and cautionary; notably, different timeframes for repeat offenses are established depending on the type of violation, indicating a granular and differentiated approach. The linkage between "type of offense" and "duration of record validity" reflects FIFA's effort to systematize the concept of "prior record" within disciplinary logic. Discursively, this article shows FIFA's attention not only to the moment of violation but also to past behavior of individuals and institutions in final assessments. This multilayered perspective enhances predictive capacity and management of violations for FIFA's adjudicatory bodies.

Article 27: Suspension of Sentence Execution: This provision reflects a discourse of rehabilitation and reform within the framework of punishment. The possibility of suspending the execution of a sanction, conditioned on a probationary period, indicates that FIFA pursues a hybrid approach combining discipline and trust. The article departs from purely punitive logic and creates space for behavioral reconstruction provided the offender commits no further violation during the specified period. From a discourse-analytic standpoint, it embodies restorative and behavior-focused justice. However, the exception for competition manipulation offenses—where suspension is not available—reflects FIFA's red lines; a discourse in which certain behaviors are essentially non-negotiable.

Article 28: Disciplinary Defeat: In this article, punitive discourse manifests in numeric and symbolic form. Assigning standardized results for disciplinary defeat (3–0 in 11-a-side football, 5–0 in futsal, 10–0 in beach soccer) shows FIFA's pursuit of uniformity and formal justice in addressing unlawful match conditions. Beyond its punitive burden, this method of allocating results carries symbolic weight, sending a clear message to other actors about the consequences of rule breaches. The refusal to annul cautions received in voided matches further underscores FIFA's commitment to legal stability and continuous sanction enforcement. In sum, Article 28 articulates a discourse of resolve and uniform practice against structural disruptions to competitions.

Article 29: Matches Behind Closed Doors: Through precise restrictions on attendance in behind-closed-doors matches, Article 29 embodies a discourse of environmental control and social deterrence within FIFA's disciplinary structure. Allowing



specific categories—team members, officials, media, and accompanying children—indicates FIFA’s goal of applying punishment without completely disrupting the match’s media and official functions. The article conveys a twofold message: first, preventing the recurrence of improper fan behavior; second, preserving the professional image of the match for global audiences. It reflects a hybrid policy of strict discipline and soft display, wherein social control is exercised by engineering the physical presence of persons.

Article 30: General Rule: This article consolidates the legal foundation of all disciplinary actions and effectively provides the institutional infrastructure for subsequent provisions. By specifying FIFA’s competence to adjudicate, investigate, and impose sanctions, its discourse rests on sovereign authority and centralized decision-making. At the same time, delegating part of the competence to confederations and federations within their respective domains reveals a discourse of structural delegation and conditional trust. Through this provision, FIFA retains its role as the parent body while, via division of responsibilities, seeking to establish a multilevel, coordinated system of oversight and punishment. This blend of concentration and distribution builds a complex structure of governance in global football.

Article 31: Composition of FIFA Judicial Bodies: Here FIFA defines the organizational contours of its judicial apparatus and, by determining its membership composition, projects a discourse of legitimacy, expertise, and institutional independence. Empowering the Congress to elect the chair, deputy chair, and members strengthens intra-institutional democratic legitimacy and creates a balance between executive and judicial powers within FIFA’s structure. The discourse is grounded in task differentiation and the consolidation of transparent institutional mechanisms: the legitimacy of adjudicatory processes begins not only with performance but with the decision-making structure itself. The article seeks to institutionalize FIFA’s judicial authority through emphasis on orderly composition and electoral process.

Article 32: Independence and Impartiality: The discourse of this provision openly aims to protect procedural justice and public trust in FIFA’s judicial bodies. By emphasizing independence and impartiality criteria, it is directly influenced by human rights and judicial justice discourses. The requirement that judicial members self-declare in cases of conflicts of interest or doubts about impartiality reflects a self-regulatory and transparency-enhancing approach. Defining a mechanism to challenge a member’s participation in decision-making further creates space for critical participation and the possibility of review. Discursively, this article seeks to institutionalize principles of judicial ethics in international sport and underscores accountability and the credibility of adjudication.

Article 33: Hearings: This provision outlines the operational setting for the judicial body’s functioning from a formal and procedural standpoint. Allowing hearings with a single judge in certain cases signals structural flexibility and agility in handling diverse matters. Emphasis on the chair’s or deputy chair’s initiative to determine the number of sitting members reflects a discourse of confidence in hierarchical structure and managerial discretion. The article attempts to balance decision-making efficiency with preservation of ceremonial principles in quasi-judicial structures. The option of individual decision-making in specific situations indicates FIFA’s orientation toward optimizing adjudication in urgent or special conditions.

Article 34: Confidentiality: Article 34 strengthens the discourse of safeguarding the credibility of adjudicatory processes by emphasizing confidentiality. This core tenet of fair process is implemented by obliging judicial members and parties to preserve information. Where FIFA publishes information, it may do so only upon issuance of a final decision or when a case is opened. Crucially, disclosure is not merely an error but a disciplinary offense and, for judicial members, may even lead to suspension. The article conveys a discourse of information control, preservation of judicial credibility, and protection against media intrusions into adjudicatory proceedings.

