

# The supreme leader sails on; but where did it all go wrong for FIFA?

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FIFA claims to stand for the four 'core values' of authenticity, unity, performance, and integrity. But in recent years the leaders of world football have encountered waves of allegations concerning unaccountable and often corrupt administrative practices. Drawing upon exclusive interviews and oral evidence, a University of Brighton academic, Professor Alan Tomlinson, argues that those 'core values' have now been lost. Writing in the journal *Sport in Society*, Tomlinson claims that it is the tenure of the two presidents, since 1974, which has seen the transformation of FIFA from an INGO (an international non-governmental organization) to a BINGO, a business-oriented international non-governmental organization. A transformation which has created a culture in which unaccountability and corruption can thrive.

In his article, "The supreme leader sails on: leadership, ethics and governance in FIFA", Tomlinson explores how the leadership style, structure and values of FIFA have changed over the years. FIFA was led for its first 70 years at presidential level by volunteer idealists, six men who saw their roles in FIFA as forms of public service, believing that [football](#) had the capability to cultivate relations between countries and nations. The following 38 years produced just two presidents: João Havelange (1974 –1998) and Sepp Blatter (1998 – present).

Tomlinson shows that it is in this era of presidential tenure when the game transformed into the modern global spectacle that we see today. Havelange realised the full commercial potential of sport in a global

market and opened up the influence of the game to new media and markets. Blatter (a faithful employee of Havelange for almost quarter of a century) succeeded him as president in 1998, and continued with Havelange's business acumen and marketing vision for professional sport. It is argued that the combination of FIFA's transformation into a business-oriented organisation and the strength of autocratic power held by the president which has made FIFA vulnerable to the forms of exploitation which have resulted in allegations of corruption during Blatter's presidency. The democratic structure of FIFA – one country/ association one vote - is easily manipulated as rewards can be given to small associations in return for their support and vote.

Is change possible or, as Tomlinson suggests, is the gap between the stated goals of the organization and the practices of its leadership and core administration so entrenched that the mission statement is now little more than puffed-up rhetoric and hyperbole?

**More information:** The supreme leader sails on: leadership, ethics and governance in FIFA, *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics* Volume 17, Issue 9, 2014, [DOI: 10.1080/17430437.2013.856590](https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2013.856590)

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