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When the Formula One engines roar louder than war

A qualitative case study of the UK news framing of the Formula One Grand Prix in Russia
and Saudi Arabia regarding sportswashing

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Abstract

When Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the world of sports took the joint decision to exclude them both from hosting events and Russian athletes from competing under the Russian flag. Among the events that were cancelled was the Formula One Grand Prix in Sochi. A month later a missile strike hit an oil refinery 10 kilometres outside of the circuit in Jeddah that would host the second Formula One Grand Prix in Saudi Arabia. Despite questions regarding the safety of the venue the race still went ahead. Two cases with similar circumstances took two different directions regarding the appropriateness of hosting a Formula One Grand Prix. Both states have been accused of using sport for political purposes which has prompted the use of the term sportswashing. However, sportswashing is a vague term and has mostly been applied as a pejorative term to authoritarian states with news media being the dominant user of the word compared to a limited academic use. Thus, this study aims to map how the UK news media frames these two events to further develop the understanding of the medial use of sportswashing using framing theory and putting it in a broader context of sports mega-events and sports diplomacy. Through a qualitative analysis of 222 articles covering both Russia from 2014-2023 and Saudi Arabia from 2021-2023, five frames can be highlighted. These are *Sport as a Political Tool*, *Carrier of Responsibility*, *Development*, *Conflict* and *Global Society*. These frames show a dominantly negative coverage highlighting the responsibility of the drivers rather than covering the organisations' responsibility in deciding where the races take place. Furthermore, the framing displays that sports in general have hypocritical tendencies and where the higher organisational interest in displaying Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) could be a factor that the term sportswashing has seen an increase. As sports journalism tends not to cover political news related to sports could also be a factor that a pejorative use of the term sportswashing has increased when comparing it to already established concepts as sports diplomacy. Advancements for research would be to develop the understanding of other regions' news coverage related to sportswashing to understand this term from a more global perspective.

Keywords: Sportswashing, Framing, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Formula One, Diplomacy, Sport

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1. Introduction

“Sport has the power to change the world” (Nelson Mandela quoted in Keys 2019:1) Several statements such as this one have circulated in the world of sport for a very long time. Sport is said to have the ability to promote peace and fight against all kinds of discrimination. However, criticism towards this perception is often lost in the noise of the media (Keys 2019:1). As much as these statements have been founded in truth, sport can also be a catalysator of environmental harm (Miller 2016:720) as well as human rights violations and war (Boykoff 2022:343). With the growing interest in sport in general (Abeza et al. 2020:130,131) and especially in Formula One with the appearance of the Netflix series Drive to Survive (Dewhirst 2023:238), scrutiny of the locations where the sport is hosted has come under the spotlight. This study will focus on two cases where sport events has been scrutinised with Russia and Saudi Arabia. Both Russia and Saudi Arabia have been involved in criticised military operations with their neighbouring states of Ukraine and Yemen since 2014 and 2015 respectively.

The debate about sports and politics is a difficult topic for both the hosts, the athletes and the public who enjoy watching it because essentially, the core value of sport is just entertainment. Engaging in sport activities could be a form of escapism from war and other humanitarian tragedies that are ongoing in the world. It is easy to fall down the path of wanting to deflect politics when these issues are seeping in and infiltrating the world of sport. Despite this notion of withdrawal from political discussions relating to sport (Næss 2022:24), it has an instrumental part to play when it comes to inter-state relations (Murray 2012:576). One example of sports diplomacy was the Ping-Pong diplomacy between the USA and China in the 1970s. At the time a series of Ping-Pong matches was played which eased the tension of the strained relationship between the two states (Murray 2012:583). The view that sport and politics do not mix could therefore be seen as naive since it can be used for political purposes (Chadwick 2023:15,16).

As democratic states have been less willing to host these events (Horne 2017:248) more authoritarian states have filled the void. This notion has sparked criticism (Boykoff 2019:156). But as the former Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Secretary General Jérôme Valcke said: “less democracy is sometimes better for organising a World Cup” (Quoted in Horne 2017:247). The upsurge for undemocratic regimes to host sports has in turn created the term sportswashing which has been used to highlight how sport is used as a way of distracting the audience from problems within the hosting state such as human rights violations

(Boykoff 2022:342). As much as sportswashing could help distract people from the real problem it could also help in normalising the moral violation that occurs and remodelling it to not be seen as a violation in the first place (Fruh et al. 2023:103).

What further complicates the situation surrounding sport and the hosting of these sport-mega events is when the states that are hosting the events are engaging in war. Four days after the 2014 Olympic Winter Games in Sochi ended, Russia annexed the Ukrainian territory of Crimea (Kobierecki 2016:177). Russia later that year held in October its inaugural Formula One Grand Prix in Sochi. There were calls for cancelling the event but in the end, the race still went ahead. But in 2022 just four days after the end of the Olympic Winter Games in Beijing, Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine and because of that the Grand Prix was cancelled as well as other sporting events taking place in Russia and the ostracising of Russian athletes. The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA) together with Formula One and the stakeholders decided that the race could not take place in the circumstances that surrounded the Russian Grand Prix after the invasion of Ukraine (Formula 1 2022 a.). A month later Formula One visited Saudi Arabia for its Grand Prix in Jeddah and during one of the practice sessions Houthi rebels from Yemen launched a missile strike that hit an oil refinery just 10 kilometres outside of the circuit. Despite this attack which was a response to the Saudi involvement in the Yemen civil war, and that all the drivers reportedly wanted to call the race off and go home (Sturm 2023:175,176), Formula One together with FIA and the stakeholders decided that it was safe to race in Jeddah (Formula 1 2022 b.). Furthermore, Saudi Arabia has been criticised for its human rights violations including mass executions that were leading up to the race in 2022 (Sturm 2023:174).

Thus, there is a need to highlight the topic of sport and politics and not ignore the relationship. The media has played a huge part in having commodified and commercialised the spectacle that sport is today (Billings and Wenner 2017:4). Furthermore, the multi-billion dollar deals the sport governing bodies make for selling the rights to host and broadcast these sport-mega events have led to increased scrutiny of the hosts and how sport can be used for political purposes (Grix et al. 2023:9).

With the backdrop of these two states' similarities where both have been engaging in war, have been criticised for their human rights violations and have been accused of using sport for political purposes the aim of this study is twofold. Because Formula One made different

decisions regarding the continuation of the two Grand Prixes. The Russian one was cancelled and the Saudi Arabian race continued. Thus, the purpose of this research is to explore how the United Kingdom (UK) news media frames these Grand Prixes. This was done from the year of the states inaugural race until one year after the invasion and the missile strike to investigate if there is a difference in the coverage of the events and if the following outcomes have been impacted by the media. Furthermore, this also develops the understanding of global media events and in this case sports mega-events and which role the events have in this topic. Global media events can enable a contradictory position of both positive and negative coverage where the intention of hosting an event to portray oneself in a positive light may have the opposite effect (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2018:1139). Therefore, it is important to also take this into account when covering the framing of the Russian and Saudi Arabian races. UK news media are sampled for this study due to the deep connections they have with Formula One and them being the place where many teams have their headquarters (Bustad & Andrews 2023:595) thus placing the UK as an important source for news about Formula One.

It is also important to illuminate how the media frames the term sportswashing as this term has attached itself to the media discourse and has increasingly been reported as a tool for distracting people from the problems occurring in the hosting states. But the term has also been criticised for its pejorative use and vagueness in terms of what it actually means (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:148). Further, the broad use of the term sportswashing by the media compared to the limited academic use (Grix et al. 2023:5) makes it important to narrow down what the term offers in relation to the already established term of sports diplomacy, a question I will return to in the conclusion. To research this, three research questions have been formulated:

RQ1: How do UK news media frame the Russian Grand Prix and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix?

RQ2: How does the UK news media situate itself regarding the reporting of global media events?

RQ3: What is the conceptual difference between sportswashing and sports diplomacy?

Sport has deep cultural roots and the political use of sport has the potential to use that to its advantage (Fruh et al. 2023:109). As a part of this, the media finds itself in a paradoxical spot

of covering the criticism but also reporting the actual events. Therefore, highlighting the political aspects of the coverage could further our understanding of political sports journalism and sportswashing, which has become a buzzword in the context of contested sports-mega events.

The study is structured as follows by first reviewing the literature on this topic providing context surrounding the history of sport and politics. It provides both background of the incentives of hosting and the possibility of branding and the gaining soft power together with sports diplomacy. Furthermore, the literature review provides the conceptual history of sportswashing as well as presenting the theoretical perspective of media events and framing theory. This is followed by methodical considerations, motivation of the cases, the sampling of the material and the inductive coding of the material. The analysis covers the background of the use of sport by Russia and Saudi Arabia and what the research has highlighted in those cases. Furthermore, the findings of the five most used frames are elaborated on and what they tell us about the UK news media climate regarding sport journalism and the further understanding of sportswashing. Lastly, the study offers some concluding remarks regarding the future of Formula One and sport in general and further research.

2. Literature Review

This literature review is divided into eight sections with each covering central arguments and shortcomings about the relationship between sports and politics. It is structured by covering the overarching relationship in how sport is used for political gain, diplomacy and soft power. It covers the new occurrence of sportswashing, its conceptual history and its place in regard to the other terms mentioned. The term sportswashing is mainly used by journalists and has got sparse attention from academic circles (Grix et al. 2023:4) which illuminates a gap in the understanding of sportswashing and its relevance. By drawing from previous research regarding sportswashing and theories such as media events and framing, this study furthers the understanding of the relationship between sports and politics and highlights the role of the media.

2.1. The Relationship between Sports and Politics

Sport is separate from politics is a statement often used when someone does not want to take a stand or comment on a situation. Yet, as has been shown frequently throughout history, sports

and politics have accompanied each other. A notable example is the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Germany (Dichter 2021:247), but the relationship goes as far back as Ancient Greece (Boykoff 2022:344) and the truce that was put in place to allow the safe travel of fans and athletes (Murray 2012:576). Sport and politics have been used by states in various forms to portray strength such as creating an image of well-being and promoting nationality (Delgado 2016:608).

Within the wider notion of the relationship between sports and politics, there are connections to various goals. For example, sportswashing, which broadly refers to the use of sport as a distraction from a moral violation (Skey 2023:750) is only one lens to view this relationship. Cha (2009) brings up four different schools in which sport situates itself and its position in the world. One school centres around the focal point of state power. This means that sport is an extension of state power and that the national team for a country is an embodiment of the state (Cha 2009:1583). This realist view is limited because it solely focuses on the state and leaves out other important aspects (Merkel 2017:30). Another school of thought tries to incorporate non-state actors as well and tries to broaden the focus beyond only states. The non-state actors can therefore also themselves put pressure on state policies (Cha 2009:1583). Grix et al. (2023) discuss a similar aspect as sporting organisations commodify sports and note that sportswashing is a bidirectional relationship involving economic and social gains and that it is not a matter a state alone can partake in (Grix et al. 2023:6). The third school brings in non-material factors such as values and national identity. Sport may be a game but also a source of pride which gets interconnected with a state's view of itself (Cha 2009:1583). The fourth one argues that sport does not adequately fit into any of these schools' arguments and that there are more aspects at play than just focusing on state-to-state relations (Cha 2009:1584).

The way to view how sport is used politically could thus be understood as very interlinked concepts. It is important to note that they draw aspects from each other and the concepts may be difficult to separate. In an attempt to disentangle these concepts, I will first discuss the broad connection between sport and politics as an overarching umbrella, then sports diplomacy, and lastly soft power and sport. The first way of viewing sport and politics could be seen as a more organisational structure detached from state interference. The sport governing bodies have often tried to put themselves above politics (Dichter 2021:248), the FIA states that they shall not politically take any stances (Næss 2017:536) and political neutrality is even written down in the Olympic charter as of 2019 (Dichter 2021:248). But the International Olympic Committee

(IOC) has also before held the position of keeping politics out of the games (Hong 2019:70). Despite this position, they have excluded nations after the First and Second World Wars but also included South Africa during the apartheid and only excluded them after heavy protests from other African states. These examples could be categorised, according to Dichter (2021), into two groups: the first one, which concerns domestic politics and the second one, which relates to international politics which has an impact on sporting events (Dichter 2021:248).

2.2. Sports Diplomacy

The second way of viewing the relationship between sports and politics covers the diplomatic use of sports. This research has focused on states sending national teams or athletes to compete in other states as a form of public diplomacy but also the use of sports mega-events and the political use they could have or the host countries (Dichter 2021:249). Dichter defines the difference of sports diplomacy by states and by sports organisations as:

Sport diplomacy is how governments use sport, including teams, athletes, tours, and events, as a means of public diplomacy. Sport-as-diplomacy is when sport organizations, especially national governing bodies and international federations, ‘interact with the state, business, and industry as a result of ongoing international contacts and competitions’. (Dichter 2021:249)

Grix et al. (2021) discuss the growing literature related to sports diplomacy and how using sport for diplomatic purposes could function as an icebreaker in strained relations between states and highlight the ping-pong diplomacy between China and the USA (Grix et al. 2021:4). In the 1970s there were ping-pong matches that opened the strained relationship between USA and China and allowed for new discussions to take place. The ping-pong diplomacy offered a different way of displaying good intentions which could not be replicated by other forms of diplomacy (Cha 2009:1594).

Another example is the Baseball diplomacy between the USA and Cuba in 1999. Baseball is a national identity marker for both the USA and Cuba and in the Cuban case, it was played as a sign of resistance because colonial Spain banned it in 1868. These games gave the possibility for a new narrative for the USA and Cuban relations instead of, for example, the Bay of Pigs invasion. The difference in comparison to ping-pong diplomacy there were no diplomatic talks outside of the games and that there was no substantial difference in the relationship was made

in the end (Cha 2009:1593). Political discussions outside the event are necessary otherwise sports diplomacy stands a high risk of failing (Merkel 2017:29). While the case of ping-pong diplomacy is considered high-level diplomacy there is also a need to distinguish between this level and what is considered to be domestic, regional and international diplomacy (Grix et al. 2021:4). Sport is an effective diplomatic tool because of the social and cultural significance there is in sport and its possibility to gain access to important state figures and the possibility of engaging both local and international audiences. Since sport mega-events generate one of the largest audiences in the world make them interesting from a diplomatic perspective (Skey 2023:756).

Sports diplomacy has also been instrumental in creating national unity. For example, in the merging between north and south Yemen. Instead of focusing on the political bureaucracy, the focus was on the football team and the players who were selected for the Asian games. The result was that one half of the team consisted of northern and the other of southern Yemenis. This was done to help with the nation building of Yemen. Similar attempts have been made between North and South Korea. One example is during the opening ceremony of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney when they marched in together and waved a white unification flag with the Korean peninsula coloured in United Nations-blue (Cha 2009:1586). They marched again under the same flag in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang and competed with a unified women's ice hockey team (Grix, Jeong & Kim 2021:13). While traditional diplomacy is a procedure of advancing a state's goal, sports diplomacy is an approach to achieve that goal. Furthermore, sport has a global attraction and as such has a prominent feature of soft power in bringing people all over the world together and is therefore an argument to deploy sport diplomacy (Murray 2012:581).