Article 35: Secretariat: The Secretariat is introduced as the executive arm of the judicial body; yet its role is more than administrative—through managing cases, registering decisions, and even conducting preliminary inquiries, it becomes a quasi-legal organ. The discourse pivots around “structural support for justice,” meaning justice is not realized solely by judges but also through administrative, informational, and executive infrastructures. Responsibilities for registration, archiving, maintenance of disciplinary records, and cooperation with confederations show the Secretariat operates as the custodian of FIFA’s legal memory. By delineating a multilayered role for the Secretariat, Article 35 consolidates a functionalist legal discourse.

Article 36: Commencement of Proceedings: From a discourse perspective, this article marks the formal entry point of actors into FIFA’s judicial and disciplinary space. Stipulating that proceedings begin only at the request of the Secretary or Secretary General reflects a centralizing discourse of authority in which the central organ retains control over initiating



adjudication. Nevertheless, the mention that external complaints may, at the disciplinary body's discretion, be considered, shows a degree of openness to external voices. The article seeks a balance between administrative efficiency and public access to justice, designing the official path so that, while preserving institutional order and control, genuine complaints can be addressed.

Article 37: Procedural Methods: Article 37 defines the procedural and processual framework for disciplinary adjudication, thereby elevating a discourse of structural justice. Provisions such as written notice, an opportunity to submit a defense, the possibility of a hearing, and compliance with deadlines reflect principles of due process adapted to sports institutions. The article aims to narrow the gap between sports disciplinary structures and classical judicial bodies without replicating their full legal complexity. Allowing adjudication without the parties' presence under specific circumstances indicates FIFA's effort to balance expedition with the rights of the accused. Its discourse forges a precise link between "procedural efficiency" and "minimum justice."

Article 38: Burden of Proof: Here FIFA articulates its distinctive approach to proof and evidentiary burdens. Using the decision-maker's "comfortable satisfaction" as the standard of judgment constitutes a fundamental departure from the stringent logic of criminal courts. This concept reflects a discourse of flexibility in proof tailored to the sporting context. At the same time, assigning the burden of proof to the claimant and requiring a defense where a penalty or claim is brought against a player introduces a relative balance within the process of persuasion. The article seeks to facilitate adjudication while providing a rational basis for decisions, even if it diverges from classical legal mechanisms.

Article 39: Provisional Measures: Article 39 advances a preventive, precautionary discourse. Before a final decision, the judicial body may impose interim measures such as suspension from activities or prohibition from participating in competitions. This indicates that maintaining order and preventing potential harm can, at times, take precedence over issuing a final ruling. Though temporary in legal terms, such measures discursively display FIFA's will to intervene swiftly and proactively against potential threats. The article shifts FIFA's disciplinary structure from a purely reactive stance to a proactive, forward-looking one that serves to preserve the system's credibility and integrity.

Article 40: Settlement and Conciliation: This provision presents a rare facet of FIFA's disciplinary discourse—one oriented toward "repair" and "understanding." Unlike other provisions largely centered on punishment and control, it recognizes the possibility of settlement between parties in less serious cases. Terms such as "agreement," "restoration of the status quo," and "termination of proceedings" indicate that, in some instances, preserving relationships and avoiding conflict take precedence over punishment. The article highlights the human and flexible dimension of the disciplinary system, allowing for relational repair and trust-building under judicial oversight. Discursively, Article 40 marks the point where legal authority allows moral interaction to emerge.

Article 41: Rendering of Decisions: As the apex of the disciplinary process, this provision reinforces a discourse of finality and institutional authority. Requiring that decisions be reasoned, documented, and accompanied by their time of enforcement demonstrates FIFA's pursuit of legal transparency and structural accountability. The obligation to provide written reasoning reflects an effort to rationalize adjudication and avoid arbitrariness. Including information on avenues of appeal guarantees enhanced access to justice for the parties. Discursively, Article 41 communicates not only the closure of a dispute but also the consolidation of the judicial system's legitimacy.

Article 42: Notification and Enforceability: This article establishes the direct link between notification and the executive validity of decisions. Its discourse revolves around formality, temporality, and commitment to prompt enforcement. The use of explicit terms such as "enforceable," "from the time of notification," and the Secretariat's role in service of decisions indicates FIFA's intention to minimize delays or interpretive gaps in enforcement. The article ties legal order to administrative order and makes the decision's validity contingent not upon party consent but upon completion of an official process. Discursively, it reflects an immediacy of institutional authority and the primacy of administrative order over potential delays.

Article 43: Costs: FIFA defines the financial order of adjudication in a specific format, thereby injecting a discourse of economic responsibility into its disciplinary system. Assigning costs to the convicted party or the party filing a baseless request shows FIFA's aim to prevent administrative overload and discourage unfounded claims. At the same time, the possibility of cost exemptions in certain cases reflects a discourse of compensatory justice, projecting a social perspective within a stringent legal order. The article strives to balance the institution's financial efficiency with preserving the right of diverse actors to access adjudication.



