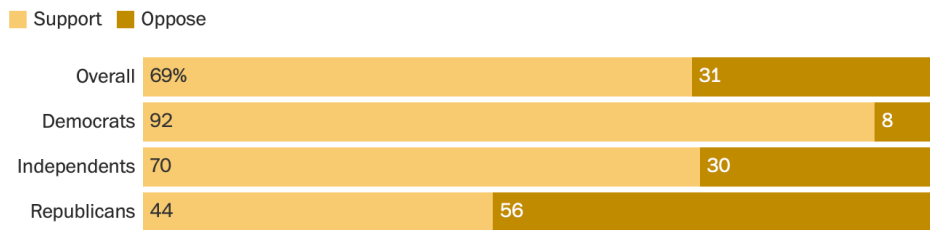


Most Americans support pro athletes leading efforts to promote voting rights

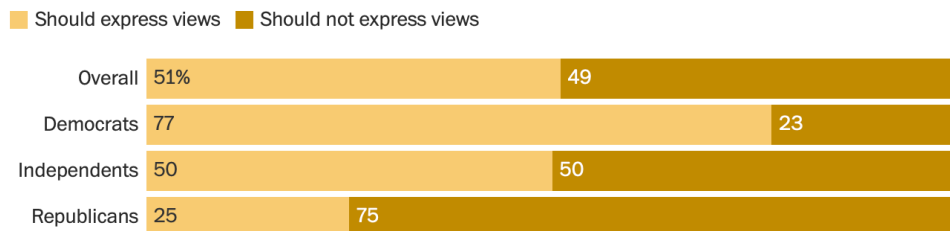
Q: As you may know, some professional athletes are leading efforts to promote voting rights. Do you support or oppose professional athletes being involved in this sort of activity?



Source: Aug. 17-23, 2023, Washington Post-UMD poll of 1,584 U.S. adults with an error margin of +/- 3 percentage points. Error margins are larger among subgroups. Conducted with UMD's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement and Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism. EMILY GUSKIN / THE WASHINGTON POST

Americans split over athletes expressing social and political views, with large partisan divide

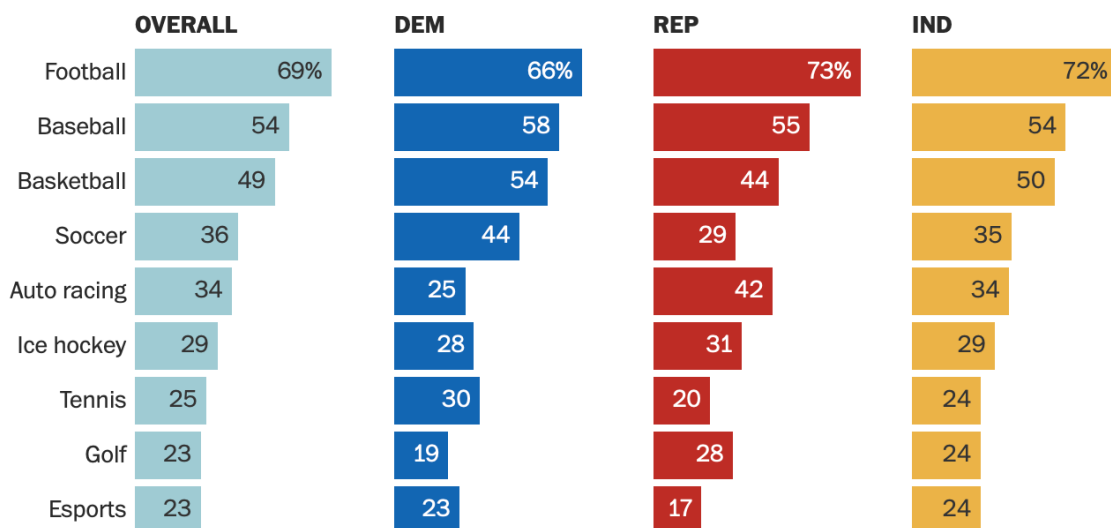
Q: In your opinion, should professional athletes use their platform to express their views on social and political issues, or should they not do this?



Source: Aug. 17-23, 2023, Washington Post-UMD poll of 1,584 U.S. adults with an error margin of +/- 3 percentage points. Error margins are larger among subgroups. Conducted with UMD's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement and Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism. EMILY GUSKIN / THE WASHINGTON POST

How sports fandom breaks down by party identification

Q: Are you a fan of each of the following sports, or not?