2.3. Soft Power and Sport

The third way is related to soft power. As mentioned briefly, soft power can be a reason to pursue sport as a diplomatic device, for example, as a way of presenting the state as attractive to promote tourism (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2015:711). A growing range of actors since 1990 on the international market such as Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), media organisations, social movements and corporations has contributed to a different landscape in the possibility to shape and distribute information around the world. This has changed how power is practised and increased the importance for states to legitimise their actions among

other states and actors (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2018:1140,1141). The connection between sport and soft power is prominent in the literature. In recent years there has been an upsurge in the concept of soft power coined by Joseph Nye and why states are attempting to seek new forms of political attraction (Grix & Brannagan 2016:251). Especially in trying to explain the purposes behind hosting big media events or sports mega-events such as the Olympic Games (Ettinger 2023:533). The concept of power is often criticised for being vague despite its broad use. Power has a lot of definitions and while power could mean an ability to resist or make change another definition of power is the ability to get what you want. When discussing power, it is important to specify which type of power, what is it intended to do, who is involved and in which domain is it discussed (Nye 2011:10,11). For example, in the domain of sport, FIA has the power of Formula One but not over the IOC and the Olympic Games.

The concept of soft power has also been criticised for its lack of distinction and that soft power can include everything (Nye 2011:18). Other criticism to the soft power concept is that it is too Americanised and it lacks an understanding of different outcomes (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2018:1141). Soft power as described by Nye is “*the ability to affect others to obtain preferred outcomes by the co-optive means of framing the agenda, persuasion, and positive attraction.*” (Nye 2011:19). The hosting of a sports mega-event could potentially provide a government with prestige. Furthermore, the possibility of showcasing the culture by attracting tourists could improve the soft power of the state (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2015:705,706).

With all spotlights on the host and the potential success that the hosting could bring comes what Cha (2008) calls a catch-22 for authoritarian regimes. Throughout the build-up and during the sports mega-event the spotlight brings media pressure for political change that could decrease the potential success and stain the public view of the event (2008:106). This is similar to what Brannagan and Giulianotti (2015) call soft disempowerment. When there is soft power to gain there is also the risk of a negative outcome. Soft disempowerment refers to occasions where actions lead to loss of influence or attractiveness (2015:705). Like Cha argues, the hosting of sports mega-events invites scrutiny from different organisations such as the media and human rights activists which could lead to a risk of loss of reputation and losing more than one can gain. This is similar to what happened in China during the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games in Beijing where the occupation of Tibet and the treatment of minorities was brought to light (Brannagan & Giulianotti 2015:706). Or that it was dubbed the “genocide Olympics” because of the Chinese government's hands-off policy related to Sudan (Cha 2008:109). As much as

sport, soft power, sport and diplomacy accompany each other and offer a possibility to brand the state to an international audience there are caveats. Qatar, for example, invested heavily in education and sports, yet the representation in the media became a challenge. For example, the hosting of the 2019 World Athletics Championship was considered a disaster because of the lack of attendance (Coates Ulrichsen 2023:129,130). To differentiate between sports and politics, sports diplomacy, soft power and sportswashing, sport and politics first encapsulate the whole field in which sport is used for a political goal. The political goal is acquired through sports diplomacy and the goal could be gaining soft power by hosting a sports mega-event.

2.4. Conceptual History of Sportswashing

The concept of washing has a long history of connotations to deception or other types of distractions, for example, money laundering and the possibility of washing or laundering the money to be able to use it later without suspicion (Skey 2023:750,751). Another concept which draws on this is whitewashing which illustrates a practice of trying to cast a favourable light on a situation or something despite a problematic history. Whitewashing often relates to racism although it can relate to other contexts as well (Fruh, Archer & Wojtowicz 2023:102). Other similar concepts of washing is greenwashing which is a concept related to the wider notion of Corporate Social Responsibility-washing or CSR-washing. CSR-washing is defined as: “the successful use of a false CSR claim to improve a company’s competitive standing” (Pope & Wæraas 2016:175). This definition focuses on the successful application of CSR-washing and not just attempts which Pope and Wæraas argue also deserve attention but does not undermine the field of CSR (Pope & Wæraas 2016:175).

The term greenwashing was first used in 1986 and alluded to acts of environmentally friendly actions but with the underlying real aim of increasing the financial gain (Næss 2020:619). However, the term has different definitions and some scholars use the Oxford English Dictionary definition of greenwashing which is: “disinformation disseminated by an organisation so as to present an environmentally responsible public image” (Quoted in Seele & Gatti 2017:241) while some refer to Greenpeace’s definition: “the act of misleading consumers regarding the environmental practices of a company or the environmental benefits of a product or service” (Quoted in Seele & Gatti 2017:241). But since its inception, the term has also undergone a change. When speaking of greenwashing today, the term relies on an exaggeration of the potential improvement to the environment (Næss 2020:619). One example is the dubious

claim of what the hybrid technologies in Formula One can contribute to, compared to the harm done to the environment when racing all over the world (Sturm 2023:178). A similar argument is that the contributions to the common car industry is said to put Formula One ahead of cyclists and Tour de France for environmental sustainability because of the latter's need for travel (Miller 2016:721,722). The literature on greenwashing, while agreeing on the communication having exaggerated the positive beliefs on corporations' environmental operation and practices, there is no consensus on what actually constitutes greenwashing (Lyon & Montgomery 2015:225). Although, even if there is not a clear definition of greenwashing, greenwashing tends to be associated with selective disclosure of information, empty green claims and misleading imagery (Lyon & Montgomery 2015:236-238).

Sportswashing or sport washing was first mentioned in a journalistic sport context in 2015 ahead of the European Games in Azerbaijan (Boykoff 2022:343; Skey 2023:750). The term sportswashing sought to illustrate the Azerbaijani dictator Ilham Aliyev's attempt to distract the public from the Azerbaijani state human rights abuses with the hosting of the European Games (Boykoff 2022:343). Since this event, the use of sportswashing in the mainstream media has risen but in the academic context, the interest in sportswashing has been limited (Skey 2023:750). Sportswashing has a lot of similarities with the other types of washing-concepts and what all these concepts have in common is that there exists a moral violation and the need for that violation to receive less attention (Grix, Dinsmore & Brannagan 2023:4). With sportswashing this moral violation is done through sport and the use of sport to deflect attention from for example human rights violations and works by hosting big media events or owning sports clubs (Fruh et al. 2023:103). With these types of events, political leaders travel around the world to meet the hosts which could get the hosts in a favourable spotlight (Boykoff 2022:343).

Even though the term sportswashing is quite new, the concept of using sport to deflect or launder a reputation is not. As noted above, the trend goes back to the Olympics in Ancient Greece where Athens entered a huge number of chariots to increase the chance of winning in purpose to distract the audience from losing a war to Sparta. This was done to project an image that everything was going as it should (Boykoff 2022:344). Other examples are the 1934 World Cup of football which was hosted by the Mussolini government in Italy and the Olympic Games in Nazi Germany in 1936 (Ganji 2023:63). Or the World Cup in Argentina in 1978 where the military overthrew the government in a coup d'état only two years before the event (Fruh et al.

2023:106). However, this does not mean that sportswashing had to occur and Grix et al. (2023) note that political use of sport does not necessarily imply sportswashing happens (Grix et al. 2023:3). Still, a World Cup connected with disappearances would not have painted a positive picture of the Argentinian government and the World Cup in Argentina could be argued as a case of sportswashing before the concept existed (Fruh et al. 2023:106). In more recent times the bid to host the 2008 Olympic Games went to China. They promised to improve human rights but that never materialised. Instead, it backfired and the repression got harder (Boykoff 2022:344). This could be connected to the different elements of greenwashing such as empty claims and the failure to implement those claims (Lyon and Montgomery 2015:237). These examples show how sportswashing draws from various elements of washing but is also intertwined with the concept of soft power by trying to showcase and reflect a positive image.

Like the other washing-concepts definitions of sportswashing varies. Grix et al. (2023) discuss how early adopters such as Amnesty International described the term as “the use of sports to distract from unethical practices” (Grix et al. 2023:4) but also bring up other definitions such as “the ‘washing’ process as an attempt by states to burnish a tarnished national image” (Grix et al. 2023:4). While Kearns et al. (2023) draw upon the definition by Fruh et al. (2023) which defines sportswashing as “the way attention is routed away from the moral violation [...] through sport” (Fruh et al. 2023:103), they develop it further by writing that the success of sportswashing is about deflection rather than the concealment. Sportswashing rarely succeeds in masking the actions to the full extent, but it complicates the discussion around the events and that the sportswasher now is not only associated with for example human rights violations (Kearns et al. 2023:4,5). Grix et al. (2023), discuss the cycle of sportswashing in three waves. *Wave 1* describes the initial critique followed by *wave 2* where different narratives compete on the view of the event and *wave 3* where the acceptance of the event occurs. Given time this process creates legitimacy for the state (Grix et al. 2023:16). As one can see there are differences in the definitions of sportswashing, but a common denominator is an aspect of using sport to launder a reputation (Skey 2023:750; Grix et al. 2023:4; Boykoff 2022:342; Ettinger 2023:533; Fruh et al. 2023:103; Kearns et al. 2023:4).

Although the consensus of sportswashing may differ, sportswashing is used mainly by journalists and aimed primarily towards authoritarian regimes and corporations (Grix et al. 2023:4). The use of the term by journalists is interesting to investigate since there has not been a lot of academic attention towards the mass media and their reporting regarding sportswashing.

Despite sportswashing often being applied as a concept towards authoritarian regimes not only by journalists but also politicians', the notion of sportswashing can also emerge in democratic environments. Furthermore, sportswashing can impact both the national and international audience and is not intended for just one of them (Boykoff 2022:342). Thus, one should be careful in how using the term because not all political use of sports must be considered sportswashing (Grix et al. 2023:3). Chadwick and Widdop further declare that sportswashing is a contested concept and that "sport washing is elusive, in that, it hasn't really been empirically identified or validated, and even less is known about the micro mechanisms that underpin it" (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:148). Furthermore, there is little discussion on what sportswashing really is, how it works or the motivation for doing it (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:148,149). By comparing how sports diplomacy is articulated there exists similarities to sportswashing. By drawing from the earlier definition by Dichter, sports diplomacy is how governments use sport. Sports diplomacy and sportswashing can thus be viewed as different sides of the same coin. Both perspectives discuss how governments use sports and while sports diplomacy focuses on the use of sport politically through a more neutral lens bordering on positive such as the ping-pong case, sportswashing focuses on the use of sport through a more devious lens to distract from human rights violations. In both instances, diplomatic values influence both terms in the way of promoting the state's interest (Murray 2012:578).

What sportswashing then offers as a concept could be debated. There exists a lacuna in the research on what type of role the media have in communicating news surrounding these events. A lot of studies regarding this area have so far mainly focused on non-western states such as Russia, China, Saudi Arabia and Qatar (Cha 2008; Cha 2009; Brannagan & Giulianotti 2015; Delgado 2016; Brannagan & Giulianotti 2018; Rookwood 2019; Meier et al. 2021; Davis et al. 2023; Ettinger 2023). Scholars who have researched sportswashing also rarely use comparative perspectives. While Næss (2017) discusses if any change has happened in the FIA commitment to neutrality and politics with the cases of the Azerbaijan Grand Prix in 2016 and the South African Grand Prix in 1985, Næss describes the more overarching political intertwinement in the sport rather than sportswashing. With such a limited and somewhat rough academic discussion of sportswashing it begs the question if it should be considered as a serious analytical concept when it lacks a clear definition. Despite this academic shortcoming, there exists a journalistic discourse of sportswashing which is intriguing to study further. Furthermore, as Chadwick and Widdop note, the research about sportswashing still needs to develop with more

systematically collected data (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:152) which is the aim of this study by researching the mediated picture of sportswashing.

2.5. Media Events and Sports Mega-Events

The term sports mega-events is drawn from the theory of media events developed by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz in the 1980s and 1990s (Billings & Wenner 2017:4; Bolin & Ståhlberg 2022:99). Dayan and Katz (1992) define media events as interruptions of routine. Media events intervene in the normal flow and they are taking place live which makes them unpredictable in the sense that something can go wrong during the event. The media is not a part of the organising of the event even if the media event is planned with them in mind. Instead, they are asked or they ask themselves to join (Dayan & Katz 1992:5,6). Media events are by Dayan and Katz divided into three scripts, which are contest, conquest, and coronation. Contests are events such as the Olympic Games, and the FIFA World Cup but also events such as presidential debates. Conquests refer to heroes breaking new ground and pushing towards new frontiers such as astronauts and the moon landing. Coronations are parades and ceremonial and more specifically royal weddings and funerals (Dayan & Katz 1992:26,27). One of these scripts is more suited for this study and it is what Dayan and Katz would call the contest script which is the script that includes sports events (Dayan & Katz 1992:26). As been noted, most of the issues that have been brought up in the research surrounding the term sportswashing or sport and politics are about sports mega-events.

The typical genre for sports mega-events is the Olympic Games which are built upon the notion that it should celebrate universal values, pride of the nation and excellence (Billings & Wenner 2017:5). Together with the FIFA World Cup they usually are considered to be the top tier of sports mega-events when discussing aspects of reach, cost, and their size. The lower tiers consist of the Winter Olympic Games, the EURO Football Championship and the Commonwealth Games (Horne 2017:239). Formula One is a bit different in the meaning that the races occur every other weekend instead of every other year. But it would also fit the description of a sports mega-event which is a large cultural event with dramatics, mass appeal and international significance (Sturm 2017:172). Formula One has also been through a mediatisation process where it during the 1980s was repackaged specifically for the media and in 2014 was valued at \$600 million a year (Sturm 2017:175) and as of 2022 is valued at \$926 million a year (Aginì 2023). During the coronavirus pandemic, the interest also increased with the Netflix

documentary series *Drive to Survive* (Rayman 2023:246) and this has played a vital role in increasing the reach of interest in the USA (Dewhurst 2023:238).

Broadcasting rights and social media apply pressure on sporting organisations and force them to reinvent themselves in the media (Næss 2017:537). Sports mega-events have as mentioned always been politicised and the media plays a paradoxical role in letting competing narratives dominate the news in the build-up to the event (Gruneau & Compton 2017:43). By hosting and participating in sports mega-events political goals exist as a way of inspiring nationalism and create positive images of the state (Delgado 2016:610). The media also contributes to shaping and constructing the social order and does so in relation to the state, corporate actors and the market (Gruneau & Compton 2017:41). Major events like Formula One can potentially overshadow and exploit viewers and provide a platform from which dominating ideologies are projected (Rowe 2015:578).

For sport governing bodies, the concept of neutrality is central to how they operate (Næss 2022:24). Despite its entanglement in politics, they have denied the claims and instead promoted a neutral agenda and declared that: “sport is a product of humanity, rather than a promotional arena for nations, ethnic backgrounds, or religion.” (Næss 2017:535:536). By not taking sides means that everyone will trust you (Næss 2022:24) which thus becomes an interesting aspect regarding media events. While hosting sports mega-events can become crucial in integrating human rights in non-democratic countries there are various commitments among these states. Values and ideas are conflicting which requires compromises to do business across the world (Næss 2022:16,17). But at the same time, governments employ strategies to help shape their image by hosting global media events (Rivenburgh 2010:187) such as sports mega-events. But as has been noted, the hosting of these types of events is a gamble in its effects on managing a reputation (Rivenburgh 2010:188; Chari 2015:418; Brannagan & Giulianotti 2015; Brannagan & Giulianotti 2018; Cha 2008; Meier et al. 2021; Delgado 2016).

What has emerged from over two decades of research about global media events are five variables that occur which make a difference to the host's image. The background of this meta-analysis is grounded in soft power and the coverage of global media and the mapping of the strategic communication decisions that must be taken into consideration for states that aim to host global media events (Rivenburgh 2010:188,189). This research was built upon various kinds of sources ranging from official documents, media coverage, and interviews as well as

secondary sources regarding this area. Not only sports events were covered but also events such as United Nations summits (Rivenburgh 2010:192). Rivenburgh also discusses the caveats of this research and highlights the primary focus on the success of the image the host is trying to portray and notes that an event can be a success from a sporting perspective but still fail due to organisational problems. Another caveat is the importance of noting that global media events are complex in nature and that while they are unique events, this research refers to common grounds in the events (Rivenburgh 2010:193).