Article 44: Clerical or Technical Errors: This provision reflects a discourse of precision coupled with flexibility in FIFA's legal structure. The possibility of correcting typographical or computational mistakes without re-running the entire adjudicatory process indicates legal realism—rather than suspending or vacating a decision, the system allows technical rectification. By specifying that the same issuing body performs the correction, the article maintains control and ownership of the decision with the issuing authority, reinforcing cohesion in judicial authority.

Article 45: Appeals: Article 45 is the most prominent expression of a discourse of enhanced access to justice in FIFA's disciplinary regulations. By defining an independent appellate body and clarifying its jurisdiction over first-instance decisions, FIFA builds a multilayered review system. While recognizing the right to appeal, the article maintains order and legal discipline through formal and temporal requirements. The notable point that certain decisions (e.g., of the chair) may not necessarily be appealable reflects graded authority and stability in key determinations. Discursively, this provision balances the “right to contest” with the “relative finality of decisions,” signaling a mature judicial process.

Article 46: Final and Enforceable Decisions: This article explicitly projects a discourse of institutional decisiveness: decisions issued under it are deemed final and enforceable, with no appeal or suspension foreseen. Within this framework, FIFA seeks to prevent procedural attrition and ensure efficient execution of sanctions. The discourse rests on closing avenues of return and emphasizing the terminal authority of the issuing body. From this perspective, Article 46 embodies the “legal endpoint” of a case—a point where the disciplinary power structure is applied without wavering and, simultaneously, confidence in prior proceedings is affirmed.

Article 47: Temporal Jurisdiction for Enforcement: By setting a five-year window for enforceability, this article outlines a legal discourse grounded in temporal limitation and executive order. The insistence that decisions are no longer enforceable after the specified period reflects a realistic approach: FIFA acknowledges limits to executive memory and shields the system from stagnating unresolved cases. The provision creates a balance between executive compulsion and the passage of time. Referring to the start of the period from the date the decision becomes enforceable demonstrates conceptual and computational precision, rooted in time-bound, structured control.

Article 48: Competent Bodies for Enforcement of Sanctions: This article maps a hierarchical system for enforcement and explicitly identifies which bodies are responsible for implementing sanctions. Delegating enforcement to federations, leagues, and clubs at the national level, and to confederations at the regional level, creates a discourse of conditional decentralization within FIFA's central order. From a discourse-analytic view, it introduces a multilevel enforcement model grounded in operational trust in subordinate bodies, yet accompanied by central oversight. Establishing consequences for failure to enforce shows that this relative trust is always framed by FIFA's superior institutional authority.

Article 49: Supervision of Enforcement: Here, a control-oriented and evaluation-centered discourse characterizes FIFA's executive structure. Requiring responsible bodies to submit reports and evidence of enforcement reflects meticulous monitoring of compliance with disciplinary order. Thus, FIFA is not only the decision-maker but also the overseer of execution, extending its power structure from judgment to on-the-ground realization. Discursively, the provision shows the continuity of authority that does not stop at issuing a verdict but supervises its complete execution. The implicit threat of secondary consequences in cases of default embodies a discourse of implicit coercion under the guise of formal oversight.

Article 50: Enforcement of Financial Obligations: This article clearly illustrates FIFA's financial-disciplinary discourse. Addressing the fulfillment of financial obligations arising from disciplinary rulings and establishing enforcement mechanisms—such as surcharges for delay—convey an unmistakable message of zero tolerance for financial non-compliance. Allowing installment payments subject to committee approval reflects legal flexibility in accommodating parties' economic conditions. At the same time, the article makes clear that financial order in FIFA is inseparable from legal order and that breaching it constitutes a disciplinary violation rather than a mere administrative issue. Accordingly, the discourse blends executive authority with economic realism.

Article 51: Enforcement of Bans and Suspensions: FIFA explains a comprehensive, systematized approach to enforcing personal sanctions such as bans or suspensions. The central discourse focuses on “comprehensive execution” and “avoidance of legal loopholes.” Stating that bans must be applied across all national and international competitions clearly reveals FIFA's concern about creating escape hatches for offenders. Terms such as “automatic,” “at all levels,” and “not subject to interpretation” point to a discourse of unconditional obligation and universal enforceability. The article shows FIFA's aspiration, as a global overseer, for practical uniformity in the execution of disciplinary justice.



Article 52: Stay of Execution Due to Appeal: This provision provides a mechanism to balance “swift enforcement of sanctions” with the “right to an effective challenge.” The dominant discourse creates breathing space for the accused during the appeal process. Staying execution upon filing an appeal is treated as a facet of procedural justice. However, making the stay contingent upon the Appeal Committee’s approval reflects a controlled limitation of this right. With this article, FIFA underscores both the primacy of order and discipline and adherence to defense rights and due process. Discursively, the article strives for “flexible order,” allowing parties a voice without undermining firmness.

Article 53: Enforcement of International Decisions: A discourse of institutional solidarity and overlap is prominent here. By obligating member associations to enforce international decisions issued by superior bodies or other associations, FIFA seeks to prevent bifurcation or contradictions in the administration of justice. Phrases like “without delay,” “with the same effect,” and “in accordance with FIFA’s framework” underscore immediate and unconditional alignment. The article aims to create a discourse of global order in football, where enforcement is not confined to national borders but is aligned within a coordinated structure that spans all levels.