Source: Aug. 17-23, 2023, Washington Post-UMD poll of 1,584 U.S. adults with an error margin of +/- 3 percentage points. Error margins are larger among subgroups. Conducted with UMD's Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement and Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism. EMILY GUSKIN / THE WASHINGTON POST

Document 1

Athletes' advocacy for voting rights garners broad support, poll finds

The Washington Post, by Sapna Bansil & Emily Guskin, October 11, 2023

While Americans are divided on whether athletes should speak out on behalf of social and political causes, a clear majority support them advocating for voting rights, according to a Washington Post-University of Maryland poll.

As athletes have continued to bring attention to a range of issues — including systemic racism, gender inequity, gun violence and LGBTQ+ rights — the poll finds that 51 percent of Americans favor athletes expressing their views on social and political issues. Meanwhile, support for athletes leading efforts to promote voting rights is considerably higher. [...]

Support for athletes speaking out on politics is down from 62 percent in 2020, a time when athletes played a visible role in national protests that followed the murder of George Floyd and became increasingly outspoken on political and social causes.

Athletes and sports leagues have increasingly used their platforms to support voting initiatives. For the 2022 midterm elections, WNBA players spearheaded a social media campaign to promote National Voter Registration Day, the NBA encouraged voting by scheduling a day off on Election Day, and the NFL and Major League Soccer helped recruit poll workers. [...]

“It to me suggests that if you’re an athlete or a team and you’re thinking about getting involved in politics but you’re worried about alienating potential fans, the path might be first through nonpartisan efforts to encourage registration and voting,” said Michael Hanmer, who researches the intersection of sports and politics and directs the University of Maryland’s Center for Democracy and Civic Engagement, which co-sponsored the poll with The Post and the Shirley Povich Center for Sports Journalism.

Mitzi Hughes, a 61-year-old travel agent from Bonney Lake, Wash., said she believes sports and politics “don’t mix well.” But she supports athletes engaging in voting issues, which she views as fundamentally nonpartisan. [...]

Perspectives on athlete activism vary widely based on party affiliation, at a time when social justice issues have become increasingly politicized and access to voting has been restricted. As of May 29, 11 states — 10 of whose legislatures are Republican-controlled — had passed laws this year making it harder to vote, according to the Brennan Center for Justice, a nonpartisan group that supports policies such as automatic voter registration. [...]

Isabel Hennequin, 42, an office manager from the Bronx who leans Democratic, said former NFL quarterback Colin Kaepernick’s 2016 protests over police brutality and systemic racism resonated with her. She supports athletes using their platforms to effect change. “Not only are they athletes who play for a team or do a sport, but they are also considered to be role models, and they do have a lot of influence,” Hennequin said.

Frank West, a 61-year-old retired police, fire and EMS worker from Stanwood, Mich., who voted for Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020, disapproves of the national anthem protests led by Kaepernick and prefers that athletes stay out of politics. But West is more amenable to athletes encouraging voting, as long as those

efforts are nonpartisan. “Supporting the democratic process is great. I have no problem with that at all,” West said.

The partisan divide on athlete advocacy reflects rhetoric from right-wing media and politicians, most notably Trump. The Post-UMD poll was conducted shortly after the U.S. women’s soccer team, which has long been outspoken on issues of equal pay and LGBTQ+ rights, was eliminated from the World Cup in the round of 16, a defeat the former president and front-runner for the 2024 Republican nomination attributed to “wokeness.” [...]

Perspectives on athlete activism also diverge based on which sports people are fans of. [...]

Document 2

The Olympics' Toughest Act: Balancing Sports and Politics

The New York Times, by Hannah Beech & Valerie Hopkins, August 10, 2024

The Olympics have long been a stage for political expression, for athletes who take the opportunity. Some do, while others choose to focus strictly on their sport.

The athletes had lost. Their time in Paris was over. And they were, in this moment of defeat by a team from a political rival, not even allowed the comfort of their homeland's name and flag.

To be an Olympian from Taiwan is to not exist, at least not officially. To placate China, the island competes at the Games under the awkward designation of Chinese Taipei. The intrusion of politics into sports forces the island's athletes to engage in the kind of rhetorical gymnastics [...].

