How do international sports events shape repression in authoritarian host countries? While international tournaments promise unique gains in political prestige, autocrats must fear that foreign journalists will unmask their wrongdoings. Scharpf and Gläßel analyze this publicity-scrutiny problem in joint work with Pearce Edwards (Emory University), arguing that autocracies resolve this dilemma by strategically adjusting repression according to the spatial-temporal presence of international media. Using highly disaggregated data on the 1978 World Cup in Argentina, they demonstrate that the military host government largely refrained from repression during the tournament, but preemptively cleansed the streets beforehand. These adjustments specifically occurred in locations where the regime expected foreign journalists. Additional tests suggest that the regime adapted its logistics of repression accordingly, which also shaped violence after the tournament. Together, the analysis highlights the human costs of mega-events, contradicting the common whitewashing rhetoric by functionaries. The findings have implications for detecting human rights violations around political summits and international fairs.

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