Article 54: Transparency of Decisions: Article 54 strengthens public trust in FIFA’s disciplinary structure. Publishing judicial decisions under defined parameters is part of a discourse of “institutional accountability” and transparency in sport governance. Yet protecting parties’ privacy and redacting certain information demonstrate efforts to balance the “right to know” with the “right to dignity.” By highlighting controlled disclosure, the article advances a discourse of “regulated transparency”—transparency in service of adjudicatory legitimacy rather than disruption of power equilibrium. FIFA presents itself here as transparent yet vigilant.

Article 55: Non-Execution of Decisions and Its Consequences: In this article, the discourse of legal compulsion emerges explicitly. Failure to execute disciplinary decisions on time is deemed an independent, prosecutable violation. Expressions such as “written request,” “deadline setting,” and “additional disciplinary sanctions” show that FIFA does not merely insist on execution but also possesses deterrent tools to guarantee it. The article sends a clear message to associations, clubs, and individuals: in FIFA’s disciplinary system, issuing a decision is not the end; full and prompt execution is the condition for the structure’s credibility. Discursively, Article 55 safeguards the continuity of FIFA’s executive authority and legal sovereignty.

Article 56: Cooperation Between FIFA and Confederations: This provision clearly reflects a discourse of vertical cooperation within FIFA’s power structure. By obliging confederations to cooperate fully in enforcement, FIFA seeks to consolidate hierarchical order and legal command within interactions between superior and subordinate bodies. Cooperation is not optional but an institutional obligation whose breach triggers disciplinary consequences. The discourse is built on coordination, accountability, and reinforcement of cohesion in the international legal system. The language is inflexible and directive, signaling FIFA’s intention to reproduce central authority across intercontinental space.

Article 57: Notification of Decisions to Third Parties: Article 57 introduces a discourse of selective transparency and controlled legal information flow. While judicial principles rest on confidentiality, this article allows notification of decisions to third parties—if they are deemed to have a legitimate interest—thus balancing secrecy of proceedings with targeted transparency. Terms like “legitimate interests” or “requirements of the judicial process” leave limited interpretive space for the issuing body, reflecting discursively a decision-making power over controlled disclosure. The provision serves the discourse of adjudicatory credibility and the legitimacy of purposive transparency within FIFA’s disciplinary framework.

Article 58: Automatic Suspension for Non-Payment: This article intertwines financial penalties with sporting sanctions. If determined debts are not paid, the person is automatically suspended from participation in sporting activities. This direct linkage between economy and discipline reflects the emergence of a “financial sovereignty” alongside sporting sovereignty. Automatic suspension, without the need to initiate a new judicial process, embodies a discourse of immediate authority and direct accountability. Article 58 deploys traditional punitive tools while leveraging indirect pressure mechanisms, compelling financial compliance by threatening professional activity.

Article 59: International Enforceability: Here, FIFA introduces a mechanism whereby disciplinary decisions are enforceable across borders. The discourse rests on legal convergence and cross-border coordination. Geographical limits do not bar the enforcement of FIFA decisions; member associations are obliged to abide by rulings even concerning foreign parties. The article strengthens internal disciplinary order and discursively portrays FIFA as a transnational, supra-state institution with legal power beyond borders. Thus, FIFA’s disciplinary justice acquires a global structure.



Article 60: Regional Follow-Up and Enforcement Mechanisms: As a complement to the previous provision, this article presents a networked and distributed discourse of disciplinary power. Confederations and associations are not only recipients of decisions but also enforcement arms and follow-up institutions. Words such as “committed,” “obliged,” and “coordinated” show that regional enforcement must align with FIFA’s goals. The article marks a transition from a rigid hierarchical discourse to a networked–coordinated one, wherein responsibility for executing justice is shared among multiple bodies. In this way, FIFA strives to entrench and extend its disciplinary power both centrally and across levels.

Article 61: Enforcement of Decisions Issued by External Bodies: This article reflects a discourse of legal compatibilism and judicial integration at the international level. By recognizing decisions of bodies such as the Court of Arbitration for Sport or dispute resolution chambers, FIFA strengthens its place within the global football order. Treating compliance with these rulings as part of the internal disciplinary system indicates a discourse of inter-institutional cooperation, mutual legitimation, and respect for international sports law. At the same time, FIFA preserves its strategy of ensuring execution through its own structure, employing internal disciplinary tools to enforce external decisions.

Article 62: Reopening of Proceedings: This provision highlights a discourse of corrigible justice, acknowledging that adjudication—even when considered final—may require reconsideration if new evidence emerges. By precisely defining conditions for reopening, such as the appearance of new information or proof of a clear error, the article demonstrates a commitment to fairness and realism in adjudication. Discursively, it balances authority and structural humility: as overseer, FIFA permits review to correct potential mistakes without undermining the overall legal order.