There is no arena more international than the Olympics. The United Nations General Assembly, that other grand global endeavor, excludes the territories, the itty-bitty islands and the not-quite nations that get to go to the Games. Puerto Rico, Palestine, Chinese Taipei — they all marched in the Olympic parade of nations, as did a refugee team whose 37 members were forcibly displaced from some of the very countries that competed alongside them in Paris.

But to accommodate such a diversity — North Korea and South Korea, Israel and Palestine, Armenia and Azerbaijan, China and Taiwan — the Olympic masterminds mandate that athletes should refrain from taking political stands. They imbue in a single sporting moment, the flight of a woman propelled by a springy pole or the revolution of a wheel in a velodrome, an inspirational expression of international unity. They romanticize an Olympic truce in which competitors lay down their weapons for the duration of the world's greatest athletic contest.

But politics always interfere. At a badminton semifinal in which Taiwan was playing, security personnel confiscated a scarf with the word "Taiwan" on it. A pro-Taiwan fan had a poster in the shape of the island grabbed by another spectator. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Taiwan decried such "violent behavior," calling it antithetical to the Olympic spirit. [...]

That Olympic spirit is supposed to float somehow in a bubble above the cut-and-thrust of global politics.

"We must be politically neutral but not apolitical," Thomas Bach, the president of the International Olympic Committee, said last year. "We should not make the mistake to raise ourselves to referees of political disputes because we will be crushed by these political powers."

Bach, a German lawyer by training, was speaking in defense of the I.O.C.'s decision to allow individual athletes from Russia and Belarus to participate in Paris, despite those nations' roles in the invasion of Ukraine. The Russian and Belarusian teams had already been banned from competing as national entities.

That decision was based, the I.O.C. said, on Russia's inclusion of parts of occupied Ukraine in its Olympic delegation, not simply on Moscow's decision to invade another sovereign nation. Turning guns on civilians is not enough to get a national team thrown out of the Olympics, as proven by the presence in Paris of delegations from places like Afghanistan, Myanmar and Syria.

Those who disparaged Russians and Belarusians competing as so-called “individual neutral athletes” were hypocrites, suggested an I.O.C. statement posted online.

“It is deplorable that these governments do not address the question of double standards,” the statement said. “We have not seen a single comment from them about their attitude towards the participation of athletes whose countries are involved in the other 70 wars, armed conflicts and crises in the world.” [...]

It’s a fallacy, of course, that politics and sports exist in separate spheres, and even the I.O.C. admits it. How could they not be conjoined when the Games depend on nationhood as an organizing principle of competition? Patriotism is only a punch or a paddle away from jingoism.

Besides, the Olympics have long been a showcase for potent political expression: Jesse Owens sprinting and jumping to four golds in 1936 Berlin; gloved fists raised on the medals stand in 1968 Mexico City; the American-led boycott of the 1980 Games in Moscow because of the invasion of Afghanistan, and the Soviet bloc returning the slight by shunning the Los Angeles Games four years later.

Even the I.O.C.’s recognition of a refugee team, which first competed in 2016 in Rio de Janeiro, is itself a political statement. In Paris, about 40 percent of the team is from Iran, but it includes athletes from Afghanistan, Syria, Ethiopia, Venezuela and more.

On Aug. 8, Cindy Ngamba, a Cameroonian who resettled in Britain as a child, claimed the refugee team’s first-ever medal, a bronze in boxing. Her next battle will be to gain citizenship in Britain, where she has faced deportation threats. [...]

Sports loves an underdog story, the redemptive arc of a come-from-behind victory. Tiny Hong Kong, the territory that switched from British to Chinese rule more than a quarter century ago, won two fencing gold medals in Paris, more than Bangladesh, India and South Africa combined.

But those victories were quickly politicized. One of the fencers was regarded with sympathy by members of a crushed democratic movement in Hong Kong, the other viewed as supportive of the rulers in Beijing who have criminalized dissent through a restrictive national security law. [...]

In the Azraq refugee camp in Jordan, home to about 40,000 displaced Syrians, al Ghotany’s family and friends cheered on a homegrown son.

“It’s as if he told the refugees in the camp, ‘Nothing is impossible; here I am,’” said Ali Adel Asigmani, a university student who also grew up in the camp.

Being at the Paris Games was a gift, but one that depended on the interplay between global politics and physical prowess more than anyone likes to admit.

The Hong Kong team ended the Games with an impressive haul of four medals. Yet its Olympic presence depends on Beijing’s acquiescence, an approval that may be harder to maintain when China fully absorbs the territory politically in 2047.

