



FIFA

Oakridge MUN 2026

FIFA Council

**Agenda: Maintaining Football Neutrality Amid Growing
Geopolitical Tensions and International Conflicts**

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1. Letter from the Executive Board

“Football is the beautiful game. Geopolitics, unfortunately, is frequently the ugly one. Your job over the next three days is to find common ground between them, ideally without anyone receiving a red card.” , The Executive Board, OAKMUN FIFA Council
Dear Delegates, Welcome to the FIFA Council Committee at OAKMUN. We, the Executive Board, are genuinely delighted to have you here, and only mildly terrified by the complexity of what we are about to ask you to solve. The agenda before you is, to put it diplomatically, a lot. Football and geopolitics have always had a complicated relationship, imagine two teammates who fundamentally disagree on tactics but are stuck sharing a dressing room for the foreseeable future. This committee is that dressing room. You will debate, you will negotiate, and with any luck, you will not resort to the kind of behaviour that earns a two-match ban. We would like to make a few things absolutely clear before you begin:

1. Read the background guide. Seriously. All of it. Yes, including the footnotes. We wrote them. We have feelings.
2. Your position paper must reflect your specific association. “Football should be peaceful and unifying” is a sentiment we all share. It is not, however, a policy position. It will not impress us. Please do better.
3. Coalition politics are real, but surprise alliances are better. The delegate who finds common ground between, say, Norway and Saudi Arabia on player welfare will earn our eternal admiration and probably the best award of the conference.
4. Intellectual rigour is non-negotiable. We are not here to adjudicate a popularity contest. Resolutions must be specific, operationally coherent, and grounded in FIFA’s actual governance frameworks. “FIFA should do more” is not a resolution clause. It is a wish.

We chose this topic because it is genuinely unresolved. The questions you will debate are the same questions the actual FIFA Council, national associations, player unions, and civil society organisations are wrestling with right now. There is no clean answer. There is no side that is entirely right. There is, however, a better or worse policy framework, and your task is to build the better one. The Executive Board will be rigorous. We will be fair. We may also, on occasion, be slightly amused when things get very complicated, which they will. We wish you excellent deliberations,

productive working papers, and just enough procedural disagreement to keep things interesting. Respectfully (and with considerable anticipation),

The Executive Board

FIFA President: Syed Hudaifah FIFA Vice President: Jiteesh Reddy FIFA Council Member: Meghamsh Pranav Boyapati FIFA Council Committee, OAKMUN

2. MUN Rules Of Procedure (ROP)

1. Roll Call

- The Chair calls on each country to declare if they are "Present" or "Present and Voting." It refers to the voting procedure on the Draft Resolution, where a delegate can vote "Yes", "No", or opt to "Abstain".
- If "Present and Voting," the delegate cannot abstain from voting. If the delegate chooses to respond with "Present", they may answer with "Present and Voting" on subsequent days, but this is not permissible for "Present and Voting" as this reply must be used consistently from that point forth.

2. Setting the Agenda

- Delegates motion to set the agenda, followed by a formal debate on which topic to discuss first. This motion requires a simple majority to pass.

3. Speakers' List

- After passing a motion to enter formal debate, delegates are placed on a speakers' list to make formal speeches. Time limits are set, and the Chair calls on delegates to speak in order.
- A delegate must raise their placard if they wish to add their name to this list. They can be on this list only once on any occasion.

4. Points

- **Point of Order:** To correct a procedural error by the Chair.
- **Point of Personal Privilege:** For personal discomfort (e.g., if the room is too cold, or if a fellow delegate cannot be heard).

- **Point of Inquiry:** To ask questions about discussion or statements in committee.
- **Point of Parliamentary Inquiry:** To ask questions with regard to the Rules of Procedure.

5. Motions

- **Motion to Suspend the Meeting:** To break for caucuses or adjourn the session.
- **Motion to Close Debate:** Ends the discussion on a topic and moves to voting. Requires a two-thirds majority.
- **Motion to Table the Topic:** Postpones debate on a topic. Requires a majority vote.

6. Yields

- **Yield to the Executive Board:** A delegate yields their remaining time from their speech to the Executive Board. It is to be used as they see fit.
- **Yield to Another Delegate:** A delegate yields their remaining time for another delegate to speak. (This delegate's permission must be sought beforehand)
- **Yield to Points of Information:** A delegate yields their remaining time to Points of Information to the committee.
- **Yield to Comments:** A delegate yields their remaining time to comments from the committee.

7. Caucuses

- **Moderated Caucus:** The Chair controls the speaking order with shorter, focused speeches. The topic selected is a narrowed version of the agenda, chosen by the delegate who proposed the moderated caucus.
- **Unmoderated Caucus:** Informal discussion among delegates not under the moderation of the Executive Board.

8. Draft Resolutions and Amendments

- Delegates collaborate to create draft resolutions, which are formal solutions to the discussed issue.
- **Friendly Amendments:** Accepted by all sponsors without a vote.
- **Unfriendly Amendments:** Need to be voted on to be added.

9. Voting

- **Procedural Votes:** Includes motions and amendments; all members must vote.
- **Substantive Votes:** For resolutions and unfriendly amendments; only "Present and Voting" delegates may vote, and abstentions are allowed.

3. Committee Mandate

2.1 Scope of This Committee

The OAKMUN FIFA Council Committee operates as a deliberative body charged with developing policy frameworks, institutional guidelines, and concrete recommendations on football neutrality. Delegates should be precise about what is within and outside this committee's authority.

House Rules (The Unofficial Ones):

1. A position paper that could have been written by any delegate is a position paper that impressed none of them. Specificity is your friend.
2. "My delegation believes in peace" is not a clause. Neither is "raising awareness." We are raising the bar instead.
3. Citing the background guide is fine. Citing a source we have never heard of, accurately, is better.
4. Coalitions win awards. Monologues win sympathy. Choose wisely.
5. The Executive Board has read the statutes. We will know.

2.2 What Delegates Can Do

Delegates may draft resolutions that:

- Establish or modify FIFA policies for handling geopolitical conflicts within football;
- Develop criteria for suspension or reinstatement of associations affected by international conflicts;
- Create frameworks for evaluating hosting bids from nations with contested human rights records;
- Establish mechanisms to protect players and officials facing political pressure;
- Recommend procedures for engaging with the United Nations, the International Olympic Committee, and regional human rights bodies;[1]
- Propose new FIFA task forces, monitoring mechanisms, or institutional positions.

Delegates may also pass directive resolutions instructing the FIFA President and Secretariat to initiate dialogue with member associations, commission independent reports, or revise FIFA Statutes, though statutory amendments ultimately require FIFA Congress approval.[2]

2.3 What Delegates Cannot Do

This committee cannot override FIFA Congress decisions, impose sanctions on specific associations outside established disciplinary procedures, or make binding determinations reserved for the FIFA Disciplinary or Ethics Committees.[3] Resolutions that purport to compel sovereign governments to act are legally imprecise and should be avoided. In short: you are a football governance committee, not the UN Security Council, and certainly not the referee. Draft accordingly.

2.4 Role of Football Associations and Member States

FIFA Statute Article 19 explicitly prohibits governmental interference in member associations' affairs.[2] Delegates speak on behalf of their football associations, not their governments, though the interests of the state and the association are not always identical, and that tension is precisely what makes this agenda item complex.

4. The FIFA Ethics Committee: Structure, Independence, and Reform

3.1 Overview and Mandate

The FIFA Ethics Committee is the body formally responsible for investigating and adjudicating alleged violations of the FIFA Code of Ethics by FIFA officials, member association officials, and other persons subject to FIFA's jurisdiction.[4] It is frequently invoked in debates about FIFA's institutional integrity. Understanding its structure, limitations, and the history of its failures is essential for delegates seeking to develop credible governance reform proposals.