Article 63: Annulment of a Decision: Article 63 represents the most robust manifestation of legal reconstruction within FIFA’s judicial structure. It expressly allows for complete annulment of a ruling under specific conditions. This reveals structural courage and an acknowledgment of possible legal defect—something seldom emphasized in complex judicial systems. Conditions such as lack of jurisdiction or serious procedural breach underscore a discourse of legal exactitude and respect for due process. Analytically, the provision guarantees self-correction in FIFA’s disciplinary structure, enabling long-term survival and legitimacy.

Article 64: Costs of Reconsideration: A logical extension of the previous article, this provision introduces a discourse of economic accountability into the realm of judicial review. By establishing cost mechanisms for reopening or annulment, FIFA aims to deter abuse of exceptional processes. Phrases like “if the request is rejected,” “additional costs,” and “financial burden on the requester” signal a policy of curbing baseless petitions through calibrated financial pressure. Article 64 reflects FIFA’s blended perspective on justice and efficiency: access to review is balanced with financial responsibility to prevent systemic attrition.

Article 65: Suspension of Membership and Its Disciplinary Effects: This provision clearly exhibits FIFA’s political–disciplinary discourse. Suspending a national association is treated as severing its legal bond with the entire disciplinary order, resulting in ineligibility to participate in any official activity. This measure represents the most severe level of institutional pressure FIFA may deploy for structural or governance reasons. Notably, consequences apply not only to the association but also to clubs and players, creating a discourse of correlated sanctions. Analytically, the article reflects FIFA’s supra-state regulatory power that contemplates intervention across sovereign boundaries.

Article 66: Expedited Proceedings: This article reflects a discourse of efficiency and rapid responsiveness in emergencies. By defining a fast-track mechanism, FIFA demonstrates that its disciplinary system is not solely predicated on precision and formalities but possesses structural flexibility for prompt, effective decisions in special situations. Terms such as “without unnecessary delay” and “while preserving the parties’ rights” suggest a balance between speed and due process. The provision addresses contexts where decision-making delays could disrupt competitions. Discursively, Article 66 moves FIFA toward reactive, dynamic justice aligned with situational exigencies.

Article 67: Single-Judge Proceedings by the Judicial Chair: This article concentrates decision-making power, on an exceptional basis, in the hands of the judicial chair. Its dominant discourse is conditional centralization in the service of structural efficiency. In specified cases, the chair may decide alone on urgent, simple, or administrative matters. While such concentration might appear to reduce transparency, limiting its scope and subject matter aims to create agility in the decision process. The discourse combines institutional trust, procedural economy, and individual responsibility, enabling the chair to facilitate the path of order without compromising justice.



Article 68: Urgent Matters: Article 68 embodies FIFA's emergency executive power. Under special conditions, the Secretary General or the judicial chair may implement immediate measures such as temporary suspension without completing the full process. From a discourse perspective, the article prioritizes the overarching order of football over routine legal procedures: in crises, the "public interest of football" prevails over "legal formalities." This approach resembles "states of exception" in other legal systems, enabling immediate action to preserve the broader structure. Requiring subsequent review by the competent body preserves minimum judicial oversight.

Article 69: Sensitive Cases: This provision ventures into the ethical and social dimensions of disciplinary regulations. Cases involving vulnerable interests—such as children or victims of discrimination—must be handled with sensitivity, confidentiality, and respect for human dignity. It bears a protective and humane justice discourse that moves the legal structure beyond mere punishment toward dignity-centered adjudication. Terms like "protection of information," "non-disclosure," and "limited media coverage" reflect an ethical discourse protecting weak and vulnerable subjects. The article marks the substantive entry of human rights principles into FIFA's disciplinary core.

Article 70: Media Interviews: A clear boundary is drawn here between the legal system and the media sphere. The dominant discourse is narrative control and protection of adjudicatory credibility. Prohibiting media interviews by judicial members or parties during proceedings is an explicit effort to prevent politicization and media-driven adjudication. The article seeks to preserve "procedural silence" so that the outcome emerges from legal channels rather than public platforms. Discursively, it sustains the boundary between "formal justice" and "public judgment," keeping narrative balance within institutional control.

Article 71: Facilitating Enforcement of External Bodies' Decisions: Continuing the prior discourse on international cooperation, this article focuses on "effective execution." FIFA presents itself not only as the issuer of internal rulings but also as the facilitator of implementing decisions from international sports bodies such as dispute resolution chambers. It thus appears as the "executive arm of international sports order." Discursively, the article conveys two messages: preserving cohesion in the global football legal system and emphasizing FIFA's superior role in ensuring coordinated justice across levels. In short, FIFA is positioned as the link between decision and action.

Article 72: Regulatory Changes During Proceedings: This article reflects a discourse of interpretive justice and adherence to the principle of facilitating adjudication. Stating that, if regulations change during proceedings, the more lenient rule must apply signals commitment to human rights principles and procedural fairness. It endeavors to prevent penalties misaligned with the time of the offense and to provide psychological assurance to sports actors. Analytically, the article humanizes legal order, moving from rigid legalism toward adaptive justice—a bridge between a strict legal framework and ethics-centered adjudication within FIFA.