The first variable is the *Host organization and treatment of the media* which revolves around the ability of the media to do its job which includes aspects such as language of material and operational logistics (Rivenburgh 2010:193). The readiness of the host may for example become the main issue in the media, such as wrong information being given multiple times or traffic jams and pollution can become the face of the host (Rivenburgh 2010:194).

The second variable is *Media as national and cultural actor*. News related to the host has similarities to international coverage and journalists cover their own states' relationship with the host states and national bias such as focusing on their own athletes (Rivenburgh 2010:195). This variable also considers difficulties regarding cultural misinterpretations such as oversimplifications of the cultural life in the hosting state (Rivenburgh 2010:196).

The third variable is *Media resources and financial constraints*. Financial constraints impact the quality of reporting from an event. While some media organisations can afford to have more journalists at the event covering the daily and cultural life in the hosting state other organisations cannot and this may impact the framing of the host (Rivenburgh 2010:196,197). Rowe (2007) also notes that sports coverage has different statuses in different states that could impact the reporting of events (Rowe 2007:386). To add on this variable, the status that sports journalism has could also potentially impact the level of reporting.

The fourth variable is *Media routines for GME reporting* which refers to the stories that surround the conditions during the build-up to the event, such as security, worker conditions, budget, and conflicts. These aspects tend to dominate the buildup (Rivenburgh 2010:197). During the event the limelight shifts from these reports to the actual event (Rivenburgh 2010:197) which Meier et al. (2021) also note in regard to their research of Twitter posts during the build-up to and during the 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia. The tweets during the World

Cup showed that Russian politics was not the focus during the event and only took up a marginal position (Meier et al. 2021:797) and the attempts by activists to politicise the event failed (Meier et al. 2021:804). Furthermore, even if hosting states try to challenge stereotypes the media often fall back to this type of coverage on already established perceptions where hosting image campaigns fall short in what they attempt to portray (Rivenburgh 2010:198). When Brazil lost 7-1 against Germany in the 2014 FIFA World Cup in Brazil it unleashed a massive amount of sarcastic and negative content which may or may not have been brought to light if they did not lose. This included the stereotypical portrayal of Brazil as a state embedded with corruption and that the game was rigged which impeded the efforts of Brazil to display a different image of the state (Chari 2015:412,413). While Chari's study focuses on comments on articles (2015:411), the media plays a role in enabling these types of statements and instead of the hosts being portrayed in a positive light it gets the opposite reaction (Rivenburgh 2010:198).

The fifth variable is *Intervening news events*. This refers to news that a host cannot plan for such as external, surrounding and internal news events which could take up a lot of space in the media. External news refers to natural disasters, war and elections which could end up with the host getting less media attention than it would under any normal circumstances (Rivenburgh 2010:199). One example is the missile strike on an oil refinery in Jeddah just outside of the circuit as one of the three practice sessions of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix was taking place (Sturm 2023:175). Surrounding news refers to events where for example activists try and hijack the attention of the media. For example, a Formula One race in Bahrain in 2011 was removed because of domestic protests against the Bahrain government and international criticism but returned the year after that (Næss 2023:136). Internal news refers to news related to the event such as doping and cheating scandals (Rivenburgh 2010:199).

These five variables can be useful when analysing the impact of the Russian and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prixes and how they situate themselves within a broader media and communication field. While much previous research has focused on the Olympic Games and the FIFA World Cup, less attention has been placed on Formula One. By highlighting these variables with the help of framing one can learn which role sports mega-events have for a state and if they have a legitimating factor. By already knowing the Russian Grand Prix got cancelled in 2022, this study can potentially highlight deciding aspects in news reporting regarding these events. As mentioned, the media tends to switch from reporting on problems to cheerleaders

during these events and therefore calls this for a critical reflection on the impact of sports mega-events (Horne & Manzenreiter 2006:14,15).

2.6. Framing

Framing theory is adopted in this study because it is suitable for understanding the broader media view on sports mega-events and why different measures have been taken regarding the Russian Grand Prix and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. Journalists are the group that uses the term sportswashing the most but there exists a lacuna in studying the media and its coverage of sportswashing. Since the development of media technology such as satellites and the internet has enabled people to consume sports to a higher degree, the mass media has an significant part to play in facilitating assumptions and framing in the news (Kim, Lee & Oh 2017:255). Furthermore, as mentioned earlier the term sportswashing has been primarily used as a negative word against authoritarian regimes. However, the fact that similar measures which resembles sportswashing has been used by democratic states as well has put the use of this term in a peculiar light. One example is the Olympic Games in Atlanta 1996 during the run-up to the event, the homeless people were targeted to make place for the Olympic Village and more than 9000 people were arrested on doubtful terms and some people got one-way bus tickets to Alabama and Florida. This was not started by the Olympic Games, but the hosting of the games made it possible and gave it the push it needed to accomplish the removal (Boykoff 2019:163,164). The Olympic Games in Salt Lake City in 2002 was also used by the United States after the 9/11 attacks to proclaim that it still was the safest place in the world and to consolidate security dominance (Boykoff 2022:347).

Another interesting aspect in highlighting the framing of news reports in sports journalism is noting the perception of sports journalism as the toy department of news organisations and the idea that sports journalism is more about entertaining rather than serious reporting (Harrison & Boehmer 2020:294; Rowe 2007:385; Rowe 2017:516). As Næss notes, people who are interested in sports tend to look away from its involvement in politics because politics is said to be ruining everything (Næss 2022:24). Along with this, sporting organisations are also getting less scrutinised by the media, potentially because of the lower public interest in scrutinizing international actors before national (Allison 2005:163). But just because sport is a popular leisure activity it cannot be exempted from critical investigation (Rowe 2007:386). However, as aforementioned, an important note to have in mind is the varying reputation sports

journalism has in different states. According to scholarship, journalists receive greater respect in, for example, the USA compared to the United Kingdom (Rowe 2007:386). While sports journalism tends to leave the critical reporting to other departments, the sports journalism finds itself in a difficult position. Sports journalism has an economically important role in getting readers to the newspaper, but it also needs to consider what works and what news makes people interested and thus underreport on political issues (Rowe 2007:389,400). For example, when the FIFA bribing scandal in 2015 came to light there was an interest in personalisation rather than illuminating power processes. Sports journalism seemed to be more tempted to report about Sepp Blatter who was the FIFA president at the time, compared to the complex structure of FIFA. This reporting style is also a more media-friendly approach especially when considering the visual moment of the money shower of Blatter that happened during a press conference in 2015 (Rowe 2017:520). The same goes with Formula One. In the previous example about the cancelled Grand Prix in Bahrain in 2011 there is a very complicated structure of organisers and ownership and laws that abide by when it comes to human rights abuses and who has the responsibility (Næss 2023:136). With this in mind, it is important to research media and sports journalism through framing because it could show how a specific issue is framed and how it incorporates information, arguments, symbols and metaphors to convey the topic. Framing selects aspects in order to project a particular problem formulation. The portraying of some aspects and excluding others plays a role in how the media highlights ideas to the audience (Kim et al. 2017:258).

The concept and development of framing is attributed to Erving Goffman (Kim et al. 2017:258). Goffman describes framing as an observation of an event and to understand and make sense of the observation the individual employs a framework to locate and identify something that otherwise would be meaningless (Goffman 1974:21). There are a few ways of defining framing, but most of the research has employed similar ways of understanding the concept (Semetko & Valkenburg 2000:94). Framing can be understood as an important instrument for people to make sense of the world around them. How an issue is framed in news reporting can shape people's understanding and for example if a news report is positive the response from the public usually tends to also be likewise (Harrison & Boehmer 2020:295). By illuminating details in frames, it can help to uncover the power in which the frame tries to communicate (Entman 1993:55,56). Framing can therefore be understood as various forms of constructs and perspectives used to mould people's perceptions of an issue and to frame is to select certain aspects of an issue to

highlight particular perspectives or interpretations (Kang & Svensson 2023:699). Kang and Svensson highlight two important processes of framing which are selection and salience:

Selection refers to the decision of what someone wants to say about a particular issue and salience is the process of making certain information more noticeable and meaningful in how a message is communicated. (Kang & Svensson 2023:699).

As well as focusing on the framing of the two Grand Prixes it is also important to focus on how these sports mega-events build legitimacy. Legitimacy could broadly be defined as the acceptance of authority and its laws (Rodríguez Pérez 2017:171). But it is also based on what is considered appropriate by the public (Rodríguez Pérez 2017:171). By distributing positive news coverage of events such as the sports mega-events the media helps to legitimate the organisation and the host state (Marschlich & Ingenhoff 2023:4). While research concerning media legitimacy has focused much on the tone of the coverage, for example, if it is positive or negative or neutral coverage of an event (Marschlich & Ingenhoff 2023:4) it is still an important aspect to consider because of the role the media have in shaping the global image of a sports mega-event. Marschlich & Ingenhoff (2023) also draws on Entman (1993) and argue that it is not only the tone of the news that shapes legitimation but also how events are framed (Marschlich & Ingenhoff 2023:4). Entman describes the process of framing as making certain aspects more salient (Entman 1993:52). Marschlich and Ingenhoff (2023) points to how the media is selecting frames and therefore also have the ability to create legitimacy (Marschlich & Ingenhoff 2023:4). Thus, by also including the media tone during the two Grand Prixes could showcase how the legitimacy of the event and hosts get established.

By using framing theory, this study illuminates structures and concepts (Kang & Svensson 2023:700) in how the media reports about the two Grand Prixes. Furthermore, to highlight why different measures have been taken regarding two similar Grand Prixes this study focuses on the political aspects of the topic just like Seippel et al. (2016) discuss Norway's potential bid for hosting the Olympic Games in 2022. Their purpose is to understand the politicisation of sport and thus research how it is framed politically (Seippel et al. 2016:442). In this study, the framing allows to place sportswashing and the Formula One Grand Prixes in the broader context of sports mega-events. Therefore, by highlighting the framing of events which are similar to each other like the Russian and Saudi Arabian Grand Prix the research could develop the understanding of sports mega-events and sports and politics in the media.

In position to this literature, there is a gap in the analysis of journalistic material regarding the use of sports mega-events and sportswashing. Sportswashing has similar caveats as other types of washing such as greenwashing in what it really means and what it is meant to illuminate. As Chadwick and Widdop implies, the term sportswashing is elusive (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:148) and as many authors have discussed, the intertwining of sport and politics is not something new that started to happen in the 21st century. Instead, it is something that has been going on for over a millennium. But instead of sportswashing, the term that is used in those cases is sports diplomacy. A shift has occurred where sportswashing has gained a lot of journalistic attention in recent years despite its elusiveness. Yet, few have studied the sports journalism that covers the topic even though it gets a lot of mentions. Thus, creating a gap in the understanding of the journalistic content. Sportswashing is a subject that draws from complex disciplines such as diplomacy and soft power which in turn also makes it complex. The political embedding sportswashing bring to sports journalism and the reputation of them being a “toy department” (Rowe 2007:285,286) creates an intriguing intersection between the two. Therefore, it is important to explore the journalistic coverage of sports mega-events and focus attention on how they frame these events and how they create the notion of sportswashing. By covering the journalistic take on sports mega-events this study is not only developing the existing literature on the relationship between politics and sport but also focuses on further the understanding of which role media plays when covering the sports mega-events.

3. Methodology and Methods

The purpose of this study is to analyse the UK media news coverage of the sports mega-events of the Russian Grand Prix and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix through a framing perspective. But it also aims to further develop the understanding of the conceptual use of sportswashing. Since language plays a huge part in news framing but also the conception of the term sportswashing, a qualitative approach has been selected. More specifically a textual analysis of the material. This allows for looking at the news in a wider context as well as studying the content and possible themes in the news (Brennen 2017:206). This study focuses on UK national newspapers because of their societal importance in framing news coverage (van Dooremalen & Uitermark 2021:468).

3.1. Case Selection

The selection of cases was based upon a theoretical sampling approach to explore specific concepts (Bruhn Jensen 2012:269 b.) such as sports and politics. By adopting the case study, one may develop a better understanding of reality as well as develop the information about the specific cases (Flyvbjerg 2006:223,224). From a broad perspective, the cases of the Russian Grand Prix and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix are very similar. Both are hosted in states that are heavily criticised by Western media outlets for their human rights violations and their involvement in military conflicts. Russia has had an ongoing conflict with Ukraine since they annexed Crimea in 2014 and Saudi Arabia has had an ongoing conflict in Yemen since 2015. What makes these two cases stand out is that a major event of significance happened in both states regarding the relationship between sports and politics. Concerning Russia, the launch of a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 got them removed from hosting various sporting events as well as removing their athletes from competing or forcing them to participate under a neutral flag (Nair 2022). Regarding Saudi Arabia, they were attacked by missiles that struck down around 10 kilometres outside of the circuit (Sturm 2023:175). Despite these similarities of engagement in conflicts and safety concerns the outcomes of the allocated races have been different with only the Russian race getting cancelled. This makes the journalistic coverage, and the application of sportswashing in this context, a particularly interesting case. The framing and the relationship between politics and sport with sportswashing in mind are thus important topics to highlight. Especially considering the increased use of the term sportswashing by the media (Grix et al. 2023:4) and if it holds any value in regard to other employed terms such as sports diplomacy.

3.2. Sampling of material

After having established the relevant context of this study the next step was to demarcate the material (Bruhn Jensen 2012:268 b.). The timeframe for the collection of material is set to be the 1st of January 2014 to the 31st of March 2023 for the Russian coverage and the 1st of January 2021 to the 31st of March 2023 for the Saudi Arabian coverage. The quite disparate timeframes between both cases can be explained by the occurrence of the two Grand Prixes. Russia has a longer period of data collection because their Grand Prix has been on the Formula One race calendar for a longer period than the Saudi Arabian one has. From 2014 and onwards compared to 2021 for Saudi Arabia. Since these races are recurring events on the calendar, it is difficult to disrupt the collection of data when the political coverage of the events is the main purpose

of this study. Furthermore, the context surrounding Russia at the time also includes significant world events such as the annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and the Malaysian plane crash that was allegedly shot down by pro-Russian separatists the same year (Hjorth & Adler-Nissen 2019 173,174). These events, I argue, therefore mark an important starting point for the collection and they are difficult to ignore considering the purpose of the study. For the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, the same decision was made regarding the year of the inaugural race in 2021 until the 31st of March of 2023.

The additional year of 2023 was added to cover the drop in the coverage and to not end the collection when the topic was the most discussed. As Hansen and Machin (2019) argue it is necessary to cover the news of an event both before and after even when the event has specific dates due to how the media reports on the topic and covers the potential loss of important information (Hansen & Machin 2019:96). Due to the scope of this study potential news may not be bound to the specific dates of the Grand Prixes but could be spread out and packaged together with other related news.

The collection of the material was acquired through a trial-and-error Boolean search in the database Global Newsstream to explore which search terms yielded the most articles. The final search consisted of the keywords: Saudi*, Formula 1 or Formula One or F1, sportswash* or sports-wash* or politi*. The same search method was used for the Russian case with the difference of Russia* instead of Saudi*. These search terms were decided upon because they considered the many variations of the terms that are used when discussing the events and the implications of them. An important aspect to note in the collection of the material for the Russian coverage is that the term sportswashing had yet to be invented when the collection of material started. As mentioned earlier, the term sportswashing was coined in 2015 but the application of sport for political uses has existed since almost forever. Thus, to compensate for this situation the keyword of politi* was included. Another reason the keyword of politi* was included is that while sportswashing is a sort of a contemporary buzzword regarding the relationship between sport and politics, the keyword of politi* catches the articles that discuss this relationship without necessarily using the term of sportswashing surrounding the sports mega-events.