3.2 Two-Chamber Structure

The FIFA Ethics Committee operates through a two-chamber structure:[4]

- The Investigatory Chamber is responsible for receiving complaints, conducting preliminary assessments, undertaking investigations, and referring cases to the adjudicatory chamber where it finds prima facie evidence of a violation. The Investigatory Chamber has the power to impose provisional measures, including temporary bans from football-related activity, pending the conclusion of a full investigation.
- The Adjudicatory Chamber is responsible for hearing the cases referred by the Investigatory Chamber, evaluating evidence, hearing submissions from the parties, and imposing sanctions where violations are established. Decisions of the Adjudicatory Chamber may be appealed to the FIFA Appeal Committee and subsequently to the CAS.

The two-chamber structure was introduced as part of the post-2011 governance reforms recommended by the Independent Governance Committee chaired by Professor Mark Pieth, and was intended to provide procedural separation between the investigative and adjudicative functions, analogous to the separation between prosecutor and judge in national legal systems.[5]

3.3 The Garcia Report: The Defining Failure

The most consequential episode in the FIFA Ethics Committee's recent history is the suppression of the Garcia Report, formally, the Report of the Independent Investigatory Chamber of the FIFA Ethics Committee into the Bidding Process for the

2018 and 2022 FIFA World Cups, authored by Michael J. Garcia.[6] Garcia, a former U.S. Attorney, was appointed in 2012 to lead an independent investigation into the bidding process for the 2018 (Russia) and 2022 (Qatar) World Cups. His investigation, which spanned two years and produced a report of several hundred pages, was delivered to the FIFA Ethics Committee in September 2014. The Ethics Committee's Adjudicatory Chamber, chaired by German judge Hans-Joachim Eckert, then produced a summary of Garcia's report that Garcia himself publicly repudiated as materially incomplete and inaccurate. Garcia resigned from his position in December 2014 in protest at the Adjudicatory Chamber's handling of his report. FIFA declined to release the full report for more than three years, eventually publishing a redacted version in 2017 only after legal proceedings forced its disclosure. The Garcia Report affair demonstrated that the two-chamber structure designed to ensure independence had failed to prevent the suppression of inconvenient findings by the very institutional actors the Ethics Committee was designed to hold accountable.

3.4 The Infantino Investigation

The current FIFA President, Gianni Infantino, became the subject of a criminal investigation by the Swiss attorney general's office in 2020, following revelations of secret meetings between Infantino and Swiss attorney general Michael Lauber, meetings that took place while Lauber's office was investigating FIFA-related corruption matters. Lauber subsequently resigned as Swiss attorney general.[5] The criminal investigation into Infantino, which covers allegations of incitement to abuse of authority, violation of official secrecy, favouring of criminals, and obstruction of a criminal investigation, remained ongoing as of the preparation of this background guide. Infantino has denied all allegations and has continued to serve as FIFA President. The investigation illustrates the extent to which the Ethics Committee's formal independence from the FIFA Presidency is complicated by the political dynamics of FIFA's governance culture.

3.5 Structural Independence: The Core Problem

The fundamental governance problem with the FIFA Ethics Committee is structural rather than personal: its members are ultimately appointed through processes that are influenced by the FIFA Council and the FIFA President, and its jurisdiction is

limited to violations of the FIFA Code of Ethics by persons subject to FIFA's authority.
[4] This means:

1. The Ethics Committee cannot investigate the conduct of the FIFA President except in the most extreme circumstances, and even then its findings are subject to appeal through processes over which FIFA Council members exercise influence;
2. The Ethics Committee has no jurisdiction over governmental actors, commercial partners, or other external parties who may be complicit in corruption or human rights violations related to FIFA's activities;
3. The Ethics Committee's investigatory resources are modest relative to the complexity of the investigations it is expected to conduct, the Garcia investigation was significantly under-resourced compared to the concurrent U.S. Department of Justice investigation that ultimately produced the 2015 indictments;[7]
4. The Ethics Committee operates under confidentiality requirements that prevent it from making public statements about ongoing investigations, creating an information asymmetry that benefits accused parties and undermines public accountability.

3.6 Reform Proposals

A range of reform proposals for the FIFA Ethics Committee have been advanced by the Independent Governance Committee, Transparency International, and academic commentators:[5][8]

- External appointment of Ethics Committee members: Removing the FIFA Council from any role in the appointment of Ethics Committee members, replacing it with a process involving independent civil society organisations, academic institutions, or international anti-corruption bodies;
- Permanent independent investigatory capacity: Establishing a permanent professional investigatory staff, insulated from the FIFA Secretariat General, with secure funding and the power to engage external forensic and legal expertise without Council approval;
- Expanded jurisdiction: Extending the Ethics Committee's jurisdiction to cover external commercial partners and agents who interact with FIFA officials in connection with FIFA business;

- Transparency requirements: Requiring the Ethics Committee to publish regular reports on the volume and categories of complaints received, cases opened, cases closed without charge, and sanctions imposed, without compromising the confidentiality of ongoing proceedings;
- Whistleblower protection: Establishing a formal, independently managed whistleblower protection programme for persons reporting ethics violations to the Ethics Committee, with legal protections against retaliation and external oversight of the protection mechanism.[8]

Committee Relevance: The adequacy of the FIFA Ethics Committee is directly at stake in debates over hosting decisions, conflicts of interest, and officials' conduct. Delegates should come prepared with a view on whether the existing Ethics Committee structure is adequate, and what specific reforms would strengthen its effectiveness and credibility.

5. Introduction to FIFA

4.1 History of FIFA

The Féd ration Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) was founded on 21 May 1904 in Paris by representatives of football associations from France, Belgium, Denmark, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland.[2] Its founding purpose was to standardise the rules of association football and to provide an institutional framework for international competition. Over twelve decades, what began as a modest European administrative arrangement has evolved into one of the most powerful non-governmental organisations in the world. FIFA first organised international football at the 1908 London Olympics.[9] The inaugural FIFA World Cup was held in Uruguay in 1930, featuring just thirteen nations.[9] The post-World War II era of decolonisation dramatically expanded FIFA's membership: by 1970, FIFA had more member associations than the United Nations had member states. The presidency of Jo o Havelange (1974-1998) transformed FIFA into a genuine commercial enterprise. He expanded the World Cup to twenty-four and later thirty-two teams, opened the tournament more equitably to African, Asian, and CONCACAF nations, and secured landmark sponsorship agreements with Adidas and Coca-Cola. [10] His successor, Sepp Blatter, continued commercial expansion while presiding over a governance culture that ultimately produced the corruption scandals of 2015. The 2015 FIFA corruption crisis, triggered by coordinated arrests of FIFA officials in

Zurich and a U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) indictment involving charges of racketeering, wire fraud, and money laundering, was the most serious institutional crisis in the organisation’s history.[7] The indictment named dozens of officials and implicated hundreds of millions of dollars in illicit payments. Blatter resigned, and Gianni Infantino was elected President in February 2016 on a reform platform.[9] Under Infantino, FIFA has pursued structural reforms, expanded the World Cup to 48 teams from 2026, secured record commercial revenues of approximately USD 7.5 billion for the 2023-2026 cycle, and launched the FIFA Forward development programme.[11]

4.2 FIFA Governance Structure

4.2.1 FIFA Congress

The FIFA Congress is the supreme governing body, composed of representatives from all 211 member associations, each holding one vote regardless of size or football stature.[2] The Congress meets at least annually and is responsible for approving changes to the FIFA Statutes, electing the President and Council members, and approving the annual budget. Constitutional decisions require a two-thirds majority; ordinary decisions require a simple majority.[2]

4.2.2 FIFA Council

The FIFA Council is the executive body responsible for the strategic direction of FIFA between Congress sessions.[2] It comprises thirty-seven members: the FIFA President, eight vice-presidents representing each confederation, and additional confederation-elected members. The Council meets at least twice annually and has authority over hosting rights awards, competition regulations, senior staff appointments, and commercial partnerships.[2]

4.2.3 Confederations

FIFA’s 211 member associations are organised into six continental confederations:

Confederation	Region	Members
UEFA	Europe	55
CAF	Africa	54
AFC	Asia	47

Confederation	Region	Members
CONCACAF	North/Central America & Caribbean	41
CONMEBOL	South America	10
OFC	Oceania	14