Article 73: Exclusion of Other Legal Sources: Here the discourse is one of FIFA's legal independence. The article firmly declares that external legal sources—unless expressly accepted—are not applicable. This indicates FIFA's intention to present its proprietary legal framework as the ultimate, self-sufficient reference. By excluding national or customary sources, FIFA seeks to immunize its disciplinary order against external influences. This independence-seeking discourse consolidates FIFA's power as a "closed and authoritative legal system."

Article 74: Interpretation of the Regulations: This provision expressly assigns interpretive authority to the Disciplinary Committee—discursively transferring "semantic power" into FIFA's decision-making structure. Exclusive interpretive delegation centers meaning production: the content and application of the regulations are shaped not by the public or external courts but within a closed circle of official organs. FIFA thus becomes both producer and interpreter of law, enabling a discourse of semantic dominance and interpretive control over the legal order.

Article 75: Repeal of Previous Regulations: With explicit wording, this article states that upon entry into force of the new version, all previous regulations are repealed. Discursively, it conveys structural renewal and movement toward updating the legal system. Conversely, eliminating prior versions without exception represents a discourse of rupture with the past, aiming to free the legal order from historical accretions and possible inefficiencies. Article 75 reinforces the message that "the legal order is meaningful only in the present."

Article 76: Entry into Force: This provision finalizes the discourse of operationalization, linking all theoretical, disciplinary, ethical, and structural discussions to the point of practical implementation. This simple yet fundamental clause



determines the moment when law crosses from text to action—when FIFA’s legal discourse becomes an operational reality in global football.

In the second stage of analysis, the study focused on identifying the overall discursive structure of FIFA’s Disciplinary Regulations by analyzing the intertextual relations among different articles. At this stage, the analysis was elevated from an article-centered level to a structure-centered level; that is, the provisions were examined not only as independent units but also as parts of a meaningful and purposeful whole. The aim was to extract how meaning is reproduced across the entire regulatory system and to identify the dominant discourses formed through interactions among the articles. The theoretical framework at this stage continued to rely on the integration of Norman Fairclough’s three-level model (text, discourse, social context) and Teun van Dijk’s ideological analysis. Accordingly, the analysis attended both to the linguistic and semantic layers of the provisions and to their institutional position and social function within the global structure of football.

Articles 1 to 5 play a central role in establishing the discursive foundation of legal order and consolidating FIFA’s supranational authority. Drawing on concepts such as scope of application, legal sources, and institutional objectives, these provisions entrench FIFA’s position as a superior regulatory body. Subsequently, Articles 6 to 30, by designing precise disciplinary and punitive mechanisms, reinforce a discourse of control, deterrence, and accountability. This section shows that the regulations, rather than merely responding to violations, function to sustain behavioral and institutional order on a global scale. From Article 31 to Article 45, the analysis centers on the organization of judicial bodies, principles of due process, and adjudicatory procedures. These provisions reflect a discourse of formal justice, legal rationality, and institutional legitimacy; although embedded within a centralized and controlling structure, from Article 46 onward the primary focus shifts to sanction enforcement, sustained oversight, and system effectiveness. The regulations in this segment—from managing enforcement timelines to implementing bans, financial obligations, and secondary supervision—clearly strengthen a discourse of administrative cohesion and ultimate authority.

Article 47 stipulates a specific period for the enforceability of decisions, thereby producing a discourse of temporal order and limiting boundless executive power. By setting an enforcement cap, this article prevents the freezing of cases in administrative memory and lends coherence to legal efficiency. Articles 48 to 51 distribute responsibility for implementing decisions among subordinate entities. On the surface, a discourse of decentralization appears; however, closer analysis shows that these articles actually reproduce a hierarchical order grounded in centralized oversight. Although clubs, associations, and confederations execute decisions, all operate under FIFA’s authority and, in cases of non-compliance, become subject to sanctions themselves. Article 52 creates the possibility of staying the execution of sanctions during appeal; yet the stay is conditional upon the decision of a superior body. This provision seeks to craft a discursive balance between defendants’ rights and disciplinary imperatives, while in practice maintaining the authority of the central organ.

Thereafter, Articles 53 to 76 address formal, interpretive, and executive matters of the regulations. These provisions include defining the Secretariat’s role, procedures for recording and maintaining records, interpretation of regulations, correction of errors, designation of official language, clarification of responsibilities, and rules on overlapping jurisdictions. In this section, a discourse of legal precision, institutional self-sufficiency, and comprehensive control over the cycle of lawmaking, interpretation, and enforcement is reinforced. These articles demonstrate that FIFA is not only the legislator but also the guarantor of legal memory and the ultimate authority for reinterpreting the regulations. Ultimately, it was established that all 76 articles—despite formal differences—are connected within a coherent semantic system; an order in which the concepts of justice, discipline, ethics, and transparency are (re)produced in the service of consolidating power, preserving legitimacy, and exercising FIFA’s symbolic order.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that FIFA’s 2023 Disciplinary Regulations function not only as legal instruments but also as vehicles for the reproduction of power, legitimacy, and symbolic authority in world football. The critical discourse analysis demonstrated that the regulations articulate dominant narratives of control, deterrence, and accountability while simultaneously embedding subtle mechanisms of soft power and discursive dominance. Rather than operating as neutral tools for justice, the regulations were shown to project institutional authority, define the boundaries of legitimacy, and manage dissent



within the football ecosystem. This section interprets these results by engaging with prior scholarship in the fields of sport governance, international law, discourse analysis, and organizational legitimacy.