The initial search showed a volume of 3269 articles related to Russia, Saudi Arabia and Formula One. Most of the available articles originated from the UK which could point to an interesting

bias concerning this topic while it also could refer to the popularity of the sport in the UK. Based on the dominant coverage from the UK I decided that this occurrence should be investigated further considering the other available articles varied in quantity and their place of origin. Thus, in terms of reliability and validity which concerns the quality and relevance of the findings (Gunter 2012:240) there is not a sufficient sample compared to the UK which makes the result not stable enough regarding reliability (Bruhn Jensen 2012:295 a.). Thus, the result would be skewed unfairly and cannot be considered to hold the same standard on capturing the framing of the coverage of the two races if journalistic coverage in other states also had been added.

Therefore, after the initial convenience of news sources, further actions were to be taken to narrow down the UK sample. The narrowing down considered audience reach in the UK society which resulted in covering the leading news organisations in the UK (Statista 2023) which were available in Global Newsstream. Thus, these newspapers were also selected purposively to represent the broad political landscape in the UK (Bloyce et al. 2010:452). The collection covered both the digital, daily and the Sunday versions of the newspapers if they were available. The newspapers that were collected were *The Daily/Sunday Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Observer*, *Financial Times*, *Daily Mail/The Mail on Sunday*, *Daily/Sunday Mirror*, *Daily/Sunday Express*, *The Independent*, *Evening Standard* and *Daily Star*. In total eight articles from Daily Mail were collected from the Eire (7) and Scottish region (1). These were collected because the *Irish Daily Mail* could not be found on Global Newsstream. While the *Scottish Daily Mail* existed, the one article that was from that newspaper would not appear when searched for. As it could not be ruled out that the articles were not published in the *Daily Mail* based in England, they were therefore included in the sample.

These newspapers can further be divided into what can be called broadsheets and tabloid newspapers. This division of the newspapers could be defined as different styles of reporting (Brookes & Baker 2022:364). Broadsheets are viewed as a more quality form of newspaper (Touri & Rogers 2013:179) while tabloids are the more popular form of newspaper (Domeneghetti 2019:877). This distinction between broadsheet newspapers and tabloid is important to make because of the relationship they have to the government and the broader readership. Broadsheet newspapers tend to align more with mainstream political parties and movements while tabloid media align themselves with the populist movement and anti-establishment parties (Walter & Fazekas 2023:2518). Furthermore, broadsheet newspapers tend

to focus more on Europe, the EU and member states while tabloids focus more on their readership and their interest (Walter & Fazekas 2023:2518). While this is an important aspect to have in mind, research about the differences between the broadsheet and tabloid newspapers has also concluded that there is not enough evidence to suggest any large differences in the reporting of Brexit news (Walter 2019:223). Therefore, I argue considering the relative consensus on the negative view of Russia and Saudi Arabia, the UK news media will be classified as one entity going forward in this study.

This strategy of sample resulted in 939 articles regarding Russia and 365 articles regarding Saudi Arabia. Of these in total 1304 articles, an initial reading was conducted to exclude news briefs, duplicates and to ensure that the articles contain the keywords and that the articles encapsulate the political dimension that surrounds the Grand Prixes in question. This narrowed the sample to 106 articles regarding Russia and 116 articles for Saudi Arabia.

Table 1. Compilation of Articles

Newspaper	Russia	Saudi Arabia
Telegraph	32	31
The Guardian	6	15
The Observer	3	5
Financial Times	5	6
The Independent	7	7
Mail	16	17
Mirror	3	8
Daily Star	7	8
Evening Standard	1	2
Express	26	17
Total	106	116

As can be seen in Table 1, the newspapers are combined under their common name, for example, Telegraph encapsulate both the Daily and Sunday versions or that *Daily Mail* and *Mail on Sunday* go under the name Mail. To further explore the political landscape of the newspapers, *The Telegraph* is centre right, (Evans n.d.). *The Guardian* and *Independent* are both centre left (Walsh 2020:2064) together with *The Observer* (Matthews 2019:377). *The Financial Times* is right-leaning (Walsh 2020:2066). *Daily Mail* is right-leaning (Ryan & Tonkiss 2023:999) together with *Daily Star* (Domeneghetti 2019:877). *The Daily Mirror* is centre-left (The Mirror

n.d.). *Express* has a conservative and centre-right political leaning (Express n.d.). Regarding the political affiliation of the *Evening Standard*, it was difficult to find, but they did in the 2019 UK general election endorse the Conservative Party which is considered right-wing (Fevyer & Aldred 2022:764).

3.3. Coding

Studies that employ framing theory have used various forms of measurement. While a majority use a deductive approach there have also been hermeneutic and computerised approaches to extract frames (Bashir & Fedorova 2015:136). This study aligns with the study of Bashir and Fedorova (2015) and uses a qualitative and inductive approach to give a more thorough understanding of the framing of criticised sports mega-events. The material was analysed through a thematic inductive analysis. This means the exploration of patterns or themes that can appear within the material (Braun & Clarke 2006:79). However, important to note is that themes are not just in the material waiting to be discovered. Thus, the researcher needs to reflect on the decisions that are made when highlighting which themes are of value (Braun & Clarke 2006:80). The material was coded through an inductive approach which means that the text was coded without a defined set of already made codes (Braun & Clarke 2006:83). I argue that since there has been limited previous research regarding the topic of media and sportswashing, the inductive approach was used to let the codes be data-driven and not be decided beforehand. All the material was read twice.

The coding was made in six steps (Braun and Clarke 2006:87). The first step proceeds with the familiarisation with the data and the conducting of an initial reading of it to gather ideas about the data (Clarke 2006:87). The second step concerns the process of creating the first codes. This is a systematic process much like the open coding process in grounded theory (Kuckartz 2014:71). Open coding encapsulates a procedure of different ways to break down the data into various codes in order to examine them and categorise the data (Dey 2007:84). The process of open coding can be applied in various detail spanning from the documentation of single words to entire texts (Flick 2018:59). In this study the level of detail is focused on sentences as can be seen in its entirety in the appendices section (Appendix 1; Appendix 2).

The third step is where the data and categories found from the second step are linked together. (Braun & Clarke 2006:89). Henceforth, named main category and subcategories in the

codebook (Appendix 1; Appendix 2). In this step connections between the subcategories are formed and contribute to larger themes (Braun & Clarke 2006:89). Categories may refer to the same content which allows for overlap between them (Kuckartz 2014:72). For example, could the frame of Global society refer to human rights while other frames also could do that but with different associations (Appendix 1; Appendix 2).

The fourth step concerns the review of the themes. By reviewing each category and theme, some might lack support in the data while others refer to the same topic. Other categories may need further separation and the creation of two separate themes (Braun & Clarke 2006:91). As the process of coding is an ongoing process (Braun & Clarke 2006:91) of going back and forth there is also a need for going through the coding a second time (Kuckartz 2014:79). This step also goes hand in hand with the fifth step with the naming of the themes (Braun & Clarke 2006:92) and the creation of subcategories to accurately describe what the main category is about (Kuckartz 2014:76). The sixth step is producing the analysis (Braun & Clarke 2006:93) where the themes that occurred are the portrayed frames that the UK news media drew upon when they discussed the topic of Formula One in Russia and Saudi Arabia.

3.4. Reflections and Limitations

Criticism that often gets raised towards qualitative research is the problem of generalisability of the generated results (Flyvbjerg 2006:221). This does not mean that qualitative research is inferior to quantitative methods. Instead, what is implied is that the result offers a different view of the researched material (Kuckartz 2014:2). The quality of the research does not depend solely on the choices of specific theoretical decisions, although it is important aspects to have in mind when conducting research (Seale 2007:387). Generalisation is not the only way of gaining knowledge and a case study can be a valuable source of gaining new knowledge about a topic (Flyvbjerg 2006:227).

Another possible limitation of this research is the coverage of the UK media only, thus limiting the understanding of how broadly discussed this topic is. As aforementioned, the term sportswashing has been used as a pejorative term applied to states with questionable human rights records (Ettinger 2023:533) and the focus of a lot of research has been on undemocratic states (Kearns et al. 2023:5). Given Formula One's expansion outside of Europe and into Asia (Bustad & Andrews 2023:596) it would have been beneficial to cover other regions as well.

But, with limited English coverage outside of the UK, this was not possible, especially given the predominance of news from the UK in the material. This could also be because of the topic of Formula One. While it is a very popular sport (Bustad & Andrews 2023:611) it may not have the same coverage and popularity as the FIFA World Cup or the Olympic Games worldwide. However, covering the UK media still gives valuable insight and the possibility of a better understanding of the term sportswashing and further the broader relationship between sport and politics and its place in the journalistic discourse of Western media. Especially, because of the different decisions made regarding the cancellation of the Russian Grand Prix and the continuation of the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix. This situation makes these two cases interesting from a journalistic point of view where the UK media could indeed be an interesting starting point.

4. Analysis

The analysis is separated into two parts where the first part discusses the context around Russia and Saudi Arabia regarding the use of sport. Following this the analysis will explore the five frames the UK news media employed when covering the Russian Grand Prix and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix.

4.1. Soviet Union, Russia and Sport

The use of sport for political purposes has as mentioned focused a lot on non-Western states which includes Russia (Meier et al. 2021:786). For example, the hosting of the Olympic Games in Moscow in 1980 and the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi have been instances where the sport had a legitimating role and was used by the governments to strengthen their position (Dubrovskiy 2019:136). Regarding the security around the event in 1980, preventive measures were taken, such as capturing and shutting out those who were reportedly in the risk zone of interfering with the games. It could be measures such as forcing people out of the city and reducing access to the city overall (Dubrovskiy 2019:137). During the build-up to the Olympic Games the Soviet Union also invaded Afghanistan in 1979 which increased the calls for a boycott of the games (Dubrovskiy 2019:142). Just as in Moscow, the games in Sochi also became a forum for speaking up about human rights and democracy. Other similarities included anti-Western rhetoric, deterioration of human rights and exploitation of workers for the Olympic construction projects (Dubrovskiy 2019:143).

Kramareva and Grix (2018) explored the Russian commitment to hosting sports mega-events not to launder its reputation, but instead focusing on the domestic audience (Kramareva & Grix 2018:1408). While Kramareva and Grix (2018) like Dubrovskiy (2019) also connect the similarities between the Olympic Games in 1980 and 2014 there is a difference in how the invasion of Afghanistan and the annexation of Crimea was received by the Russian public. The invasion of Afghanistan got a more reserved response, but the annexation of Crimea found widespread support (Kramareva & Grix 2018:1414). While these types of sports mega-events can generate positive outcomes for a state, they can also in the Russian case be a way of producing nationalism and as Boykoff alludes “*hosting the Olympics revs up domestic publics in ways that can soften up the political terrain for war*” (Boykoff 2022:345).

The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia has also garnered a lot of attention. While the World Cup in Russia also stands as a criticised event with the backdrop of the Russian annexation of Crimea (Meier et al. 2021:786), other sports have not yet gathered the limelight but still have a great following such as Formula One (Bustad & Andrews 2023:597). With the introduction of the first Grand Prix in Russia in 2014 in October the annexation of Crimea was still very new. Another event that happened in 2014 was the Malaysian aeroplane was shot down in July in eastern Ukraine killing all 298 people onboard. This event was blamed on pro-Russian separatists sponsored by Russia (Hjorth & Adler-Nissen 2019:173,174). The circumstances of these events place the Russian Formula One Grand Prix in a special position of the intersection of sport and politics and the politicisation of sports mega-events.

4.2. Saudi Arabia and Sport

The research about Saudi Arabia and sports follows a similar trend as the research surrounding Russia and has focused a lot on soft power, nation branding and sportswashing. Studies that research Saudi Arabia’s investments in sports have centered on the founding of the LIV Golf Tour (Davis et al. 2023) acquiring rights to host World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE) (Grix et al. 2023) and the purchase of the football club Newcastle United in 2021 by the Saudi Arabian Public Investment Fund (PIF). These events established accusations of sportswashing because of it diverting attention away from the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi Arabian embassy in Turkey in 2018 as well as other human rights abuses (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:150).

The focus on Saudi Arabia as a case is centred around its massive commitment to acquire sports events and Chadwick and Widdop (2023) indicate that it could be seen as an attempt at changing the Saudi Arabian state's economic structure with over \$1 trillion invested (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:150). Davis et al. (2023) discuss the LIV Golf Tour in relation to Saudi Arabia's goals and how it is not just sportswashing, but also the acquiring and founding of these projects could be seen as trophy assets, where money does not matter (Davis et al. 2023:4). Ettinger (2023) argues further that the purpose form Saudi Arabia is a strategic entanglement in western economies (Ettinger 2023:536,537) and is a part of transitioning away from a primarily oil-based economy (Ettinger 2023:541).

Formula One might not have brought the same headlines as the founding of the LIV Golf Tour which challenged the leading PGA Tour with players switching tours (Davis et al. 2023:10). Furthermore, the PGAs response to players switching was by banning them from participating in their tour (Davis et al. 2023:8). Another example is the acquirement of Newcastle Football Club in 2021 for around 300 million British pounds which sparked controversy because of the human rights violations and that it required the involvement of the UK government to seal the deal (Jones et al. 2024:104). As the Formula One Grand Prix in Saudi Arabia was announced, similar news coverage was circulating about the event and the human rights violations committed by the Saudi regime (Sturm 2023:167). But most notable were the missile attacks during the Friday practice session for the second Formula One Grand Prix which the Houthi rebels from Yemen took responsibility for. The missile strike was a response to the Saudi Arabian involvement in the Yemen civil war (Chadwick et al. 2023:2). The missiles struck an oil refinery circa 11 kilometres from the circuit (Sturm 2023:175). The smoke from the strike was clearly visible from the circuit and prompted the driver Max Verstappen to say: "I smell burning – is it my car?" (Quoted in Rayman 2023:242). This event sparked new controversies about racing in a potential warzone, but the race still went ahead as planned with safety assurances. Other factors that may have impacted the decision to still go on with the race was the reported contract worth 900 million dollars to host Formula One races for the next 10 years in Saudi Arabia, thus making the Grand Prix a substantial part of the income of Formula One (Sturm 2023:175,176). With this said the Russian and Saudi Arabian sports mega-events have both conflicts impacting them.

4.3. Sport as a Political Tool

The five frames that now are going to be analysed are in many ways connected to each other. However, to separate them, each frame displays different aspects relating to the core frame and how the news coverage deals with the questions that arises from the material. With the background given around the circumstances of the Russian and the Saudi Arabian cases the media discourse somewhat reflects these differences but there is also a similarity in how they are discussed in terms of which frames are more broadly used to cover their Grand Prixes.

Starting with the frame of sport as a political tool, this frame was the most visible in both the Russian and Saudi Arabian case. This frame covers how states uses sport as a political tool to attain other goals than entertainment. Within this frame the politicisation of sport is key, and a majority of articles focus in various ways on the incentives to why someone wants to host sporting events. For example, distractions and branding are a vital part of this. While these two reasons could be argued to go hand in hand where one implies an outcome of the other, they could also be separated where the implied goal is to distract and where branding could be more about showing of the power in hosting a good event. Examples of these two different implementations are “Putin needs the kudos of these global events to cover up his illegitimacy and the hideous acts he is perpetrating in Ukraine” (Dorries 2022 Telegraph) and the more branding example: “[the race is] a vanity project for Putin” (McEvoy 2014 c. Daily Mail). While both convey a different goal of hosting the event they still reflect on political purposes within sport such as distractions and branding. The first example refers to the actual invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the Russian involvement there, the second refers to the glamour the sport brings which shows that the sport could be good for many uses.