4.3 Powers and Limitations of FIFA

FIFA's institutional powers include regulation of international competitions, the award of hosting rights, player registration through the International Transfer Certificate system, maintenance of the Laws of the Game in cooperation with the International Football Association Board (IFAB), the imposition of sanctions on member associations, and management of its commercial portfolio.[2] FIFA's limitations are equally significant. As a private association incorporated under Swiss law, FIFA has no enforcement authority beyond sporting sanctions and cannot compel sovereign governments to alter their policies.[12] Decisions are subject to review by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which has overturned FIFA decisions on multiple occasions.[12] FIFA Statute Article 17 prohibits governmental interference in associations' affairs, a provision that protects football from political manipulation but can simultaneously insulate FIFA from democratic accountability. [2]

6. Agenda Overview

5.1 Defining Football Neutrality

Football neutrality refers to the principle that FIFA and member associations should conduct activities independently of political, religious, racial, and ideological influences.[2] This is embedded in FIFA Statute Article 4 (non-discrimination) and operationalised through rules preventing display of political symbols, banning governmental interference, and restricting political statements during official competitions.[2] Key Distinction: Neutrality is not the same as apoliticism. Every FIFA decision including a decision to do nothing carries political consequences. Awarding a World Cup is a political act whether or not it is framed as a technical evaluation. The question is not whether FIFA can be genuinely neutral, but what principles should guide its decisions when neutrality is contested or impossible.

5.2 Relationship Between Sport and Geopolitics

The dominant tradition in international sports governance is the autonomy of sport doctrine the principle that sporting institutions should be self-governing, insulated from governmental interference, and evaluated on sporting rather than political criteria.[13] This doctrine underpins FIFA's structure and the broader framework of sports law developed through the CAS. Against this, a growing body of scholarship argues that sporting autonomy is both empirically false and normatively problematic.[14] States have consistently used sport to project soft power and legitimate their governments the 1936 Berlin Olympics, the boycott-ridden 1980 and 1984 Games, the 1978 Argentine World Cup, and the 2022 Qatar World Cup all demonstrate that sport has never been genuinely insulated from politics.[15][16]

5.3 Why the Issue is Increasingly Relevant

Several structural trends make this issue more urgent than at any previous point in FIFA's history:

1. Intensification of geopolitical competition - the Russia-Ukraine conflict, tensions in the Middle East, and U.S.-China rivalry inevitably implicates football;
2. Expansion of social media and global broadcasting makes image management through traditional communications strategies impossible;
3. Growing financial power of football in Gulf states and through sovereign wealth fund investment creates new forms of leverage;[16]
4. A new generation of players with social media platforms and individual brands are more willing to make public political statements.[17]

7. Historical Background

6.1 Political Influence in Football Throughout History

From the moment football achieved mass spectatorship in the early twentieth century, it became a vehicle for national pride, state legitimacy, and political messaging.[13] What has changed is not the fact of political influence but its scale, sophistication, and the institutional capacity to challenge or resist it.

6.2 The 1978 Argentina World Cup

The 1978 FIFA World Cup, hosted by Argentina under the military junta of General Jorge Rafael Videla, remains one of the most morally contested events in football history. The junta, which had seized power in 1976 and was engaged in the systematic murder of political opponents a period claiming an estimated 10,000 to 30,000 lives used the World Cup as a deliberate exercise in domestic legitimization and international image rehabilitation.[15] FIFA, under Havelange, declined to relocate the tournament despite significant pressure from human rights organisations, citing sporting neutrality and contractual obligation.[10] The 1978 World Cup established the precedent that hosting rights, once awarded, were extraordinarily difficult to revoke a precedent that continues to shape FIFA's decision-making.

6.3 Apartheid-Era Sporting Bans

South Africa's suspension from FIFA in 1964, and subsequent expulsion in 1976, remains one of the clearest examples of FIFA acting on human rights grounds.[18] The apartheid government's policies of racial segregation made it impossible for South Africa to field a genuinely representative national team, and the broader international sporting boycott provided FIFA with both moral and practical justification for exclusion.[18] South Africa was readmitted in 1992 following the unbanning of the African National Congress, and hosted the 2010 World Cup in a moment widely celebrated as sporting and political redemption.[19] The apartheid precedent is the most frequently cited historical example by those who argue FIFA can and should take decisive action on human rights grounds.

6.4 Yugoslav Conflicts and Football

The dissolution of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s produced complex football governance challenges as new states sought FIFA membership and conflicts in Bosnia, Croatia, and later Kosovo created disputed eligibility situations. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was suspended from international competitions between 1992 and 1994 as a result of UN sanctions the first European association suspended for reasons related to a political and military conflict in the modern era.[14] The Kosovo case is particularly instructive. Following Kosovo's declaration of independence in 2008, recognised by more than 100 states but contested by Serbia, Russia, and China, FIFA admitted Kosovo as a full member in 2016.[2] That decision

required careful navigation of FIFA's relationship with UEFA, Serbia, and the broader question of whether sporting recognition constitutes political recognition.

6.5 Russia 2018 World Cup

The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia was awarded in a 2010 voting process later found to have involved significant corruption.[6] The McLaren Report and subsequent FIFA Ethics Committee investigations identified problematic conduct.[20] The tournament attracted persistent criticism given Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, its military involvement in eastern Ukraine, and its record on LGBT+ rights, yet FIFA proceeded without imposing political conditions on Russia's conduct, establishing a pattern that would complicate subsequent responses.

6.6 Qatar 2022 World Cup

The 2022 World Cup in Qatar generated the most sustained human rights controversy in tournament history.[21] Criticism focused on three principal areas:

1. Migrant worker treatment: Credible reports of exploitative conditions and significant death tolls under the kafala sponsorship system;[22]
2. Criminalisation of homosexuality: Creating genuine risks for LGBT+ fans, players, and officials;[21]
3. Sportswashing: Use of the tournament to launder Qatar's international reputation.[16]

The seven national team captains who planned to wear 'OneLove' armbands abandoned their plan after FIFA threatened sporting sanctions.[9] FIFA President Infantino's pre-tournament speech, in which he appeared to compare his personal experiences with those of migrant workers, was widely condemned.[9] The Qatar experience significantly elevated human rights in FIFA governance and produced new, if contested commitments to embed human rights due diligence in future hosting processes.

6.7 Russia–Ukraine Conflict and FIFA Sanctions

Following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, FIFA imposed a suspension on the Russian Football Union on 28 February 2022, one of the fastest geopolitical responses in FIFA's history.[12] Russian club teams were also suspended from UEFA competitions. The decision was made under significant pressure from

UEFA, which threatened independent action, and from member associations indicating refusal to play against Russia.[12]

The Russia Suspension: A Test Case

Critics argue the suspension did not go far enough, that Russia should have been fully expelled and its football assets redirected to Ukrainian reconstruction. Others argue the suspension was politically motivated, inconsistent with neutrality principles, and sets a precedent for powerful Western nations to exclude others for political rather than sporting reasons. Non-Western associations noted that comparable African and Asian conflicts did not produce comparable responses.

6.8 Evolution of FIFA Neutrality Policies

FIFA's formal approach to political neutrality has evolved significantly since the organisation's founding. Current FIFA Statutes contain provisions relevant to this committee: Article 4 (non-discrimination), Article 14 (obligations of member associations), Article 17 (non-interference by governments), and the FIFA Human Rights Policy adopted in 2017.[23] The 2017 Human Rights Policy aligns FIFA's commitments with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights.[1] By acknowledging that FIFA has responsibilities, not merely charitable intentions, in the area of human rights, the policy implicitly concedes that the autonomy of sport has limits. However, the policy has been criticised by Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and FIFPro for lacking enforcement mechanisms, relying on self-assessment by hosting nations, and being applied inconsistently.[21][22][17]

8. Current Challenges

7.1 Geopolitical Conflicts and FIFA Governance

The central governance challenge facing FIFA is the simultaneous multiplicity of geopolitical flashpoints each demanding some institutional response: the Russia–Ukraine conflict, the Israeli–Palestinian situation, tensions in East Asia, and ongoing instability across parts of Africa and Latin America.[24] The organisation lacks a coherent, publicly articulated framework for deciding when and how to respond, making each individual decision appear ad hoc and susceptible to political pressure from powerful associations.