One of the most salient results was that FIFA's regulations do more than prescribe punishments—they establish the symbolic framework through which FIFA asserts its supranational role. This aligns with arguments about normative pluralism in sport, which suggest that private regulators like FIFA create parallel systems of law and ethics that intersect with, but do not depend upon, state legal systems (Abanazir, 2024). The disciplinary framework reflects this pluralism by positioning FIFA as both legislator and enforcer in its own jurisdiction, thus asserting its role as a normative authority beyond national boundaries. Such dynamics reinforce the concept of FIFA as a quasi-sovereign regulator of global football.

These findings also resonate with the literature on the constitutionalization of FIFA. Bützler highlights how efforts to embed constitutional principles into FIFA's governance structures promise greater legitimacy but face significant challenges due to weak accountability mechanisms (Bützler, 2020). The discourse observed in FIFA's disciplinary code reflects precisely this tension: while the text adopts the formality and gravitas of constitutional principles, it simultaneously preserves centralization of power, thereby limiting the democratizing effect of such constitutionalization. The regulations thus operate as a facade of constitutional order while maintaining hierarchical authority.

The discourse of anti-discrimination in the regulations, particularly the strong stance taken against racism and xenophobia, can be seen as an attempt to address criticisms that FIFA has historically failed to deal with systemic discrimination effectively (Covo, 2019). However, the results of this study show that the emphasis remains largely symbolic, often oriented toward protecting FIFA's public image rather than fostering structural change. This observation supports earlier findings that FIFA's anti-discrimination measures frequently lack effective enforcement, thereby reinforcing the organization's legitimacy without disrupting entrenched inequalities.

The findings also revealed the prominent use of gendered and ethical discourses, which aligns with scholarship on how gender equality has been mobilized in the context of mega-events such as the Women's World Cup. Desjardins argues that discourses of gender equality are often instrumentalized in bid processes without leading to transformative outcomes (Desjardins, 2021). Similarly, this study shows that FIFA's disciplinary regulations invoke values such as fairness, respect, and equality but embed them in a framework of control and legitimacy rather than empowerment. This indicates that the regulations' ethical narratives serve primarily to reinforce FIFA's authority rather than to foster systemic reform.

In line with this interpretation, the findings highlight FIFA's increasing attention to human rights discourses. This reflects Duval and Heerdt's call for a research agenda exploring FIFA's human rights responsibilities (Duval & Heerdt, 2020). The disciplinary regulations embed human rights language in several articles, but the critical discourse analysis suggests that such references are carefully controlled to avoid external accountability. Instead of enabling substantive engagement with international human rights law, these discourses frame FIFA as a self-sufficient moral regulator. This mirrors the broader trend of sports organizations adopting human rights language while limiting genuine compliance with external norms.

From the perspective of legitimacy and authority, the findings resonate strongly with Freeburn's theoretical exploration of how private sports regulators construct authority (Freeburn, 2018). FIFA's disciplinary regulations, through their linguistic form and procedural detail, contribute to a legalistic aura that legitimizes FIFA's governance role. Yet, as García and Welford note, legitimacy increasingly depends on the engagement of stakeholders such as supporters (García & Welford, 2015). The results indicate that stakeholder participation remains absent from the disciplinary framework, highlighting a gap between discursive commitments to fairness and the exclusion of key constituencies from regulatory processes.

The discursive reproduction of FIFA's legitimacy was also apparent in the findings related to media and communication. Ghaffori's study of FIFA's World Cup social media coverage shows how discourse frames power and suppresses dissent (Ghaffori, 2023). Similarly, the regulations examined here deploy linguistic strategies that obscure the coercive nature of authority by framing disciplinary actions as necessary for order and integrity. This aligns with Gomtsian's analysis of FIFA as a private legal order operating with minimal public oversight (Gomtsian, 2018). Together, these studies and the present findings underscore how FIFA consolidates its legitimacy through carefully curated discourses embedded in its regulatory framework.



The regulations' emphasis on morality and ethics also echoes Graf's call for interdisciplinary discourse analysis to understand how inequalities are reinforced in football (Graf, 2023). FIFA's use of ethical vocabulary in the disciplinary text—such as integrity, fairness, and responsibility—reinforces dominant values while suppressing alternative interpretations. This aligns with Henson's international analysis of FIFA, which highlights how its governance mechanisms produce authority that extends far beyond sport (Henson, 2018). The regulations thus reflect a broader pattern of institutional dominance exercised

Page | 17 through normative discourse.

The results further support Hock's analysis of private order-building, where organizations like FIFA assume state-like functions (Hock, 2018). By defining scope, jurisdiction, and responsibility across time and geography, FIFA's regulations resemble legislative codes of states. This also affirms Kobierecki's depiction of FIFA as a diplomatic actor exerting influence over states (Kobierecki, 2019). Disciplinary regulations, in this sense, become tools of soft power that extend FIFA's influence into the political realm.