However, the 2014 Grand Prix came at a time when the Malaysian aeroplane was shot down killing 298 people. To add to that, there was a crash at the Japanese Formula One Grand Prix the week before putting the driver Jules Bianchi in a coma which later resulted in his death (BBC 2015). These events could be called intervening news events in the form of both external such as the downing of the aeroplane and internal such as the crash (Rivenburgh 2010:199). The events more or less took attention away from the Grand Prix and focused instead on the circumstances around the plane crash and the situation concerning Jules Bianchi. Both events decreased the potential branding and the celebration of the Formula One Grand Prix with a

plane crash that was caused by pro-Russian separatists and with a driver having crashed the week before.

This frame also often brings up claims of neutrality in the coverage. This is mainly a phrase ascribed to those within the sport answering accusations regarding the political nature of the event rather than views from the journalists. The problem in claiming neutrality of sport is that it opens a door for the opposite, to use it for political purposes. Several articles mention quotes from team principals who claim they do not want to have anything to do with politics. For example, Christian Horner, the principal for Red Bull when questioned about Azerbaijan's inclusion in Formula One and the situation with Russia concerning the Malaysian aeroplane said: "It is wrong to make F1 a political statement or subject when we are a sport" (Quoted in Paul Weaver 2014 a. *The Guardian*). The presence of these types of quotes from people within the sport in articles adds to a negative tone in the coverage of the Grand Prix. Rather than only focusing on the Grand Prix, intervening news such as questioning the appropriateness of the event taking place is favoured. Another quote that puts the statement that politics and sport do not mix into perspective is:

Have any of them stopped to consider the speciousness, the sheer stupidity of the argument that sport and politics do not mix? The notion that a sport of global reach, in which most races are subsidised to a large degree at government level, can exist in some vast political void is at best naive, at worst downright dangerous. (Brown 2014 a. *Telegraph*)

The emphasis on the stupidity of the argument of claiming political neutrality is constant throughout the articles ranging from "Putin's very direct involvement" (Johnson 2014 e. *Telegraph*) or: "the political nature of the race" (McEvoy 2014 c. *Daily Mail*). While this frame is poignant in its ability to draw attention to the presence of politics in its broadest form it also connects it to the economy: "For too long, we have cared only for the money, and here, in part, is the result." (Martin 2022 a. *Daily Mail*). The focus on these types of situations paints what could be described as a depressing picture of both Formula One but also sport in general since the descriptions also cover a bigger picture encapsulating how these things are not only tied to specific events but also are systemic in the world of sports. This raises the question of what legitimacy these events could be given since a negative picture is portrayed frequently throughout the UK news media. When focusing on media routines, the invasion of Ukraine

flipped the coverage of the Russian Grand Prix. From not being discussed in negative ways since 2014 to demanding cancellation in 2022 and the journalistic digging into what sports are used for and the negative aspects it could hide. This is similar to how the 2014 World Cup turned the narrative of Brazil from positive to negative. Their attempts to project the positive change in the state failed after the loss to Germany. Thus, showing the fragility of sport as a resource of soft power (Chari 2015:418,419).

Despite the fragility of sport as a soft power resource (Chari 2015:419), the interest in sport by non-Western states is huge and has been followed by discussions of what purpose. The frame of sport as a political tool brings forward two elements that are highlighted, branding and distraction. As been mentioned, these are common aspects of what the literature labels as sportswashing (Fruh et al. 2023:103). Thus, showing that the studied articles do end up in this kind of reporting about the Grand Prix whether the host explicitly pursues that purpose with the event. Yet, the framing also shows signs of further investigation in the matter:

However, with the sporting establishment again in open revolt over another scheme that will surely be derailed, academics insist there is method behind the madness of Saudi's sudden sporting obsession. (Morgan 2021 e. Telegraph).

As this quote suggests there lies more behind the Saudi Arabian efforts in trying to host sporting events. The hosting of events is not only concerning branding or just about the sport but rather what it brings with it. Sports is used as a political tool to bring forward the state on an international stage. But where it is not just the occasional hosting of a sporting event it is several sports events in the Saudi Arabian case. The hosting offers the possibility to the local population to be included in the global world of sports (Amara & Bouandel 2023:692). However, the negative portrayal of the situation and everything that surrounds it makes the use of sport for political purposes similar to propaganda. Like sportswashing, propaganda has been used as a pejorative term for maliciously displaying activities. Most notably the lens through which the 1936 Olympic Games in Nazi Germany is viewed and their purpose of showcasing power (Skey 2023:755). Thus, the frame of the political use of sport conveys the negative use of sport in ways that connote to propaganda:

With jail and floggings among reported punishments for dissidents of Mohammed bin Salman (MBS), the social media void is filled by the country's rulers drip feed sporting and entertainment gossip. (Morgan 2021 e. Telegraph)

The strong language used focuses not only on the sport itself but also on what implications it has for the citizens of Saudi Arabia. As Skey (2023) argues, propaganda has been traditionally seen as something a passive audience is being manipulated for by those who are in power (Skey 2023:755). The term "drip feed" is a metaphor that implies that manipulation is taking place. Just like Russia which has focused a lot of attention on its population (Kramareva & Grix 2018:1420), by providing a large amount of sporting events Saudi Arabia is framed as doing the same. However, using terms like "drip feed" may turn the discussion sour rather than exploring the interplay of politics and sport as the complex phenomenon it is (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:153).

What happens here is a form of corruption of the value of the sport. What once was held in high regard has been corrupted by commercialisation and the search for economic gain and through that sport has become a tool to be used for other purposes (Fruh et al. 2023:109). Phrases like "Potemkin village" appear in different articles which is a phrase that originates from the 18th century. According to the legend, fake villages were created to impress the empress of Russia, Catherine the Great when she wanted a tour of her country. Shortly, it means a façade with the purpose of not showing the reality (Murtoff n.d.). By implying a façade is at play draws attention to something that is not adhering to the original value of sport. Potemkin village and similar phrases like "putting on its best face for the west" (Morgan 2022 g. Telegraph) or "deliberate strategy to deflect" (Goddard 2023 Express) frame the use of sport in similar terms as to what would be called sportswashing in the Saudi Arabian coverage.

Although sportswashing is not mentioned at all in articles related to Russia, the only exception is when it is discussed in relation to Saudi Arabia. As aforementioned this might be explained partly because the first use related to sport was in 2015 (Skey 2023:750), one year after the inaugural Grand Prix in Sochi. The term also became more used after 2018 (Skey 2023:750) in which case the Russian Grand Prix had been on the calendar for four years. However, similar descriptions of events and actions are presented which shows that sportswashing is not a new concept. It could rather be viewed as a new development in sports diplomacy. The way sports diplomacy tries to profit from the global brand of sport and the potential soft power it can yield

is an attractive tool to use (Murray 2012:581). Yet, as is illuminated by the framing it has its caveats. The idealism that surrounds the topic with terms such as dialogue and diversity is also what makes it elusive (Murray 2012:588). Thus, when these terms are shown to have little anchoring in the real world and how things are governed, this could create a more dissatisfied form of the concept sports diplomacy which could be classified as sportswashing.

As mentioned Grix et al. (2023) discuss three waves in which sportswashing takes place (Grix et al. 2023:8). *Wave 1* is the initial criticism after acquiring the potential event that is going to take place. *Wave 2* signifies a period of negative coverage and the highlighting of substantial differences between the party that is investing and the subject of matter while *Wave 3* signifies the time when sportswashing has become normal (Grix et al. 2023:8). The process of the Russian Grand Prix already being on the calendar for four years could be understood as they missed *wave 1* and skipped ahead to *wave 3* where almost no coverage of either more positive or negative news comes from the event (Grix et al. 2023:10). This puts the Russian event in high contrast to the Saudi Arabian One where sportswashing was named plenty of times in the space of the three years that were under scrutiny in this study. To offer some contextualisation around the events, the fact that the decision to cancel also came so quickly after the invasion of Ukraine took place may have had an impact on the journalistic use of sportswashing. Thus, also broadly on the frame of Sport as a Political Tool.

4.4. Carrier of Responsibility

The frame Carrier of Responsibility is a frame that also was very salient in the UK news media. The frame covers issues of morality, cancellation and most frequently the role of the individual athlete. The calls for cancellation were only reported in the news that covered the Russian Grand Prix. The overarching theme for this frame is individual responsibility. In the UK news media, the individual stands out as the centre of attention and more specifically the attention on the individual athletes. It is the drivers who get the tough questions and are framed as the ones who should take responsibility rather than the organising corporations. This is one example showing how the drivers are those who are at the forefront of wanting to boycott the race in Russia:

“It was four-time champion Vettel who gave the loudest condemnation when asked whether he thinks the race in Sochi-scheduled for late September-should take place following Russian President Vladimir Putin starting a full-scale attack on their neighbours” (Wilson 2022 b. Telegraph)

Of course, this goes both ways in creating interesting stories of putting the superstars at the centre of attention. As Harrison and Boehmer (2020) argue, by putting this into the perspective of financing the journalism and the newspaper, the drivers are bringing in the clicks and a bigger audience (Harrison & Boehmer 2020:306). But what this framing of the issue also does is place responsibility on people who might not have the necessary means of actually making a change. While the Russian invasion of Ukraine got an overwhelming response of support for a boycott and a cancellation of the Grand Prix, the Grand Prix in Saudi Arabia on the other hand did not get the same response. This was despite similar circumstances surrounding the event such as the missile strikes on Saudi Arabian soil that are tied to the Saudi military involvement in Yemen (Chadwick, Widdop & Goldman 2023:2). Instead, the framing focused on the shock and the forwarding of responsibility to those in charge:

With the state accused of sportswashing and having recently executed 81 people in one day, the seven-times champion admitted he was shocked when he received a letter from a teenager sentenced to death for a crime he was alleged to have committed when he was 14. [...] Hamilton placed the pressure firmly on F1 to make a difference since the drivers have no say on the countries his sport visits. (Richards 2022 i. The Guardian).

The example of drivers being put at the centre of attention concerning the sport's whereabouts illuminates the state in which the sport is in. Several articles regard the drivers as the ones who should stand up to injustice but do not develop the stance further. The focus on the drivers is an interesting point in applying responsibility where it highlights the drivers instead of to the people in charge. The little interest in political writing concerning sports journalism (Rowe 2007:387) may also be significant in understanding the interest of the stances of individual athletes.

Other examples highlighting the individuality of the problems that arise through the location of the races are:

“In Saudi Arabia he and Sebastian Vettel wore helmets with the rainbow colours to show their support for LGTB+ people while highlighting the views of and human rights abuses of those countries. (Russel 2021 The Independent)

Several articles mention the use of equipment by drivers that emphasises the design that highlights issues in these countries. Helmets are one example, but others mention t-shirts with supportive messages as well. Small acts of protests like this could be seen as insignificant in the grand scheme of what is happening in these states. Such as 14-year-olds getting sentenced to death for something that has not been proven or that Saudi Arabia as of March 2022 had executed 106 people (Sturm 2023:174). Highlighting these examples still holds the discussion running in the media. Furthermore, the illumination of resistance ties into the notion that there is a journalistic interest in covering the person in sports journalism (Rowe 2017:520). The fixation on the drivers' decisions to use rainbow-coloured helmets could be seen as an example of this.

This can also be connected to media routines concerning the reporting surrounding the sports mega-events. As mentioned, the media tend to report on the conditions that in some way frame the event which could be news stories that concern different types of conflicts (Rivenburgh 2010:197). One conflict that keeps reappearing is the concerns of human rights violations and the coverage of the sports reactions to these concerns could very well take over the agenda rather than the Grand Prix itself. Since Saudi Arabia has been criticised for human rights violations in the past (Sturm 2023:167) and the murder of the journalist Jamal Khashoggi (Næss & Hölzen 2023:190), there is a risk of falling into these types of reporting. It is important to note that the news articles that are covered in this study are collected only from UK news sources. Since the UK are to be considered Western media, it means that the news may have a more critical view of the actions of both Saudi Arabia and the sport governing bodies with the term sportswashing mainly have been used pejoratively (Ettinger 2023:533). Thus, it should not be seen as an example of pointing to the whole discussion surrounding the event but only from the point of view of the UK.

4.5. Development

The frame of Development highlights coverage for the possibility of positive development that sports may bring when they visit a new state. What constituted the frame were culture clashes, sport for development and empty claims. However, culture clashes were only mentioned in the Saudi Arabian coverage. As much as the coverage raises a positive point of view the frame in the UK news media also questions the actual possibility for change. When discussed, the argument for development is almost exclusively employed by sport governing bodies, leading

figures in the sport or athletes to legitimise their presence in the criticised states. Phrases such as claiming awareness of a situation or shining a light on the situation are common.

Most of the background concerning this topic in the UK media comes from interviews or the release of official statements from the sport governing bodies. For example, the CEO of Formula 1, Stefano Domenicali was quoted regarding the future of the race in Saudi Arabia: “this country and the sport is taking a massive step forward” (Quoted in Richards 2022 k. The Guardian). This was then directly refuted by Richards through the depiction: “This is F1’s most hackneyed refrain, that they can effect positive change. Yet their argument is not backed up by any evidence” (Richards 2022 k. The Guardian). The claim of development is received with scepticism and the lack of evidence suggesting that any change has never happened.

The journalists also highlight the response to cancelling the Russian Grand Prix where Formula One released a statement that stated: “The FIA Formula 1 World Championship visits countries all over the world with a positive vision to unite people, bringing nations together” (Smith 2022 b. Express). The statement could be seen as contradictory considering what happened after the Olympic Games in Sochi 2014. After the Olympic Games there was an annexation of Crimea which makes the view that sport can facilitate change in authoritarian states naive. As Boykoff (2022) argues, sport can be a factor at play in playing to the nationalism of the domestic audience in planning for war (Boykoff 2022:345). This makes the sport for development claims falter when instead of bringing unity it brings conflicts. Thus, it may help explain the critical stance on the issue by the UK media.

To contextualise there are very few examples of the sport facilitating change for good in authoritarian states. The only two big cases in recent that this could be applied to are South Korea and South Africa. Although the South Korean hosting of the Olympic Games in 1988 in Seoul has been labelled as a step towards democracy and the hosting of the event gave democracy a chance, there were also a lot of political reforms at play. These reforms played a significant part to the democratisation process and cannot only be attributed to the hosting (Grix et al. 2021:7). However, to this democratisation process, there were also a pressure on the South Korean Government to show itself from a favourable side to avoid failure. Thus, together with the large demonstrations that took place in 1987, there was a shift towards democracy in South Korea (Cha 2009:1600).