7.2 Suspension of National Teams

Suspension is FIFA's most powerful direct sanction but also its most politically sensitive.[3] There is currently no clear, publicly available FIFA doctrine governing when suspension is triggered, how long it lasts, what conditions must be met for reinstatement, or how suspension decisions are reviewed.[12] This absence of procedural transparency leads to perceptions of arbitrariness that undermine FIFA's institutional legitimacy.

7.3 Human Rights Concerns

Human rights concerns now arise at multiple levels simultaneously: tournament infrastructure construction conditions; laws of host countries; treatment of players within national team environments; governance of club football in authoritarian states; and the relationship between FIFA's commercial activities and states whose models depend on suppression of civil liberties.[23] FIFA's 2017 Human Rights Policy is a formal acknowledgment of these responsibilities, but critics consistently argue the gap between stated commitments and operational conduct remains wide.[21] [22] The appointment of a FIFA Director of Human Rights in 2017 and creation of human rights due diligence frameworks for hosting bids have been noted as positive steps, but enforcement mechanisms remain weak.[8]

7.4 Sportswashing Debates

The term sportswashing refers to the use of high-profile sporting associations, events, and investments to rehabilitate the international reputation of states with poor human rights records.[16] The debate is genuinely contested: Pro-Intervention View: Sporting engagement with authoritarian states confers legitimacy without producing change; revenues sustain repressive governments; FIFA has a responsibility not to be complicit.[21] Counter-View: Engagement through sport can produce incremental improvements via exposure and dialogue; sovereign states have the right to invest revenues as they choose; the label is selectively applied to non-Western states while similar practices by Western-aligned states are ignored.[16]

7.5 Hosting Rights Controversies

The process by which FIFA awards World Cup hosting rights has been a recurring source of controversy.[6] FIFA's reform measures, including the Hosting Evaluation Report, increased technical assessment criteria, and the FIFA Council Evaluation

Committee, have been acknowledged as improvements but have not resolved fundamental transparency concerns.[20] The 2034 World Cup awarded to Saudi Arabia has attracted substantial criticism from human rights organisations, LGBT+ advocates, and footballers' unions.[22][17]

7.6 Fan and Player Activism

Player activism has become a significant force in football governance.[17] Events including the 'taking the knee' movement, the OneLove armband controversy at Qatar 2022, Danish national team human rights statements before that tournament, and individual players' statements on the Russia–Ukraine war and Gaza have all required FIFA and national associations to determine how to respond to player political expression.[9] FIFA Regulation 13.8.1 prohibits political statements during official competitions, but the boundary between political expression and human rights advocacy is not always clear, and application has been inconsistent.[3]

7.7 Financial Interests Versus Ethical Obligations

The FIFA Forward Programme distributes USD 6 million per four-year cycle to each of FIFA's 211 member associations, funded substantially by World Cup commercial revenues.[11] Decisions that reduce those revenues by moving tournaments away from commercially lucrative hosts or imposing conditions that deter sponsors, directly affect resources available for grassroots football development in precisely the smaller associations that most depend on FIFA support.[11] This structural dependency makes principled decision-making genuinely difficult.

7.8 The Saudi Arabia 2034 Hosting Decision

The award of the 2034 FIFA World Cup to Saudi Arabia, confirmed at the FIFA Congress in December 2024, has generated the most significant pre-tournament human rights controversy since Qatar 2022 arguably more so, given that the lessons of Qatar were freshly available to FIFA's decision-makers and yet the process proceeded with minimal enforceable human rights conditions attached.[25][26]

7.8.1 The Bidding Process and Its Legitimacy

The 2034 bidding process has been widely criticised for its lack of genuine competition. Following the announcement of the joint 2030 centenary World Cup across Spain, Portugal, Morocco, Argentina, and Uruguay, Australia, the only other credible candidate for 2034, withdrew its bid within days, citing the impossibility of

competing with Saudi Arabia's financial resources and FIFA's accelerated timeline. The effective absence of a contested bidding process undermined the legitimacy of the evaluation framework FIFA had committed to apply following the Qatar controversy.[25] FIFA's Hosting Evaluation Report for the 2034 bid rated Saudi Arabia as having a "high risk" human rights profile the same designation applied to Qatar in 2010 but recommended proceeding on the basis of commitments made by the Saudi government and the Saudi Arabian Football Federation. Critics from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch argued that these commitments lacked specificity, enforceability, and independent monitoring mechanisms, and that FIFA had learned nothing from the Qatar experience.[26][27]

7.8.2 Key Human Rights Concerns

Human rights organisations have identified the following as priority concerns for the 2034 tournament:

- Migrant worker rights: Saudi Arabia's kafala sponsorship system, which ties workers' legal status to their employer, remains in place despite partial reforms. The construction of stadium and infrastructure capacity required for a 48-team World Cup will require a significant expansion of the migrant labour force.[25]
- Criminalisation of same-sex relationships: Saudi law criminalises homosexuality, potentially with severe penalties. FIFA has not obtained binding commitments regarding the safety of LGBT+ fans, players, and officials, analogous to those it sought (and failed to secure) from Qatar.[26]
- Women's rights and gender segregation: While Saudi Arabia has introduced limited social reforms since 2017, including permitting women to attend sports events, significant restrictions on women's freedoms remain in place. Women journalists, human rights defenders, and officials may face particular risks.[27]
- Freedom of expression and assembly: Saudi Arabia's record on freedom of expression, the treatment of dissidents, including the 2018 killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi, and the criminalisation of political opposition creates a hostile environment for the kind of open civic expression that typically surrounds a World Cup.[25]
- Climate conditions: The extreme summer heat in Saudi Arabia raises serious athlete welfare concerns and will require either a winter tournament schedule (disrupting domestic leagues globally, as Qatar 2022 required) or

significant artificial cooling infrastructure with substantial environmental costs.[26]

7.8.3 The Sportswashing Dimension

The Saudi 2034 award is widely characterised as the most explicit example of sportswashing in FIFA's history, given the Saudi government's simultaneous pursuit of the LIV Golf merger with the PGA Tour, ownership of Newcastle United through the Public Investment Fund (PIF), hosting of Formula 1, boxing world championship events, and a range of other high-profile sporting acquisitions.[16] Proponents of the award argue that engagement produces incremental reform and that the economic development associated with the tournament creates genuine improvements in living standards. Critics argue that the pattern of Saudi sporting investment is a coherent strategy to deflect international attention from a domestic human rights record that has worsened since the consolidation of power by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.[25] Committee Relevance: The Saudi 2034 decision is the most live and contested hosting issue before this committee. Delegates should be prepared to engage with: (a) whether the existing hosting evaluation framework is fit for purpose; (b) what enforceable conditions FIFA can and should attach to hosting agreements; (c) how FIFA should respond if Saudi Arabia fails to meet its commitments; and (d) whether the 2034 decision creates precedent that affects future hosting decisions.