The findings also mirror broader debates on enforcement legitimacy. Lord argues that pursuing global elites requires robust enforcement mechanisms to achieve credibility (Lord, 2016). Yet the results of this study show that FIFA's enforcement remains selective and highly centralized, raising questions about whether legitimacy is truly achieved or merely discursively projected. This concern connects to Meier's observation that FIFA has consistently resisted state interference to preserve its private transnational authority (Meier, 2015). The disciplinary framework exemplifies this resistance by asserting exclusive jurisdiction over misconduct within global football.

The study also aligns with critical analyses of sportswashing and postcolonialism, particularly in relation to Qatar 2022. Nielsen and Dahl argue that FIFA's discourse serves to sanitize controversial political contexts (Nielsen & Dahl, 2023). The findings here confirm that FIFA's disciplinary regulations deploy narratives of integrity and fairness that obscure deeper structural inequities, thereby serving as instruments of reputation management. This confirms concerns about the co-optation of discourse in service of organizational legitimacy.

The necessity of greater accountability is underscored in both the findings and existing scholarship. Rutgersson emphasizes that without accountability mechanisms, FIFA risks reproducing cycles of crisis (Rutgersson, 2024). The regulations analyzed here reveal little evidence of genuine participatory accountability, instead favoring centralized enforcement and symbolic narratives. Similarly, Scelles highlights how governance practices shape the competitive balance of women's football (Scelles, 2021). The results of this study suggest that FIFA's disciplinary framework reinforces rather than resolves such imbalances by entrenching centralized control.

The broader credibility crisis identified by Tomlinson, who characterizes FIFA's motto "For the Game. For the World" as hollow amid persistent scandals, is also reflected in this study (Tomlinson, 2016). While the regulations project images of fairness and integrity, the discourse analysis suggests that they serve as instruments of authority and legitimacy maintenance rather than meaningful reform. This finding underscores the ongoing gap between rhetoric and practice in FIFA governance.

From a strictly legal perspective, the results support Van Kleef's analysis of the ambiguous legal status of disciplinary regulations (Van Kleef, 2014). The discourse reveals how FIFA's regulations straddle private and public domains, complicating recognition by national legal systems while asserting authority across borders. This hybridity also relates to Webber's discussion of corporate governance and responsibility, which highlights how multinational organizations like FIFA navigate the intersection of transnational law and corporate ethics (Webber, 2016). The disciplinary regulations examined here exemplify such navigation, using discourse to legitimize authority while avoiding robust external oversight.

In summary, the findings of this study reinforce and extend existing scholarship by demonstrating how FIFA's 2023 Disciplinary Regulations embody discourses of authority, legitimacy, and control that extend beyond legal functionality. Through the critical discourse analysis, it becomes clear that FIFA employs its regulations as a form of soft power and discursive management, sustaining its supranational authority while projecting legitimacy in the face of persistent criticism.

Despite the contributions of this study, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, discourse analysis by its nature relies on interpretation, which introduces subjectivity into the findings. While rigorous frameworks such as those of Fairclough and van Dijk were employed, alternative readings of the same text are possible. Second, the study focused solely on the 2023 Disciplinary Regulations as an official published text, without incorporating interviews, case analyses, or enforcement data.



This restricts the analysis to the discursive level and excludes empirical verification of how the regulations are applied in practice. Third, the scope of this study was limited to FIFA, without systematic comparison to other international sport governing bodies such as the International Olympic Committee or UEFA. Comparative analysis might provide a broader perspective on whether the patterns identified here are unique to FIFA or indicative of wider trends in transnational sport governance. Finally, the research was constrained by language and relied on official English texts, which may not fully capture nuances in multilingual application across FIFA's global membership.

Future research could build on these findings in several directions. Comparative studies could examine disciplinary regulations across multiple international sport governing bodies to determine whether similar discursive strategies of legitimacy and control are employed. Longitudinal analyses might explore how FIFA's regulations evolve over time, particularly in response to crises or scandals. Future research could also integrate empirical methods such as interviews with stakeholders—players, referees, administrators, and supporters—to assess how the disciplinary framework is perceived and experienced in practice. Additionally, digital ethnography of FIFA's communication platforms could illuminate how disciplinary discourses are disseminated and contested in online spaces. Finally, critical legal research could investigate the interplay between FIFA's private disciplinary order and national or international legal frameworks, especially in cases of conflict or overlap.

For practitioners, several implications emerge from this study. First, FIFA should prioritize transparency and participatory governance by engaging stakeholders, including players and supporters, in shaping disciplinary frameworks. Second, mechanisms for accountability must be strengthened to ensure that enforcement is not merely symbolic but genuinely transformative. Third, disciplinary measures should integrate restorative justice principles, emphasizing education, rehabilitation, and inclusivity alongside deterrence. Fourth, FIFA should harmonize its regulations with international human rights standards, ensuring consistency between rhetoric and practice. Finally, greater collaboration with national associations and confederations could enhance the legitimacy and fairness of enforcement, promoting trust in FIFA's governance structures.

Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in this study were under the ethical standards.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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