With South Africa and the apartheid regime, there was an international boycott taking place instead of trying to highlight the problems from within the state. The rather large-scale boycott reaching from both FIFA and the IOC with their expulsion from the organisations in the 1960s and the 1970s and other means of political pressure on South Africa are considered to have had an impact on ending the apartheid in the country (Næss 2017:538). This shows that in both cases there is much more at play when regarding positive development than just being in a country and playing sport. The complexity of positive development can therefore help explain the framing of scepticism in the UK news media. For example, the salience of showing the opposite of change such as drawing comparisons to Formula One's presence in Bahrain:

Since the mass protests in Bahrain in 2011, F1 has raced on in the country and human rights groups insist the situation has worsened for everyone who speaks out against the regime and that imprisonment and torture has in fact increased. (Richards 2022 b. The Observer)

The highlighting in the coverage of the sport governing bodies focus on portraying what positive outcomes the sport can bring when faced with criticism. To deal with these deflections the studied articles fill it with other explanations for the shying away. For example, such as explaining it through economic incentives:

The idea that big-money sport heralds social change has been so comprehensively debunked by the evidence of recent mega-events from Russia to China to Qatar to Azerbaijan that it feels amazing its proponents have yet to come up with some other fig leaf for their money grabbing (Hyde 2019 The Guardian)

As this shows the highlighting of other motives, Grix et al. (2023) talk about the development of seeing the issue at hand as a bidirectional relationship which includes for example either cultural or economic gains for those who are involved in the process (Grix et al. 2023:3). This relationship could help in understanding the critical perspective that is reflected in the UK news media. The monetary aspect of racing could explain why the Saudi race was not cancelled compared to the Russian race. This increases the notion of scepticism of development. Other reasons could be which side the USA and the UK are on since they amount to around 70 per cent of the weapons trade towards Saudi Arabia (Stavrianakis 2017:564).

4.6. Conflict

Since Russia has been involved in a conflict with Ukraine since 2014 and Saudi Arabia since 2015 with Yemen, the coverage of the Grand Prixes has been impacted as a result of this. The frame of Conflict revolves around these conflicts and how they have impacted the coverage of the Grand Prixes. Authoritarianism is a central point in this frame and further revolves around security, sanctions and discussions about human rights violations. Questions about security regarding the Russian Grand Prix in 2014 could be raised in terms of behaviour: “high security amid controversy over Russia's behaviour in the region” (McEvoy 2014 e. Mail On Sunday). Controversy and behaviour frames Russia for wrongdoing and for their behaviour of something that should not be tolerated. Other examples specifically point out their leaders when discussing economic sanctions: “The sanctions against Russia's national teams, its clubs, its athletes are important in trying to turn the Russian public against its leader.” (Martin 2022 b. Daily Mail). This quote does not only focus on the situation with Russian sport involvement but also on the more general situation concerning sport. The quote also tries to raise questions about civil unrest against Putin and the Russian government. Regarding human rights in Russia, the discussions were not that apparent and when they were brought up, they were not conflict-related per se and here it is where frames risks to blend into each other. Just as one can talk about conflict and human rights, one can talk about them from a perspective of responsibility as well. Framing concerns the process of selection and to make the decision what to focus on (Kang & Svensson 2023:699). In this case, the coverage of the Russian Grand Prix does not select human rights as something to emphasise in terms of conflict-related news. This can depend on the fact that Russia has not been discussed in these terms during 2014 but rather as a developing subject over the years that followed. For example, the 2018 World Cup in Russia, when the rights of the LGBT community in Russia gained international attention after repressive laws were put in place (Meier et al. 2021:790).

Despite this increase in attention around the World Cup, the discussion has not transferred to the coverage of motorsport in Russia. However, the use of phrases like “Putin and his cronies” (Dorries 2022 Telegraph) or “Russian kleptocrats” (Nadine Dorries quoted in Rentoul 2022 The Independent) was used when discussing Russian investment in sports. Interestingly both of these comments come from Nadine Dorries who at the time of the comments held the position of Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport discussing the measures taken against Russia after they launched their invasion of Ukraine. Although, in the article by John Rentoul,

a political commentator for *The Independent*, he also raises the question of her importance as a result of the sporting sanctions aimed at Russia and claiming that: “these decisions are being taken by independent cultural and sporting bodies, without the need for government action” (Rentoul 2022 *The Independent*). However, “Putin and his cronies” (McEvoy d. *Mail on Sunday*). is a phrase that was often used when referring to the sanctions that were put in place for the annexation of Crimea.

This stands in contrast to how Saudi Arabia is framed and where the media focuses heavily on human rights from all angles. For example are human rights activist groups a frequent feature in the coverage of Saudi Arabia such as “Amnesty condemned an announcement issued by Saudi Arabia’s state security agency categorising feminism, homosexuality and atheism as ‘extremist ideas’” (Richards 2021 c. *The Guardian*) or how the everyday life is described as: “more authoritarian than ever since MBS came to power” (Morgan 2021 d. *Telegraph*). Examples portraying the authoritarianism shows how ominous the coverage of the political situation is in the state of Saudi Arabia and it is better to smile and wave than to displease Mohammed Bin Salman. The journalist Jamal Khashoggi who was murdered and dismembered in a Turkish embassy in 2018 (Ettinger 2023:532) is an example that is compared frequently: “They risk a fate like Jamal Khashoggi” (Herbert 2021 *Daily Mail*), “The murder of the *Washington Post* journalist Jamal Khashoggi” (Morgan 2021 e. *Telegraph*) and: “Turkish authorities describing how the sound of a bone saw could be heard” (Brown 2021 d. *Telegraph*). These statements frame a dire situation in Saudi Arabia regarding political freedom for its citizens while they are all simultaneously discussing the state of modern sport.

There is also a much more distinct negative tone in the articles related to Saudi Arabia compared to the coverage of Russia. Even though they also are negative, the coverage of Russia relied more on humour or satiric takes concerning the authoritarian situation. For example:

THEY (sic) are both known for the ruthless control they exert over their respective empires. So Vladimir Putin and Bernie Ecclestone no doubt had plenty to talk about at the Russian Grand Prix yesterday. (Osborne 2014 *Daily Mail*)

What this emphasises are two different depictions of two cases that are very similar to each other. This could depend on what wave in the media coverage they could considered to be located on (Grix et al. 2023:8). As previously mentioned, *Wave 1* is the acquiring and

investment in the potential event that is going to take place (Grix et al. 2023:8). Since there was a giant gap between the announcement of the Russian Grand Prix which was in 2010 (AFP 2010) and the actual race there could be a lack of interest in cover the event at that point in time. Compared to the Saudi Arabian race and their announcement in 2020 (Formula 1 2020) and the actual race in 2021 is a there is a closer connection between the two. The large amount of time between the announcement and the first race could have impacted the interest in negative reporting. The view that Russia was a state in transition to democracy after the fall of the Soviet Union could also be at play, although it halted around 2005 and the positive outlook could be seen as naive after that (Evans 2011:49). Other reasons could be the popularity for Formula One which has gathered a lot of attention since the introduction of Drive to Survive in 2019 as well the increasing number of races outside of Europe (Dewhurst 2023:238,239).

Wave 2 signifies a period of negative coverage and the highlighting of substantial differences between the party that is investing and the subject of matter while *wave 3* refers to the time were a normalisation has occurred and the interest is no longer there (Grix et al. 2023:8). When applying these waves to the framing of these two races one can argue that the Russian Grand Prix are closer to *wave 3*. This is because the difference in criticism that they get. To offer some contextualisation there is a gap of political coverage of the Russian race with the occasional article from 2015 until 2022. While Saudi Arabia on the other hand still are between *wave 1* and 2 considering the short amount of time between the announcement of a Grand Prix and the scheduling for the first race.

Furthermore, there is simply more interest in 2021 around these issues as well as a broader interest both in sport from the Gulf region but also the establishment of Saudi Arabia as authoritarian in Western media (Chadwick 2023:16,17). This could in turn have impacted a more thorough and negative coverage of the Saudi Arabian race. What it also could have done is the keeping of stereotypical coverage of Saudi Arabia alive. The accusations of murdering a journalist do not help in turning around the coverage of the state as authoritarian despite claims of development as was raised in the last section. The difference in how things are operated in the Gulf region with the major role the state has in organising the event compared to Europe (Chadwick 2023:20) also does not help in breaking free from the *wave 1* as of now. However, the negative coverage of the races pictured as waves is not specific to sport but could be found in other news as well. For example, arms trade scandals reported by the media show a similar trend. First as good entertainment with secrecy and drama within the government. Yet the

outcome is minimal and what transpired from a huge scandal fade into obscurity (Erickson 2015:116,117). Which again points to a regular occurrence within in the media landscape and journalism rather than something special with sportswashing.

However, the conflict frame also places news of what happens in the world as a mere backdrop for the event such as: “Security has been increased because of the war in Ukraine” (McEvoy 2014 c. Daily Mail) or “The Russian Grand Prix was scrapped this year amid Vladimir Putin’s military invasion of Ukraine” (Gamble 2022 a. Express) or in the Saudi case: “The Saudis are still at the forefront of the genocidal war being waged in Yemen” (Gallagher 2021 a. Daily Mail) or “in its seven-year war in Yemen, Saudi Arabia has ‘a sordid record of unlawful attacks’” (Richards 2022 m. The Observer). What this shows is that the coverage of the conflicts in both states is present from the beginning. Conflicts constantly intervene in the news process with the result of less attention to the actual event and more to what happens beside it. Thus, placing a large portion of the coverage on the disturbance of the sport. The coverage once again ties in with various accusations of politics and economic gain in placing a Grand Prix in an active warzone, at least in the case of the Saudi Arabian race with the missile attack happen just outside of the circuit.

4.7. Global Society

The frame of intertwinement of the global society really broadens the scope of what is at stake within both Formula One and sport in general. Here a broader discussion on the topic takes place regarding sport in society and is not only bound to Formula One but also the drawing of connections to other spots as well that are facing the same conundrum. Here, arguments about whataboutism and hypocrisy are frequent in discussing the actions that are taken by sport governing bodies as well as individual athletes. The frame that is applied reflects how modern sport is functioning in society and the difficulty of taking appropriate action when states and sporting institutions are intertwined with each other. Journalists, for example, are drawing connections between events:

It shouldn’t come as any real surprise, given that the sport itself is one giant contradiction. The obvious example: why do we still race in Saudi, etc, if we take a stance on Russia? I’m not suggesting we put Russia back on the calendar, I’m just crying out in frustration that “moral” decisions are being made for superficial

reasons. If Sochi was removed to fit with the FIA promise that “violence, abuse of human rights and repression are taken very seriously”, then a good chunk of the calendar should have gone with it. (Cooper 2022 The Independent)

The quote draws on the official statement by the FIA for the cancellation in Russia and puts it into perspective to other races. Rather than just covering one of the events it offers a deeper description of the issue drawing on the hypocrisy of where the sport goes and how serious these issues really are treated.

A question that is not adequately raised in these kinds of discussions is that even in democratic states can these issues be swept under the rug. For example, during the 2012 Olympic Games in London, pre-emptive policing resulted in restrictive movement of people. One situation involved a mocking Olympic medal ceremony of greenwashing with people throwing custard at each other. As a result, the police arrested the involved people with the argument that they could potentially do it again. No one who was involved in the stunt was charged with a crime, but their condition of the arrestment prohibited them from going near Olympic venues and their freedom of movement was impacted (Boykoff 2019:169). Maybe this is a small thing compared to mass executions, but it is still restrictions on dubious claims of security.

Furthermore, the frame of Global Society illuminates the direction that sport has taken in recent times. As Kearns et al. (2023) discuss there is a risk of intertwining between the political use of sport and what has been labelled as sportswashing with the culture of sport and the following normalisation of the situation (Kearns et al. 2023:7). For example:

Every sports fan has principles until an oligarch throws money at their team. It is usually at that point that they voice the argument that sport should not be the single blunt instrument with which to hold rogue states or corporations to account (Adams 2021 The Observer)

This quote points out in a broader picture the difficulty of addressing responsibility in a global world. It is always someone else’s responsibility to hold these states to account. It is this kind of reasoning that has allowed this type of ownership to spiral out of control. This points to the normalisation that is taking place with the intertwining of the culture of sport and what it can be used for. Furthermore, it also attaches the notion of sport as an escape from politics and what

could be called motivated ignorance to keep the identification and enjoyment of the sport (Jones et al. 2023:113,114).

Still, it is a valuable statement that also could highlight the inconsistency of responsibility. Sports for some reason are held to a higher standard than other types of entertainment and even democratic states happily engage in commerce with authoritarian regimes. There considerably less discussion about the film industry placing their movies in authoritarian states or how they censor parts of the movies to maximise profits in those states as moviewashing (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:153). This may end up in a constant loop of whataboutism. There is always something else that should be talked about that is not brought to attention such as the suggested moviewashing. The result of this is complicity to the atrocities that are taking place (Fruh et al. 2023:108). The framing highlights this by showcasing that the principles of fans are discarded when the chance of competing for trophies is approaching. The highlighting of these hypocritical statements is interesting from a framing perspective in the way Entman (1993) argues framing is about, to make some points seem more salient than others (Entman 1993:52). Illuminating the role of the fans in this situation is that they bring up their responsibility to reflect on their own role and how they argue to support their actions and how it may affect the bigger picture. To follow up this with an example:

I've got no time for what-aboutery. Just because someone else is willing to ignore the horrors of the Saudi regime in exchange for untold riches doesn't mean you should do the same. (Dunn 2022 b. The Daily Mirror)

Again, showing the need for responsibility by addressing the reader directly highlights the normalisation that has already happened. This normalisation is also not only related to one sport but to all sports. Throughout the news relating to Saudi Arabia, football, golf, tennis and boxing are frequently mentioned in terms of whataboutism and sportswashing:

But the whataboutism is exactly what those that are sportswashing want. It deflects and diverts. [...] If we just focus on the football, or the golf, or boxing or tennis, we are doing the job for the Saudi government because we are not talking about the continuing genocidal war in Yemen or the 81 people beheaded by the Saudi government in one day recently, or its treatment of the LGBTQ community. (Gallagher 2022 b. Daily Mail)

This highlights the complicity that the studied articles put into the meaning of sportswashing. It takes away the attention from these issues by not speaking out (Fruh 2023:108) which makes this a central part of the term of sportswashing. But still, these issues are discussed in the UK media and quite regularly across different frames. Thus, the highlighting of these topics could also be seen as a form of resistance by the UK news media. The resistance from the media is through keeping the topics alive through the news and “If your efforts at sportswashing give you a reputation as a notorious sportswasher, has sportswashing really helped you?” (Ganji 2023:73). Although it is an interesting observation, it has not yet yielded a change in how different sports are bought up and invested in by authoritarian states (Ganji 2023:73). This opens the question of states participation and if it actually is sportswashing or if it is something else. As been noted, sportswashing is elusive (Chadwick & Widdop 2023:148) and the journalistic use of the term does not seem to have an impact. As noted, it is not only one sport but several. Thus, sportswashing may only be a small part of what the bigger goal is. An authoritarian state may host an event to improve its image but with it comes pressure for political change which can cause the opposite of improvement (Cha 2009:1601). At the forefront of this is the notion of potential improvement which is central to the hosting of an event. Still, the negative coverage has not stopped anyone from wanting to host the sports mega-events. The critique that comes with it may not have any significance because the goal is not gaining soft power now but rather towards economic and geopolitical goals which are not as dependent on publicity (Ettinger 2023:534). The terms on which the events get negotiated lack the accountability of taking human rights seriously from all parts included (Boykoff 2022:349).

But the fact that issues of how the sport is governed are still brought up and how the race in Russia gets treated differently when other races in similar states still are on the calendar points to something more than just sportswashing. Furthermore, the fact that a larger part of the organisation’s releases are CSR-statements showing how they take responsibility and are awake to the situations that surround the events when they stand before criticism, puts them in the line of fire. Likewise, the IOC makes big claims of being a supporter of human rights and other principles while the actual implementation of these standards is lacking in evidence (Boykoff 2019:172). Other examples are FIA and Formula One with their initiatives regarding both sustainability and societal responsibilities (Næss 2023:131). There is a considerable change in how they are positioning themselves today, compared to how they acted in the past with their reluctance in taking political stances (Næss 2023:131). Because of this humanitarian signalling by the sport governing bodies, it could be a possible explanation to why the studied articles use

sportswashing to frame the relationship between sports and politics. The statements of being awake and shining a light on human rights issues create a sensitivity of being exposed to these types of scandals and news (Erikson 2015:117).