7.9 The Israel–Palestine Conflict and FIFA

The ongoing conflict between Israel and Gaza, which escalated dramatically following the Hamas attacks of 7 October 2023 and Israel's subsequent military campaign, has generated the most active and contested governance debate within FIFA in 2024. The situation has produced a formal legal complaint against the Israeli Football Association (IFA), an independent legal review commissioned by FIFA, and a fractious FIFA Congress session in Bangkok in February 2024 at which the question of Israeli suspension was debated but not resolved.[28][29]

7.9.1 The Palestinian Football Association Complaint

In April 2024, the Palestinian Football Association (PFA) filed a formal complaint with FIFA requesting the suspension of the Israeli Football Association on the following grounds:[28]

1. That Israel's military operations in Gaza had caused the destruction of football infrastructure - including stadiums, training facilities, and

administrative offices in a manner that made normal football activity impossible;

2. That Palestinian players, coaches, and officials had been killed, injured, or detained in numbers that constituted an effective destruction of the Palestinian football ecosystem;
3. That Israeli military and security forces had used sports facilities for detention purposes, violating international humanitarian law norms applicable to sporting infrastructure;
4. That the IFA's failure to condemn these actions, and Israeli football clubs' inclusion of players from illegal settlements in competitions, constituted violations of FIFA Statute Article 4 (non-discrimination) and the FIFA Human Rights Policy.[23]

7.9.2 FIFA's Response and the Independent Legal Review

FIFA's response was to commission an independent legal review of the complaint, to be conducted by a panel of legal experts with no institutional connection to FIFA. The review was tasked with assessing whether the complaint disclosed prima facie grounds for disciplinary action against the IFA under the FIFA Statutes and Disciplinary Code.[29] The process was described by the PFA and its supporting associations as inadequate, a delay mechanism rather than a genuine investigation. Simultaneously, the IFA rejected the complaint entirely, arguing that it was a political manoeuvre with no basis in FIFA's governance framework, that FIFA had no jurisdiction over the actions of a sovereign government, and that the inclusion of settlement-based clubs in Israeli league football was a domestic matter outside FIFA's remit.[29]

7.9.3 The Russia Precedent Problem

The Israel–Palestine situation forces a direct confrontation with the Russia precedent. If FIFA suspended Russia within four days of the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, acting under Article 13 of the FIFA Statutes regarding actions “seriously damaging the image of football”, on what principled basis does it decline to apply comparable measures in response to what the United Nations, the International Court of Justice, and numerous human rights bodies have characterised as a crisis of equivalent or greater humanitarian severity?[12][1] FIFA's institutional answer has been to distinguish the Russia situation, where an association's government was directly conducting a military invasion of a neighbouring state whose football association was a FIFA member, from the Israel–Palestine situation, where the dynamics are

more complex and the legal characterisations more contested. Critics argue this distinction is politically rather than legally motivated, reflecting the greater commercial and diplomatic weight of Israel's Western allies compared to Russia's international isolation.[26] Key Analytical Question: The Israel–Palestine case is the committee's hardest consistency problem. Delegates should be prepared to articulate a principled framework that explains when geopolitical conflicts trigger FIFA action and when they do not, and to apply that framework consistently regardless of which associations or governments are involved.

7.9.4 Political Fault Lines in the Committee

The Israel–Palestine question divides the committee in ways that do not map neatly onto traditional geopolitical blocs. Arab associations, including Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and others have been among the strongest advocates for IFA suspension or expulsion. Several African associations have expressed support for the Palestinian position. Most Western European associations have urged FIFA to complete the independent legal review before taking action, while expressing concern about the humanitarian situation in Gaza. The United States has opposed suspension. Several Asian associations have been divided based on their own diplomatic relationships with both Israel and Arab states.

9. Stakeholder and Bloc Analysis

8.1 Western European Football Powers

Western European associations, England, France, Germany, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, Belgium, Portugal, Sweden, Denmark, and Norway constitute the most commercially powerful bloc in global football and have historically been the most vocal advocates for human rights standards in FIFA governance.[30] However, significant internal tensions exist: France, Germany, and the Netherlands have substantial economic relationships with Gulf state entities. England's Football Association consistently advocates for reform but operates within a Premier League ecosystem that includes Gulf state ownership of prominent clubs. The Nordic associations have been most outspoken on human rights, Denmark, Sweden, and Norway were at the forefront of pre-Qatar criticism.[17] Credibility Challenge: Western European advocacy for human rights standards is sometimes perceived by African, Asian, and CONMEBOL associations as selective, hypocritical, or culturally imperialist. Effective coalition-building requires Western European delegates to acknowledge

this perception and frame arguments in terms of universal principles rather than Western values.

8.2 Eastern European Associations

Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Austria, and Switzerland occupy a complex political space. Some particularly Hungary, have governments that have adopted confrontational postures toward Western liberal institutions, yet remain within the UEFA framework.[14] Switzerland hosts FIFA itself and has a tradition of institutional neutrality. Hungary's closer relationship with Russia than other EU members may create divergence from the Western European consensus on Russia-related issues.

8.3 South American Football Nations

Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Chile, Peru, and Colombia collectively represent the strongest footballing tradition outside Europe and a significant bloc in FIFA governance.[31] South American associations are sensitive to perceived European cultural hegemony in football governance and have historically been more willing to tolerate political diversity among FIFA members. Brazil's current government has adopted a foreign policy of strategic non-alignment. Argentina's historical relationship with political difficulty, the 1978 World Cup, may produce a degree of self-awareness in approaching some human rights arguments.[15]

8.4 African Football Associations

Morocco, Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Algeria, and Cameroon represent a diverse continental grouping. With 54 member associations, the African bloc has significant influence in FIFA Congress votes.[32] African associations have historically noted double standards in FIFA's application of sanctions, conflicts in Africa have not produced the speed or severity of response seen in the Russia suspension.[18] They are also acutely aware of structural dependence on FIFA's Forward Programme funding, creating incentives to maintain constructive relationships with FIFA leadership.[11] Morocco's co-hosting role in the 2030 World Cup gives it a particular interest in hosting standards and human rights due diligence frameworks.

8.5 Asian Football Associations

Japan, South Korea, and Australia represent different dimensions of the AFC's political diversity. Japan and South Korea are among the most commercially developed football associations in Asia, with strong leagues, significant player

exports to Europe, and governments broadly aligned with Western liberal institutions on human rights.[33] The broader AFC context includes associations from China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Central and South-East Asia with varying human rights profiles. AFC internal political dynamics mean its positions in FIFA governance do not always align with those of its most prominent member associations.

8.6 North American Associations

The United States, Canada, and Mexico are co-hosts of the 2026 World Cup, giving all three a direct interest in FIFA governance outcomes.[34] The U.S. Soccer Federation has developed a strong human rights advocacy position, driven by internal player group pressure and U.S. foreign policy posture. Mexico's association is CONCACAF's most commercially influential, with strong Liga MX revenues and significant cultural ties to both North American and Latin American football.

8.7 Russia and Ukraine

Russia's Football Union is currently suspended from international competition following the 2022 invasion of Ukraine.[12] The Russian Football Union has argued the suspension is politically motivated and inconsistent with neutrality principles noting the tension between sanctioning athletes for governmental decisions an argument with some procedural merit but limited international sympathy.[12] The Ukrainian Association of Football (UAF) has been one of the most directly affected stakeholders, with domestic football severely disrupted by conflict and players serving in or affected by the war.[9] Ukraine has advocated for Russia's full exclusion and argued the current suspension does not go far enough.

8.8 Sovereign Wealth Funds as Football Actors

The entry of sovereign wealth funds (SWFs) from Gulf states into football ownership has introduced a category of actor that sits entirely outside FIFA's existing governance frameworks and yet exercises substantial influence over the commercial and political dynamics that shape FIFA's decision-making environment.[35][36]

8.8.1 The Principal Funds and Their Football Portfolios

Three Gulf sovereign wealth funds have emerged as the dominant state-linked investors in global football:

- Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF): PIF completed the acquisition of Newcastle United FC in October 2021 in a deal valued at approximately £305 million. PIF holds an 80% stake, with the Saudi state holding a controlling interest in PIF itself. Newcastle's acquisition generated immediate controversy regarding the application of the Premier League's Owners' and Directors' Test, given Saudi Arabia's human rights record and allegations of large-scale piracy of Premier League content.[36] PIF has subsequently acquired four Saudi Pro League clubs and has been the financial vehicle behind LIV Golf.
- Qatar's Qatar Investment Authority (QIA) and Qatar Sports Investments (QSI): QSI acquired Paris Saint-Germain in 2011 and has since spent in excess of €1.5 billion on player transfers, including the record-breaking acquisitions of Neymar (€222 million, 2017) and Kylian Mbappé. The QSI-PSG relationship has been at the centre of recurring UEFA Financial Fair Play investigations.[37]
- Abu Dhabi's City Football Group (CFG): Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan acquired Manchester City in 2008. The City Football Group has since expanded to a portfolio of twelve clubs across multiple continents, creating a model of multi-club ownership that raises questions about competitive integrity and concentration of player development pipelines.[38]

8.8.2 The Governance Gap

FIFA's jurisdiction extends to national football associations. It does not extend to club ownership structures, which fall within the regulatory competence of domestic associations and, for European competitions, UEFA. This creates a structural governance gap: the entities exercising the greatest financial leverage over football's commercial ecosystem and whose state ownership creates the most direct conflicts of interest in FIFA's geopolitical decision-making are formally outside FIFA's regulatory reach.[35] The governance gap manifests concretely in: (a) conflict of interest in hosting decisions, where associations from SWF-ownership states sit on the FIFA Council alongside commercially entangled associations; (b) commercial dependency that moderates Western associations' advocacy positions; (c) player market distortion through state-subsidised recruitment; and (d) multi-club

ownership structures that neither FIFA nor UEFA has comprehensively regulated.[38] [24] Governance Implication: The sovereign wealth fund question illustrates a fundamental limitation of FIFA's regulatory architecture: it was designed for a world in which football associations were independent civil society bodies, not instruments of state financial power. Delegates should consider whether FIFA's mandate should be extended to address club ownership structures, or whether doing so would exceed FIFA's appropriate institutional remit.

10. Women's Football and Geopolitical Exclusion

This section addresses a significant gap in the existing framework: the distinct and often more severe ways in which geopolitical conflicts, authoritarian governance, and discriminatory laws affect women's participation in international football.

9.1 The Structural Invisibility of Women's Football in FIFA Governance

Women's football accounts for an increasing share of FIFA's commercial and reputational portfolio the 2023 Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand attracted record viewership and generated approximately USD 570 million in commercial revenue yet the governance frameworks through which FIFA responds to geopolitical crises were designed almost entirely around the men's game.[39] The result is a systematic invisibility: when conflicts, authoritarian governance, or discriminatory laws affect women's ability to participate in football, FIFA's institutional response has been slower, less consistent, and less resourced than its response to comparable situations in men's football.[40]

9.2 The Afghan Women's National Team

The most acute example of geopolitical exclusion affecting women's football is the situation of the Afghan women's national team following the Taliban's return to power in August 2021. The Taliban government has systematically prohibited women from participating in sport, dissolved women's sporting institutions, and in some cases detained or threatened women athletes who attempted to continue playing. [41] The Afghan women's national team effectively ceased to exist within Afghanistan. Players who were abroad at the time of the Taliban takeover were unable to return; those who remained faced acute personal danger. FIFA's response was limited to facilitating the evacuation of a small number of players through partnerships with civil society organisations, and to suspending the Afghanistan

Football Federation's membership on grounds of governmental interference a suspension that addressed the formal governance violation but provided minimal practical protection to the players most at risk.[23] The Afghan situation raises a question that the committee should engage with directly: what obligation does FIFA bear toward individual athletes not just associations when those athletes face state persecution as a direct consequence of their participation in FIFA-sanctioned competitions? The existing FIFA Statutes and Human Rights Policy focus almost entirely on the obligations of member associations; they provide little framework for FIFA's direct duties of care toward individual athletes.

9.3 Iran: Hijab Compliance and International Competition

Iranian women footballers face a distinctive set of constraints arising from the requirement under Iranian law to comply with hijab regulations in public spaces, including sporting arenas. The Islamic Republic of Iran has historically interpreted these regulations as requiring Iranian women athletes to wear the hijab during international competition a requirement that has created conflicts with the dress regulations of various international sporting federations and has limited the ability of Iranian women to compete freely in international environments.[40] The football-specific dimension of this issue involves both the national team context where Iranian women footballers competing internationally must navigate between Iranian legal requirements and host-country norms and the club football context, where Iranian women seeking to play professionally in European leagues may face legal consequences upon return to Iran. FIFA's regulatory framework has no specific provision for situations where domestic law requirements conflict with an athlete's freedom of movement in international competition. The 2022 protests in Iran following the death of Mahsa Amini, and the visible support expressed by some Iranian male footballers for the protest movement during the Qatar World Cup, further illustrate the political pressures on Iranian athletes of all genders and the inadequacy of FIFA's existing frameworks for responding to those pressures.

9.4 Saudi Arabia: Women's Football Development and Its Ambiguities

Saudi Arabia's introduction of a women's football league in 2020, and the subsequent expansion of women's sport more broadly, has been presented by the Saudi government as evidence of genuine social reform. Women players from the Saudi Women's Premier League have been included in national team squads for international competition for the first time in the country's football history.[39] The governance question these developments raise is whether FIFA should treat them as

evidence that engagement produces meaningful change supporting the argument for proceeding with the 2034 hosting award or as cosmetic reforms that do not address the fundamental legal and social constraints facing Saudi women, including the guardianship system, restrictions on freedom of movement, and the persecution of women's rights activists.[26] The answer has direct implications for how FIFA evaluates the human rights due diligence associated with the 2034 award.

9.5 Structural Recommendations the Committee Should Consider

- A requirement that human rights due diligence for all FIFA hosting bids include a gender-specific impact assessment, evaluated separately from the general human rights assessment;
- The establishment of a FIFA emergency support mechanism for women athletes facing persecution, analogous to the evacuation facilitation provided to Afghan players but institutionalised and resourced;
- A formal review of whether FIFA's Statute Article 4 non-discrimination provisions, as currently applied, adequately protect women athletes from state-imposed discrimination as distinct from association-imposed discrimination;
- Extension of FIFPro's engagement mandate to include systematic monitoring of the conditions under which women footballers participate in FIFA-sanctioned competitions globally.[40]

11. The Autonomy of Sport Doctrine: Legal Foundations

10.1 Overview

The "autonomy of sport" doctrine holds that sporting institutions should be self-governing, insulated from governmental interference, and evaluated by sporting rather than political criteria. This doctrine underpins FIFA's entire institutional architecture and is invoked routinely when FIFA resists external demands whether from governments, civil society, or international bodies that it modify its conduct. Yet the legal foundations of this doctrine are more contested, more fragile, and more subject to judicial qualification than its routine invocation by FIFA might suggest.[42] [43]

10.2 The Swiss Law Basis

FIFA is incorporated as an Verein an association under Swiss law, specifically the Swiss Civil Code (Articles 60–79). This legal form grants FIFA significant autonomy: as a private association, it may set its own statutes, govern its own membership, and discipline its members without requiring governmental authorisation for each decision.[2] Swiss law also provides that the internal affairs of associations are governed by their own rules, and that court intervention is limited to cases of manifest unfairness or violation of fundamental rights. This Swiss law basis has practical consequences for this committee. FIFA's decisions are not directly subject to review by national courts of most member associations' home states; they are subject to Swiss law and to the CAS as a private arbitration tribunal. The insulation from national court jurisdiction is a feature of the Swiss Verein structure that FIFA has deliberately chosen and maintained.

10.3 The Court of Arbitration for Sport

The CAS, based in Lausanne, Switzerland, serves as the primary appellate body for FIFA decisions. It was established in 1984 under the auspices of the International Olympic Committee and restructured in 1994 to give it greater independence following the Swiss Federal Tribunal's Gundel decision, which questioned whether the original CAS structure was sufficiently independent of the IOC.[12] The CAS applies a hybrid body of law: Swiss private law for procedural matters, the regulations of the relevant sporting federation for substantive matters, and general principles of law including human rights norms where federation regulations are silent or conflict with fundamental rights. The CAS has increasingly engaged with human rights arguments in its decision-making, as illustrated by its 2020 ruling in *Adams v. WADA* on proportionality in doping sanctions. Critically for this committee, the CAS has confirmed the validity of the Russian Football Union's suspension on sporting grounds while declining to engage with the broader political arguments Russia advanced.[12] This suggests that the CAS views the sporting-governance basis for suspension as adequate without requiring FIFA to justify the suspension on political grounds, a position that has implications for how the committee should frame any suspension criteria it develops.