While this entails parts of distraction as the outcome of sportswashing it can also be considered as criticism of not practising what you preach. Rather than being only a pejorative term of trying to distract and a sort of by-product of sports diplomacy in terms of trying to connect people (Murray 2012:581), It follows a movement in the world right now in demanding more responsibility from business actors (Özturan & Grinstein 2022:401). As these events never have been as popular as they are right now, they are very sensitive to corruption considering the potential economic significance they bring (Keys & Burke 2019:218). The sport governing bodies have also come under pressure from human rights organisations while also attempting to use the human rights rhetoric for legitimacy but fail in showing that their presence has had any impact (Keys & Burke 2019:218,219). Thus, as much as sportswashing may be pejorative it also pokes holes in the idealistic picture of what sport can surmount.

5. Conclusion

In the mist of the Russian invasion and the following ostracization of Russian participation in various sports in February 2022, sports could potentially be seen as heading towards a way of adhering to their principles of valuing human rights and the strive for unity and peace in the world. After the missile attack launched by Houthi rebels that struck an oil refinery 10 kilometres outside of the Formula One circuit during one of the practice sessions in Jeddah in March 2022, everything went back to normal. In order to reconnect to the purpose of this study aimed to explore how the UK news media frames the Russian and the Saudi Arabian Formula One Grand Prix. Furthermore, it also concerned how we can understand the contradictory position of global media events and the conceptualisation of sportswashing regarding to sports diplomacy. Since the term sportswashing has largely been employed by journalists compared to the limited academic use this study explored the topic by drawing from frameworks such as framing theory. This theory helps to develop the information of the journalistic discourse surrounding the topic and more broadly the relationship between sport and politics.

Answering the first research question: *How do UK news media frame the Russian Grand Prix Na the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix?* I will first turn to the data which consisted of 222 articles

written across nine newspapers and presented five frames which showed that both cases were framed in similar ways. The five frames' names were *Sport as a political tool*, *Carrier of responsibility*, *Development*, *Conflict* and *Global society*. Each frame reflected on which issues were the most highlighted. As noted, no discernible difference could be seen between what could be called the broadsheets and the tabloid press. However, what was brought to light is the criticism that permeated the UK media towards these sports mega-events.

The framing of the Russian and Saudi Arabian Grand Prix was at times very similar in that way they all produced the same frames but with varying levels of severity. Russia had been on the racing calendar for a longer time than Saudi Arabia and because of that a greater normalisation of the event could occur. As discussed in the analysis, Russia may have slipped through the waves of sportswashing that Grix et al. (2023:8) mention and compared to Saudi Arabia is located in different positions. Such as differences in the tone of the news regarding the races were harsher in the Saudi Arabian case whereas in the Russian case, they tended to be more humorous and taunting. The fact that these issues of sport and politics were not that greatly discussed at the time in motorsport compared to FIFA and the Olympic Games can also have had an impact on the news coverage. Furthermore, Sportswashing as a term was not yet conceived until 2015 and did not gain traction in the media until a few years later which could also have impacted the coverage in the form of using sport as a more deliberate strategy. However, even if sportswashing was not mentioned at all in relation to Russia, similar discussions took place and where one could argue would fit into how sportswashing is constructed. Examples of the central aspects of sportswashing are distraction, façade, money and branding which all were used in the covering of the Russian Grand Prix.

Very central in the UK news coverage was the question of responsibility and who was framed as responsible. Both the Russian and the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix were framed from a perspective of individual responsibility. The drivers were the focal point of a lot of questions regarding the situation of the invasion of Ukraine and the human rights records of Saudi Arabia. It was their stance that was highlighted on what they thought of the invasion or their eventual resistance towards what was happening in the states that they were racing in. The decisions that were taken by the drivers could be seen as a way of transforming their participation to not be complicit in concealing the atrocities that were happening. Even if it is a transformative participation conducted by the drivers, the fact that they are put in the centre of attention by the media opens up for questions of journalistic responsibility.

As has been discussed in this study, sports journalists tend to focus more on results and not on politics and economy (Rowe 2017:526) which tend to be very central aspects of sportswashing. However, by also focusing on the drivers' own actions, such as their rainbow-coloured helmets keeps the conversation about the political situation going. Thus, the media are treading a thin line between allowing distraction to occur but also not letting it go away. Frames such as *Conflict* and *Development* were still predominately negative. While development raises the potential of Formula One and other sports to bring unity, peace and societal development, the claims are usually shot down because the evidence is not there. Thus, when not engaging in investigative political journalism regarding sports, central political issues to the events are still raised in the form of questioning the decisions that are made.

While there exists a lack of investigative journalism in the UK media regarding Formula One, the topic of sportswashing and responsibility is central in the studied articles. Whataboutism and hypocrisy of the sport governing bodies and the fans and how far this reaches throughout the sporting world is almost normalised when nobody wants to take the responsibility. To bring up this quote again: "If Sochi was removed to fit with the FIA promise that "violence, abuse of human rights and repression are taken very seriously", then a good chunk of the calendar should have gone with it." (Cooper 2022 *The Independent*). This statement does not only relate to Formula One but also to all of the other sports. If the sport governing bodies should adhere to their principles of human rights, there are not many options left for imaginable hosts. As been discussed the Olympic Games in London had their problems as well as the Olympic Games in Atlanta, China, Russia, and Brazil and the World Cup in Qatar, Russia and Brazil. The list goes on for questionable hosts. As Fruh et al. (2023) discuss, sportswashing corrupts and makes those who participate and watch it complicit in the atrocities, not directly but indirectly.

The second research question: *How does the UK news media situate itself regarding the reporting of global media events?* Even though this question has similarities to the first one and may overlap, it does point to the sports mega-events and how it follows the five variables. The most evident is the media routines and how the coverage is built up surrounding the events. During the build-up, other topics beyond Formula One were raised but mainly topics which concerned sportswashing in some ways. In the Russian case, sportswashing was not mentioned but similar topics were despite that, discussed. For example, the Potemkin village and the appearance of a façade. It took a similar direction as other research concerning sports mega-

events in reporting the political overtones that surrounded the Grand Prix. This included the annexation of Crimea as well as the downing of the Malaysian Aeroplane in 2014. However, the Malaysian aeroplane that was shot down could also be seen as an intervening news event due to the circumstances that no one of the involved organisers could have anticipated. But the situation still derailed the coverage of the Grand Prix due to the political situation that surrounded Russia that year with sanctions and the ties with the pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. What also could have had an impact is the crash at the Japanese Grand Prix the weekend before that resulted in the death of Jules Bianchi. As much as the Malaysian Aeroplane forced political and conflict news into the world of sports, Bianchi's crash partly reversed the coverage. Instead of conflicts, it leaned towards the safety of Formula One cars and the protocols of race marshals. Two events that in a way took each other out in terms of what topic to cover during the weekend of the Russian Grand Prix in 2014.

In the Saudi Arabian case, a lot of news focused on the human rights records and the murder of Jamal Khashoggi, mass executions and bone saws. This type of news coverage tended to lay as a shadow on every article concerning the sport in the state despite every attempt to display other aspects. This can be exemplified in talks of development and what help Formula One is claimed to achieve in the state. There is also the missile strike just outside of the circuit before the race in 2022 that even more so seized the headlines. Despite safety assurances, the media coverage reverted to the routines that had been an integral part of the news related to Saudi Arabia. However, there might be some gaps because of the scope of the collected material to cover an unbiased picture of the Grand Prix due to only UK media being collected. With that said, there is a clear negative coverage of these global media events.

What is an interesting aspect of this is the aspect of what Cha (2009) calls the catch-22 of authoritarian regimes hosting sports. Despite efforts to display other aspects of the society and aims of hosting an event, pressure for change overwhelms the efforts (Cha 2009:1601). There is a difficulty in challenging the media portrayal when the reality shows the opposite (Rivenburgh 2010:198). In the Russian case the negative coverage seemed to not matter until it did with the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The difference may be that it could be like the case of South Africa and their exclusion where a lot of sport governing bodies together with states took measures to boycott the state (Næss 2017:538). Thus, the public outcry after the invasion and that Russian athletes was to compete under a neutral flag could very much be the last drop that resulted in a decision to cancel the Russian Grand Prix.

To answer the third research question: *What is the conceptual difference between sportswashing and sports diplomacy?* Having mapped the framing in the UK media surrounding the Russian and Saudi Arabian Grand Prix it is safe to establish that there is a lot of coverage regarding political motives, political situations, and the state of the world of modern sport. What the coverage also does is while mentioning political motives, it does so with a negative tone and with a lack of a deeper analysis concerning what sportswashing is. Considering what the literature says about sportswashing, which is that it has mainly been used as a pejorative concept towards authoritarian regimes and that their use of sport has been framed as a strategic process of trying to distract from human rights violations (Grix et al. 2023:2). While that is still true when highlighting the heavy criticism that both Russia and Saudi Arabia has faced for their hosting of different sport events in the coverage, the discussion is not only focused on the two states. The framing also points out the bigger picture and the turn that global sport has taken in the 21st century. Thus, sports in these states are not only done as a distraction or branding but also in terms of future goals.

As Saudi Arabia has already been discussed, their interest in sport is not only a form of distraction from its human rights violations or the gaining of soft power. Instead, it is a way of diversifying their whole economy and trying to get Western economies entangled in the Saudi economy, thus laying the ground for cooperation (Ettinger 2023:541). On the other hand, this is a purpose most states pursue, to make other states invest and to have favourable trading connections. Thus, what this points to is diplomacy committed through the scope of sport. Rather than focusing on creating a positive image the focus is on other aspects that the sport could bring. The criticism that surrounds the sport and the goal that it is perceived to be used for, may not convey the whole story behind the issue. As brought up, there is evidence of a personalisation bias in the media of focusing on the specific persons rather than the institutions (Rowe 2017:520). This makes sportswashing a very difficult topic to trace in the media considering that it links to multiple disciplines, spanning from international relations and geopolitics to history and entertainment, sponsorships as well as nationalism and identity. All these topics draw from each other and intersect which kind of resembles a labyrinth in a similar way to what Rowe (2017) argues is the difficulty of the organisational structure of FIFA and how that negatively impacts the interest of sports journalists to write about the issue (Rowe 2017:520). Thus, it is easier to revert to individual coverage and place the drivers on the centre stage and focus on their personal takes on a political situation that they have limited control

over. Furthermore, this also capitalises on the old saying that athletes should just play and keep their mouths shut about issues concerning politics (Carrington 2023:358).

The conceptual difference between sportswashing and sports diplomacy is that when reporting on these issues, sportswashing in the UK media gives a simplified view of the whole topic. Sport and politics are so much more than just a distraction and to be labelled as a sportswasher has not scared anyone for indulging in similar activities. If this is due to a lack of interest for a deeper understating of the topic or rather in the search for more sensational news is hard to say. What can be said is that it looks like there is a wish in the UK news media to want sports to do more. As much as sporting bodies proclaim that they can shine a light on problematic issues and be a force for peace in the regions they visit it lacks evidence. Therefore, sportswashing as much as it highlights a state's problematic situation it also puts pressure on the sport governing bodies to do more than just talk and give empty promises. The change cannot happen in a day, but it really should not need to be getting worse before it gets better. Regardless of the similar situations in Russia and Saudi Arabia and the similar coverage by the UK media, two different decisions were taken by Formula One concerning the appropriateness of racing in the two states. The easy answer is probably money. To quote Lewis Hamilton when the Australian Grand Prix amidst the Covid-19 outbreak in 2020 was looking to go ahead: "*Cash is king*" (Quoted in Richards 2020).

5.1. Limitations and Future Research

This research aimed to cover how the UK news media framed the Russian and Saudi Arabian Formula One Grand Prix and uncovered a negative tone in the news coverage. But as mentioned, only UK news media and furthermore only news written in the English language were covered due to language barriers. While Formula One is dominantly a sport in the UK and Europe it has gone through an expansion phase outside of Europe as of lately and broadened its horizons since Liberty Media took over in 2017 (Dewhirst 2023:235). Furthermore, the term sportswashing is still new with only nine years on the record since it first made its debut, but the use of the term has almost risen exponentially. Since this also has only been covered from mainly a Western perspective raises the question of how frequent the use of the term is in other languages and other regions of the world. As aforementioned the database gave most results related to UK news media which could point to an abundance of news in the English-speaking world and newspapers which are written in English. The fact that sportswashing also has been

used as a pejorative term in Western media also calls for a broader scope of languages and regions to be researched regarding this notion. The question is if sportswashing is used in the same way as in the Western discourse and if it is criticised.

Other topics that need to be raised in further research regarding sports and politics are minor sports. A lot of research focuses on the FIFA World Cup and the Olympic Games but sports and politics are not closed to only those two. This includes Formula One, tennis and golf but also other sports. This could lead to a better understanding of the whole picture regarding sports and not only what is the tip of the iceberg with the biggest sports mega-events in Football and the Olympic Games. Furthermore, regarding sports journalism, this study only covered the news relating to politics and sportswashing but with the notion that sports journalism avoids political reporting, further research could collect both to see if the correlation is still there and still an issue. Another step would be interviewing sports journalists to research their view on the process that negative coverage sport coverage seems to take. For example, the normalisation of the criticised event and if there exist a fatigue for further investigation. This could serve as examples of further research to highlight the understanding of sport in our society and which role it fills if it just is entertainment or if it mixes with politics.