10.4 The European Court of Human Rights: Mutu and Pechstein

The most significant judicial challenge to the CAS's legitimacy as an arbitration tribunal came in the 2018 European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) judgment in

Mutu and Pechstein v. Switzerland.[44] The applicants argued that the mandatory arbitration clause requiring disputes to be resolved by the CAS violated their right to a fair trial under Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights, because the CAS was not a genuinely independent and impartial tribunal. The ECtHR found that while the CAS satisfied the formal requirements of independence and impartiality, the mandatory nature of CAS arbitration athletes had no meaningful choice but to accept it as a condition of competing raised concerns about whether consent to arbitration could be considered truly voluntary. The Court ultimately found no violation in the specific cases, but its reasoning created uncertainty about the long-term compatibility of mandatory sports arbitration with European human rights standards. The Mutu and Pechstein judgment is significant for this committee because it illustrates that the autonomy of sport is not legally unlimited: it is subject to the human rights frameworks of states whose athletes participate in sporting competitions, and those frameworks can and do impose constraints on how sporting bodies exercise their authority.

10.5 European Union Law: Article 165 TFEU

Within the European Union's legal order, sport has a specific legal status established by Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU).[45] Article 165 requires the EU to contribute to the promotion of European sporting issues, while taking account of the specific nature of sport, its structures based on voluntary activity, and its social and educational functions. This "specific nature" concept has been interpreted by the Court of Justice of the EU as providing a qualified recognition of sporting autonomy sporting rules that are necessary for the organisation of competitive sport and are not disproportionate may be exempt from the full application of EU competition law and free movement provisions. The practical implications for FIFA are significant: EU law constrains FIFA's ability to impose transfer restrictions, eligibility rules, and competition regulations that conflict with the free movement of workers (Article 45 TFEU) or competition law (Articles 101–102 TFEU), unless those rules can be justified by reference to the legitimate sporting objectives and proportionality principles established in the Meca-Medina and subsequent case law. The ongoing dispute over FIFA's regulations on multi-club ownership is the most live current manifestation of this tension. Implication for Resolutions: Delegates drafting resolutions that extend FIFA's regulatory reach for example, into club ownership structures or player political expression should be aware that such extensions may face legal challenges under Swiss law, EU law, or the

European Convention on Human Rights. Procedurally robust resolutions will anticipate these challenges and include proportionality justifications.

12. Comparative Case Studies: Other Sports Bodies' Responses

11.1 Why Comparative Analysis Matters

FIFA does not make governance decisions in isolation. When it responds, or declines to respond, to a geopolitical event, it is inevitably compared to the decisions made by the International Olympic Committee, World Athletics, World Rugby, the ITF, and other major international sports federations facing the same geopolitical environment. Inconsistency between FIFA's approach and that of comparable bodies weakens the credibility of FIFA's stated principles; consistency with those bodies provides normative legitimacy. This section analyses how three major international sports bodies have approached the Russia–Ukraine situation and related geopolitical pressures, drawing lessons for FIFA's governance framework.[46][47]

11.2 The International Olympic Committee: The Neutral Athletes Framework

Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the IOC developed one of the most elaborately differentiated responses in international sports governance. The IOC's framework, revised for the Paris 2024 Olympics, established the category of Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN), Russian and Belarusian athletes who could compete at the Olympics under a neutral flag, without national symbols, anthems, or team affiliation, provided they met a series of eligibility conditions.[46] The AIN eligibility conditions included:

- The athlete must not have actively supported the war in Ukraine;
- The athlete must not be contracted to the Russian or Belarusian military or national security agencies;
- The athlete must not have been prevented from competing in their sport by their national sporting federation as a consequence of disciplinary or doping violations;
- The athlete must comply with anti-doping requirements.

The AIN framework represented a deliberate attempt to distinguish between the culpability of the Russian state which the IOC held responsible for the invasion and the individual culpability of Russian athletes, most of whom had no role in the decision to invade Ukraine. The framework was criticised from multiple directions: Ukraine and many Western nations argued that any Russian or Belarusian participation under any designation conferred unacceptable legitimacy; Russia argued that the conditions were humiliating and politically motivated.[46] For FIFA, the AIN framework raises a directly applicable question: should FIFA develop an analogous mechanism allowing Russian players to compete in FIFA competitions under neutral designation, disaggregating individual athlete participation from national association suspension? The committee should consider the sporting, political, and practical implications of such an approach.

11.3 World Athletics: The Harder Line

World Athletics (the international federation governing track and field athletics) adopted a significantly more restrictive approach than the IOC. Under the leadership of President Sebastian Coe, World Athletics maintained a blanket suspension of the Russian Athletics Federation (RusAF) which had been in place since 2015 following the WADA-commissioned McLaren Report's findings of systematic state-sponsored doping and extended that suspension to cover the Ukraine conflict period.[47] World Athletics did establish an Authorised Neutral Athlete (ANA) programme, analogous to the IOC's AIN framework, but applied it more restrictively: the number of Russian athletes cleared to compete as ANAs was significantly smaller than the number seeking clearance, and the vetting process was more rigorous. Critically, World Athletics maintained that RusAF's reinstatement to full membership was conditional on meeting a comprehensive list of structural integrity requirements including governance reforms, financial transparency, and cooperation with ongoing doping investigations rather than simply on the passage of time or the conclusion of the Ukraine conflict. The World Athletics model offers FIFA a different template: rather than treating suspension as a binary on/off status, it creates a graduated framework in which the association remains suspended but individual athletes may compete under clearly defined neutral conditions, and reinstatement is tied to specific, verifiable institutional reforms.

11.4 Wimbledon and the ATP/WTB: A Cautionary Tale

The decision by the All England Club (AELTC) to ban all Russian and Belarusian players from the 2022 Wimbledon Championships, taken unilaterally by the club

rather than through the ITF or the ATP/WTa Tours, produced a governance response that illustrates the risks of uncoordinated national-level action on geopolitical grounds.[48] The ATP and WTA Tours responded by stripping Wimbledon of ranking points for the 2022 edition, arguing that the unilateral national ban driven by the UK government's broader sanctions policy violated the principle of equal treatment of athletes and the governance authority of the international tours. The episode created a situation in which the world's most prestigious tennis tournament was effectively demoted to exhibition status for one year, damaging the commercial interests of all parties and providing no clear governance benefit. The Wimbledon case illustrates a risk that is directly relevant to FIFA's situation: if member associations take unilateral action on geopolitical grounds refusing to play against specific national teams, imposing national bans on specific players without a coordinated FIFA framework, the result is likely to be governance chaos rather than principled response. A coherent FIFA framework that gives member associations clear guidance on what they may and may not do unilaterally is essential for preventing this outcome.

11.5 Lessons for FIFA

Body	Approach	Key Lesson for FIFA
IOC	Neutral athlete framework (AIN); graduated participation	Consider disaggregating athlete from association suspension
World Athletics	Blanket suspension with ANA pathway; reform-conditioned reinstatement	Reinstatement criteria should be specific and verifiable
Wimbledon/AELTC	Unilateral national ban; reversed by tours	Uncoordinated national action causes governance failure

13. Glossary of Key Terms

The following definitions are provided to ensure consistent usage across committee debate. Delegates are encouraged to challenge each other's use of these terms when they are deployed imprecisely. Few things impress an Executive Board more than a delegate who calmly points out that the term being thrown around does not mean what the room thinks it means.

Autonomy of Sport

The doctrine that sporting institutions should be self-governing and insulated from governmental interference, evaluated by sporting rather than political criteria. Recognised in qualified form by Article 165 TFEU and the CAS jurisprudence, but not absolute in application. See Section 9.2.[42] Court of Arbitration for Sport. The primary appellate body for FIFA

CAS

decisions, based in Lausanne, Switzerland. Applies Swiss private law procedurally and federation regulations substantively. Decisions are final and binding subject only to challenge before the Swiss Federal Tribunal on narrow procedural grounds.[12]

Forward Programme

FIFA's development funding mechanism, distributing USD 6 million per four-year cycle to each of FIFA's 211 member associations for grassroots football development. The programme's dependence on World Cup commercial revenues creates structural incentives for smaller associations to maintain constructive relationships with FIFA leadership.[11]

Human Rights Due Diligence

The process, established in the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (2011), by which organisations identify, prevent, mitigate, and account for their adverse human rights impacts. FIFA's 2017 Human Rights Policy commits the organisation to conduct human rights due diligence in its operations, including hosting evaluations.[1]

Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN)

The designation used by the International Olympic Committee for Russian and Belarusian athletes who competed at Paris 2024 under neutral status, without national symbols or anthem, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. An analogous mechanism has not yet been adopted by FIFA.[46]

Kafala

The sponsorship system used in several Gulf states, including Qatar and Saudi Arabia, which ties migrant workers' legal status and right to remain in the country to their employment sponsor. Critics argue the kafala system creates structural conditions for exploitation because workers may not change employers or leave the country without employer consent.[22]

Soft Power

The ability of a state to influence international opinion and advance its interests through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion. Sporting events, cultural exports, and diplomatic engagement are classic instruments of soft power. The concept is attributed to political scientist Joseph Nye.[16]

Sovereign Wealth Fund (SWF)

A state-owned investment fund that manages national assets for long-term purposes. In the football context, the relevant SWFs include Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), Qatar's Qatar Sports Investments (QSI), and Abu Dhabi United Group.[35]

Sportswashing

The use of high-profile sporting associations, events, and investments to rehabilitate or enhance the international reputation of states or individuals with poor human rights records. The term is contested: proponents argue it accurately describes a deliberate strategy; critics argue it is selectively applied to non-Western states and ignores the potential for genuine reform through engagement.[16]

Suspension (FIFA)

The temporary exclusion of a member association from participation in FIFA competitions and governance. Distinct from expulsion, which is permanent. Current FIFA Statutes do not contain a codified set of criteria governing when suspension is triggered, how long it lasts, or what conditions must be met for reinstatement.[2] Swiss Verein A form of private association under the Swiss Civil Code (Articles 60–79) under which FIFA is incorporated. The Verein structure grants FIFA significant autonomy to set its own statutes and govern its own membership without governmental authorisation.[2]

UNESCO Convention on Cultural Diversity

The 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, sometimes invoked in debates about the cultural dimensions of football governance and the relationship between sporting events and the expression of national cultural identity.

UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights

The framework adopted by the UN Human Rights Council in 2011 (the "Ruggie Principles"), establishing that states have a duty to protect against human rights abuses by third parties, businesses have a responsibility to respect human rights, and

both states and businesses must provide remedies for human rights violations. FIFA's 2017 Human Rights Policy is explicitly aligned with these principles.[1]

14. Research Guidance

Effective participation requires preparation that goes beyond this background guide. Delegates should conduct independent research in the following areas before the conference begins. Yes, this means actual reading before the conference, not a frantic search during the first unmoderated caucus while pretending to take notes.

13.1 Know Your Association

Develop a thorough understanding of the association you represent: its governance structure, relationship with its national government, recent history of disciplinary or political controversies, commercial relationships, performance in international competition, and public positions on major FIFA governance issues.

13.2 FIFA Statutes and Governance Documents

Read the current FIFA Statutes in their entirety, with particular attention to provisions on membership, disciplinary procedures, rights and obligations of member associations, and the authority of the FIFA Council.[2] The FIFA Disciplinary Code, FIFA Ethics Code, and FIFA Human Rights Policy are equally important and publicly available on FIFA's official website.

13.3 The Russia–Ukraine Situation

Understand the sequence of events leading to the Russian Football Union's suspension, the legal basis on which it was imposed, Russia's procedural arguments against the suspension, and the current status of Russian football associations at national and club level. CAS rulings on Russia-related football matters are publicly accessible.[12]

13.4 Hosting Rights Policy

Research the process by which the 2030 and 2034 World Cups were awarded, including evaluation criteria applied, human rights due diligence processes conducted, and criticisms from civil society organisations, player unions, and academic commentators.[6][20]

13.5 Human Rights Frameworks

Familiarise yourself with the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (the Ruggie Principles), which provide the framework for FIFA's 2017 Human Rights Policy.[1] Understanding what 'human rights due diligence' means operationally will enable substantive engagement rather than rhetorical gesturing.

13.6 The Court of Arbitration for Sport

The CAS is the primary appellate body for FIFA decisions and has issued important rulings on the Russia suspension, eligibility of players from disputed territories, and disciplinary matters involving political conduct.[12] Understand the CAS's jurisdiction, procedural rules, and the principles it applies when reviewing FIFA decisions.

13.7 Civil Society and Player Union Perspectives

Engage critically with documents and public statements from Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, FIFPro, Transparency International, and the Business and Human Rights Resource Centre.[21][22][17][8]

15. Questions a Resolution Must Address

Delegates are expected to develop resolutions engaging with the following substantive policy questions. Resolutions should demonstrate engagement with the majority of these issues; the Executive Board will evaluate resolutions on specificity, feasibility, and coherence with existing FIFA governance frameworks.[24] You are not expected to solve every one of these, the actual FIFA Council has not managed it, but you are expected to try with more rigour than "FIFA should simply do better."

1. What criteria should FIFA use to determine when a national association's suspension from international competition is warranted in the context of a geopolitical conflict, and how should those criteria be formally codified in FIFA Statutes?[2]
2. How should FIFA balance its stated neutrality principle against the concrete human rights obligations articulated in its 2017 Human Rights Policy?[23]
3. What mechanisms should FIFA establish to ensure that human rights due diligence in the hosting evaluation process is conducted by genuinely independent bodies with enforceable authority?[8]

4. How should FIFA address the situation of individual players whose ability to participate in international competition is adversely affected by the suspension of their national association for reasons unrelated to their personal conduct?[17]
5. What principles should govern FIFA's response when a member association's government interferes in football governance for ostensible public interest purpose such as preventing extremist group use of football rather than narrow political interests?[2]
6. Should FIFA establish a permanent independent monitoring body for geopolitical and human rights issues, and if so, what should its composition, mandate, and enforcement authority be?[24]
7. How should FIFA respond to the phenomenon of sportswashing, given that the concept is contested, the evidence for its effectiveness is mixed, and its application may reflect political rather than principled distinctions?[16]
8. What formal frameworks should govern the reinstatement of suspended associations, including measurable conditions, timelines for review, and procedural safeguards?[12]
9. How should FIFA regulate player political expression during official competitions, and how should it define the boundary between prohibited political statements and protected human rights advocacy?[3]
10. What obligations do national football associations bear toward players who face political pressure, threats, or persecution in connection with their participation in international football?[17]
11. How should FIFA approach the consistency problem the perception that its responses to comparable situations differ based on the geopolitical significance or commercial importance of the associations involved and what institutional safeguards can address this?[24]
12. What role, if any, should the Court of Arbitration for Sport play in reviewing FIFA neutrality decisions, and should FIFA establish a specific appeal mechanism for geopolitically sensitive contexts?[12]
13. How should FIFA manage its commercial relationships with sponsors whose association with certain geopolitical or human rights contexts creates reputational risks, and what contractual mechanisms should govern sponsor conduct?

14. What frameworks should govern FIFA's engagement with international organisations including the United Nations, the International Labour Organization, and regional human rights bodies in situations involving human rights concerns?[1]
15. Should FIFA establish a dedicated conflict sensitivity protocol analogous to environmental impact assessment that must be completed before any major competition is awarded to or held in a country affected by, or at significant risk of, armed conflict or mass human rights violations?
16. How should FIFA address situations in which different member associations, acting within their own domestic legal frameworks, adopt contradictory positions on the eligibility or recognition of players or associations from contested territories?[2]
17. What obligations does FIFA bear toward the residents and communities of host nations, beyond those it owes to participating associations, players, and commercial partners?[1]
18. How should FIFA's development funding model particularly the Forward Programme be structured to ensure that distribution of development funds does not create political dependencies that compromise the independence of smaller member associations?[11]

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