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Appendixes

Appendix 1. Codebook over Russia

Frame	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Example
Sport as a Political Tool	Politicisation	Neutrality	The separation between sports and politics	citing their charter to be non-political
		Branding	The use of sports to promote the state/city	prepared to exchange huge sums of money for the "nation building" gold dust they provide
		Distraction	The use of sport as a facade	The Sochi Autodrom, more than 300 miles away on the shores of the Black Sea, has all the hallmarks of a modern-day Potemkin village
		Legality	The use of contracts and official documents to argue why the event is taking place	he planned to "honour our contract" with the Russian president
		Economy	Economic incentives for hosting events	His race was over; a case of money well spent
Carrier of Responsibility	Individuality	Morality	Displaying of ethics surrounding the placement of the events	Do we support the regime who is masterminding this bloodshed? Or do we say this is not correct?
		Cancellation	Calls for cancellation of the events	with the political fallout, there was no onus on Ecclestone or even Jean Todt, the FIA president, to cancel the race
		The individual athlete	In the centre of attention is the athlete who should make a statement	When a country is at war, it is not right to race there

Development	Positive change	Culture clash	Highlight the differences in societies all over the world	*No example in the Russian case
		Sport for development	The claims of the positive lens that sport can convey on states wanting to improve	For decades Formula One has worked hard to be a positive force everywhere it races, including economic, social and cultural benefits
		Empty claims	No change is happening despite assurances	The idea that big-money sport heralds social change has been so comprehensively debunked
Conflict	Authoritarianism	Sanctions	The use of economic sanctions to force change	It is our duty to use whatever influence and leverage we might have to bring this wholly unjustified invasion of Ukraine to a halt
		Security	Promises of the security of the event	high security amid controversy over Russia's behaviour in the region
		Human rights violations	The political situation in a state	*No example in the Russian case
Global Society	Connection between events	Whataboutery	Emphasis on an unfair amount of criticism or the exclusion of other organisations' doings	There were problems all over the world
		Hypocrisy	The act of saying one thing but doing another	If Sochi was removed to fit with the FIA promise that "violence, abuse of human rights and repression are taken very seriously", then a good chunk of the calendar should have gone with it

Appendix 2. Codebook over Saudi Arabia

Frame	Main Category	Subcategory	Description	Example
Sport as a Political Tool	Politicisation	Neutrality	The separation between sports and politics	If we mix sport and politics, we will have very few places where we can race
		Branding	The use of sports to promote the state/city	Saudi Arabia is trying to establish itself as a global destination and has used sport as a means to do so
		Distraction	The use of sport as a facade	academics insist there is method behind the madness of Saudi's sudden sporting obsession
		Legality	The use of contracts and official documents to argue why the event is taking place	*No example in the Saudi case
		Economy	Economic incentives for hosting events	The bleak reality is that the sport chose simply to cash the cheque and hope for the best
Carrier of Responsibility	Individuality	Morality	Displaying of ethics surrounding the placement of the events	The morality of even having sporting events in such places has been well covered, and if that atmosphere was not febrile enough, there was a Yemeni Houthi attack on a Saudi oil depot just miles from the event

		Cancellation	Calls for cancellation of the events	*No example in the Saudi case
		The individual athlete	In the centre of attention is the athlete who should make a statement	he felt the sport was “duty-bound” to speak up when it visited countries where groups were discriminated against on the basis of gender or sexuality
Development	Change	Culture clash	Highlight the differences in societies all over the world	It’s good to see people stand for what they believe. But at the same time, we have our culture, our traditions
		Sport for development	The claims of the positive lens that sport can convey on states wanting to improve	F1 said it had “worked hard to be a positive force everywhere it races
		Empty claims	No change is happening despite assurances	Worse still, there is no evidence any change ever occurs
Conflict	Authoritarianism	Sanctions	The use of economic sanctions to force change	*No example in the Saudi case
		Security	Promises of the security of the event	We feel safe,” the sport's chief Stefano Domenicali said as they pointed out that the oil firm Aramco is the target, not the racing event

		Human rights violations	The political situation in a state	Saudi Arabia last week announced that it executed 81 men, including seven Yemenis and one Syrian, for terrorism and other offences including holding "deviant beliefs" in the kingdom's biggest mass execution in decades
Global Society	Connection between events	Whataboutery	Emphasis on an unfair amount of criticism or the exclusion of other organisations' doings	I lost count of how many tweets I read along the lines of 'Well, what about the football World Cup in Qatar?' or 'What about Lewis Hamilton taking part in the F1 Grand Prix?' etc
		Hypocrisy	The act of saying one thing but doing another	It's hard to stomach that a sport which uses the new motto "we race as one", as a way to suggest it is making strides on equality and diversity, then goes and races in countries such as Qatar and Saudi Arabia

Appendix 3. Example of an Article Covering Russia

Russian Grand Prix enters Vladimir Putin's playground as Formula One juggernaut rolls into Sochi

[ProQuest document link](#)

ABSTRACT

Since the world last descended upon this industrial-estate-cum-theme-park for the Winter Olympics in February, events have moved on rapidly. According to the PR machines, you can witness "a story of love, friendship and passion" performed by Russia's finest figure-skaters, circus performers, actors and singers.

FULL TEXT

This weekend's race has been orchestrated to boost President Vladimir Putin's prestige at home and abroad. All major sporting events have a political overtone, but few are as blatant as this

In 1787, Catherine the Great, accompanied by a gaggle of courtiers, made an unprecedented six-month trip to Novorossia - literally 'New Russia' - now the much disputed and fought-over territories of eastern Ukraine. As governor of the region, Grigory Potemkin, a favourite and lover of the empress, was tasked with impressing Russia's allies along the journey.

The tale goes that Potemkin's men would assemble mobile villages, dressing up as peasants, before moving the settlement down the Dnieper River overnight for inspection by Catherine the next day. The notion of a 'Potemkin village', a facade concocted to hide an undesirable reality, was born.

The Sochi Autodrom, more than 300 miles away on the shores of the Black Sea, has all the hallmarks of a modern-day Potemkin village. The only difference - apart from the millions of tonnes of concrete - is that Russia has barely an ally left to woo. Formula One, driven by a compelling business argument, given the booming luxury car market in Russia, has willingly filled the void.

In a press conference when asked any questions of a political leaning, the promoter and the local vice-governor would speak among themselves for a few moments, before deciding upon an answer: the organisers admitted they had not attracted as many international visitors as they would have liked. It is hardly surprising.

Since the world last descended upon this industrial-estate-cum-theme-park for the Winter Olympics in February, events have moved on rapidly. The economic sanctions imposed after the Ukraine crisis have left Russia severely wounded, and a persona non grata on the international stage. In response, the government banned western food imports, leaving Muscovite chefs to import Parmigiano-Reggiano via Belarus.

Many Russians do not seem to have noticed there is a race going on. There were little more than a handful of spectators in the sparkling grandstand for practice on Friday morning.

Is Formula One wrong to hold a grand prix in Russia?

A capacity crowd of 55,000 is expected on race day, and several of the drivers have spoken warmly of the reception.

"I am amazed at how many fans are here," Jenson Button said. "There are so many people with Union Jacks, McLaren hats and shirts." Lewis Hamilton, who packed out a television show open to the public, added: "I'm massively impressed with Russia. They are enthusiastic about motor racing and I didn't expect that."

The organisers have been helped no end by Daniil Kvyat's recent promotion to Red Bull, putting a Russian driver at the apex of the sport for years to come.

The current crop of drivers spoke warmly about the circuit after Friday's practice, although the best they had to say in the build-up was that it resembled Valencia and South Korea: two often derided tracks which have fallen by the wayside. Others spoke of the thrill of navigating an Olympic Park. From appearances, at least, a car park better fits the bill.

The venue is pristine, immaculately finished and brilliantly built, apart from a few rogue grey cobbles in the paddock which would annoy McLaren boss Ron Dennis no end. But even from above, the backdrop of the mountains to one side and the sea to the other is not enough to make this an eye-catching proposition. There is an enormous theme park next to the circuit, not to mention an ice musical show. According to the PR machines, you can witness "a story of love, friendship and passion" performed by Russia's finest figure-skaters, circus performers, actors and singers. But the only story here is hard cash. Bernie Ecclestone, F1's impresario, shares a remarkably close relationship with President Putin, considering the language barrier. His good friend was more than happy to pay £120million for the privilege of hosting a race for five years. "Sochi holds a symbolic importance for Putin," according to Dr Andrew Foxall, director of the Russian Studies Centre at the Henry Jackson Society think tank. "It was the leading health resort in the Soviet Union and the place where members of the Soviet elite holidayed. Almost as soon as he became president in 2000, Putin set about restoring Sochi to its Soviet-era glory."

This whole endeavour to make Sochi a destination, not just for Russians, has taken a serious blow in recent months. As Richard Cregan, a consultant for the organisers who helped get the Abu Dhabi race off the ground, concedes: "There was a lot of last-minute bookings. We saw that in hospitality. People were waiting to see if the race would happen." Plans for an ice skating academy and a young-driver school may enjoy more success in the long term. But even with the political fallout, there was no onus on Ecclestone or even Jean Todt, the FIA president, to cancel the race. Unlike in Bahrain, the sport's last PR disaster, no senior politicians - barring Nick Clegg, in search of a 'differentiation' issue - have told Formula One it should not go. The normally-cautious German government did not command Mercedes to keep both cars at home.

As you would expect, security is phenomenally tight - the staff rigorously check there is charge on both your laptop and your phone, and almost refused to allow a photographer in on Thursday because of a faded picture on his media pass - but there are no protests or bombs going off in the background.

There was no persuasive argument for why the sport should independently have called the whole jamboree off. The pressure from sponsors, fierce in Bahrain, never came. Even in the wake of the Malaysian airlines disaster over Ukraine, Petronas, Malaysia's state oil company, is still happy to have its logo emblazoned on the side of the Silver Arrows.

As Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant have been beheading hostages in Syria and Iraq, Russia has understandably slipped off politicians' agendas. It may be thrust right back to centre stage when they see President Putin in Sochi. The president who has presided over economic ruin, with approval ratings of 86 per cent - his 62nd birthday this week was celebrated with an exhibition depicting him as Hercules - will be everywhere. He was here for the official signing of the contract four years ago, and is on T-shirts in racing driver overalls. To top it off, he is expected to be on the grid tomorrow afternoon.

Ecclestone and Todt's favourite refrain, that F1 is not a political sport, has been blown into oblivion by Putin's very direct involvement. The thorn in the West's side has made it shameless political theatre. The Toro Rosso team principal even personally thanked Putin.

Back in February, it was the Olympic hotels which were unfinished, naked power cables hanging off the walls. Now it is the political argument for being here which remains incomplete: it was never F1's job to articulate it. Those in Russia's F1-shaped Potemkin village this weekend will not mind one jot, as long as the money keeps pouring in.

Credit: By Daniel Johnson F1 Correspondent, Sochi

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Appendix 4. Example of an Article Covering Saudi Arabia

F1 DOES NOT HAVE A RACISM PROBLEM: IN HIS FIRST INTERVIEW SINCE TAKING OVER, STEFANO DOMENICALI DISCUSSES LEWIS HAMILTON'S FUTURE AND THE SPORT'S HUMAN RIGHTS RECORD

McEvoy, Jonathan

[ProQuest document link](#)

FULL TEXT

STEFANO DOMENICALI was the motor racing nut who as a teenager checked passes and stewarded cars in the royal park at Monza. He directed Bernie Ecclestone to his parking space and today we find him sitting in the old boss's chair.

ed "You can imagine when I was a kid, Bernie was a myth he still is," declared Domenicali. In fact, it is not the actual chair and it is not the actual office from which Ecclestone, now 90 and seeing out Covid from the seclusion of his home in Gstaad, Switzerland, turned a hobby for enthusiasts into the billion-dollar phenomenon that is modern Formula One.

The TARDIS-like office opposite Hyde Park where Mr E courted presidents and prime ministers closed down for serious business the moment Liberty Media took control as part of their £6billion acquisition of the sport in 2017. They upped sticks to St James's Market off Regent Street a plusher home for the shiny new owners.

Domenicali is rattling around the place in these strange times. Most of the staff are working from home, but he has completed his quarantine period since travelling from Italy to London and is in the boardroom for his first face-to-face socially distanced newspaper interview since taking over from Chase Carey, the corporate American with no interest in racing, who would treat journalists with an enthusiasm others reserved for undertakers.

Carey was the anti-Ecclestone. A watchful chief executive, he considered business best kept behind closed doors. Domenicali is markedly more open. A youthful 55, he is steeped in the sport ? born in Imola, son of a banker, he left Bologna University with a degree in business administration to join Ferrari ? having already been licensed as a steward, race director and clerk of the course.

IN STEFANO FUTURE

He rose to team principal when they won the last of their world titles in 2008, before a stint as CEO of Lamborghini. Now he is taking up the top job as chief executive of Formula One.

"I get on well with Bernie," he said, a departure from Carey's frosty relations with his predecessor. "We speak almost every week. He said to let him know if I need advice. Formula One without Bernie, I'm sorry, would not be what it is today.

"You must not forget he is a pioneer in understanding the opportunity presented by cars being driven around the track and building the right enthusiasm, structure and business.

"I have a lot of admiration for him and what he did. His paddock pass is ready and I hope he can come to races."

Domenicali is a conciliator. Nobody in the sport has a bad word to say about him. If there is a doubt at all, it is whether he is too nice for a role at the head of what has been called the Piranha Club ? the alphas ecosystem in which team principals ruthlessly pursue their own interests. This week he travels to Bahrain for pre-season testing and a meeting with the drivers ? to talk to them and listen to them.

One subject top of the agenda is the Sir Lewis Hamilton-led campaign for diversity after a year in which the seven-time world champion called for the sport to move away from its white-centric base to embrace different cultures. I asked Domenicali if he thinks Formula One has a racism problem.

'I don't perceive that,' he said. 'At least I don't see that from personal experience; in truth, the other way round. Formula One started in certain parts of the world - Europe - but it has moved into other areas and multi-culturalism is growing. This growth is a value, an asset.'

'When I joined Ferrari in 1991 it was 99.9 per cent Italian. Then we were joined by people from the UK, France, Japan, Switzerland, Germany - changing in terms of culture and colour, offering an incredible possibility to know people who were different.'

'Down on a knee, knees up - these things have different meanings depending on where you are in the world. It is important these gestures, which need to be respectful to the sensibilities of everyone, are backed up with actions, with credible context.'

'I want to discuss the knee with the drivers. We do not want to be focused on a single gesture. There is a big platform before races but we do not want to maximise it in a political way. We want to highlight values that are important to the world and to Formula One.'

'We want to have a scholarship to help people who can't afford a certain degree of study to get into Formula One and to grant accessibility to everyone, to get more women into top positions.'

Domenicali is a great admirer of Hamilton's ability and his unique capacity to focus on his supreme driving while simultaneously tackling broader issues.

His great friend Michael Schumacher, whom he has visited since his debilitating skiing accident but about whose condition he will reveal nothing, was single-minded, no distractions. Hamilton is different.

'I haven't asked Lewis how long he will go on,' Domenicali added. 'He knows I want him to go on and on. He is incredible, at the top of his profession and that position gives him great credibility talking about other issues that are important to him. The fight on the track this year will not be easy. The level of the top drivers is the best it has ever been.'

'Max Verstappen seems like an old guy because he has been around a long time, but he is just 22. Charles Leclerc at Ferrari is strong, Carlos Sainz has gone to Ferrari. There is Fernando Alonso back with Alpine. Sebastian Vettel is at Aston Martin and will want to show he is not the driver we saw last season. Lando Norris at McLaren. George Russell at Williams.'

'Mick Schumacher at Haas. Ha, I knew him when he was a bump in his mother Corinna's body. He reminds me of Michael. He is a team player - Michael was that more than anything else.'

'A small detail: the first time I saw Michael he had a notebook with him, and the first time I saw Mick at his Prema team (with whom he won the F2 title last year) he had a notebook and pen.'

I ask him, with his experience in red, if he envisages Hamilton ever going to Ferrari.

'No, I don't think so. They have invested in Charles and now Carlos. Lewis will end his career at Mercedes.'

The new season, starting in Bahrain on March 28, sees Formula One go to Saudi Arabia at the end of November - another recruit to the list of abysmal human rights-screwing countries. How, pray, does that fit in with the all-singing, all-dancing diversity agenda?

'Zero embarrassment,' Domenicali answered. 'Formula One has a role to play in advancing our values in different places in the world. Sport can progress this in a faster way, shining a spotlight. We can be an enabler and are discussing these kinds of things with the Saudis.'

'I want about one third of the races in Europe and then to expand globally. Two races in America. We are in talks with African countries, South Africa and north Africa and an additional race or two in the Far East, maybe Korea.'

HAMILTON'S RECORD

Yes, Miami - long talked about - is favourite to land the second US race, alongside the existing venue in Austin, Texas. The notion of four American races, trumpeted by Carey, has been ditched. It is impracticable, as Ecclestone always prophesied.

What else will Domenicali tell the drivers in Bahrain?

'Don't shoot the sport in the feet. We have a lot to be proud about ? viewing figures are up, and we have a great product. If there is anything we need to discuss we can do it constructively inside these four walls.'

Apart from that, Domenicali is looking to immerse himself in London culture, bringing his family over for the full experience ? a 'yes' to diversity! He is keen for the restrictions to lift and, among other delights of the capital, to sample the cuisine.

The next time we sit down it will be over lunch.

CREDIT: EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW by Jonathan McEvoy

CAPTION: Red royalty: with old friend Schumacher in the Ferrari days DPA; Master of one: Domenicali settling into F1's London HQ PICTURE: KEVIN QUIGLEY; Diversity talk: speaking with Sir Lewis and his father GETTY IMAGES

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