For now, Hong Kong competes in the Olympics as “Hong Kong, China.” [...]

Document 3

Politics and sports have never been closer. For brands, silence isn't neutrality

www.thedrums.com, by Matt Readman, January 19, 2024

Sports have long delivered for brands. They're also a platform for politics, whether we like it or not. Brands better get ready to pick sides, explains Dark Horses's Matt Readman.

Just before Christmas, Asahi-owned Pilsner Urquell pulled out of sponsoring the Olympic Games. The reason being that the brand also sponsored the Czech Olympic team and, following the IOC's decision to allow Russian and Belarusian athletes to be part of Paris 2024, the brand felt that the two were incompatible.

It would be easy to imagine that 'pull-out politics' are rare but happening more frequently. Fifa lost global sponsors over the decision to host a men's World Cup in Qatar. At the same time, a Roman Abramovich-owned Chelsea FC lost corporate backers after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These are just a couple of recent examples, and there will be more in the years to come.

One of the big motivations to keep politics out of sport is that it protects sponsors. If you're a big global brand, you want to know a big global tournament isn't going to be hijacked for political gain. It's why Fifa president Gianni Infantino argued so strongly that Qatar should be about football, not politics.

The irony is that, in this case, an attempt to be apolitical achieved the opposite effect. By allowing Russian and Belarusian athletes to compete as neutrals, the IOC believed it was removing the politics from a sporting competition. In reality, it was inadvertently making a political statement of its own.

What this proves is that it is impossible to be apolitical.

If we've learned anything from 2023, it's that there's no way not to take a side. Inaction is in itself a form of action.

We should by now understand this about sport. Politicians like Lee Anderson and Donald Trump, who have argued against taking the knee, fail to see that singing the national anthem before a game is also a political act. They are blind to this because it represents their beliefs and the status quo, but it is political. By its very existence, international sport is a conduit for geopolitics.

As outlined in our report, 'Sport in Times of Crisis', this is important for marketers to understand in 2024 because we're entering one of the most politically charged periods of sport we've seen to date. Of course, we've seen politics and sport intertwined in major acts throughout the 20th Century. Still, a new political perfect storm is brewing as a series of powerful forces grow and will inevitably collide.

Firstly, we're living through a period of socio-political and geopolitical disruption, the likes of which we haven't seen since the fall of the Berlin Wall. 2024 is a record year of elections, with more than half the world's population set to go to the polls. With the rise of populism and political division fuelled by an algorithmic age, there will be no shortage of culture wars in the coming years.

More important, of course, is that real wars are raging across the world, with Ukraine and Russia locked in a stalemate, an ever-deteriorating situation in Gaza. Not to mention the threat of broader escalation in

the Middle East and China's expansionist aims. [Editor's note: between submission and the edit, Iran and Pakistan had a clash too].

In this politically charged world, sporting actors are finding their voice. Since Colin Kaepernick made his stand by kneeling and was supported by Nike, we've seen a dramatic rise in athletes voicing political opinion. LeBron James, Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka, Lewis Hamilton and Marcus Rashford have all added to their iconic status by having strong social and political campaigns. In the last few weeks, we've seen athletes take either side in the Israel-Gaza conflict, with Australian cricketer Usman Khawaja displaying a pro-Palestinian message on his shoes and Israeli footballer Sagiv Jehezkel making a hostage plea after scoring. Whereas in the 1990s, superstar athletes like Pete Sampras and Michael Jordan believed their place was to keep out of politics, this generation holds no such inhibitions.

It's not just athletes who have found their voice; brands are enabling them. Over the past ten years, the rise in purpose-driven marketing - right or wrong - has given brands license to take a stronger socio-political stance. Whether brands choose to make a stand is up to them, but what they can't afford to do is end up on the wrong side of public opinion. You cannot be a bystander; the argument that sport and politics shouldn't mix any longer holds in many fans' eyes.

To add further fuel to the fire, it's not just those involved in sport that will try and use it for political gain, but those outside of it too. In a world where our media and entertainment have become fragmented, sport is almost unique in its ability to hold our collective attention. Three million more people watched England in the World Cup than the Queen's funeral. As such, it creates a stage that protestors will look to hijack. Last year, we saw the disruption created by climate change and animal rights activists on sport. Sold-out stadiums and huge TV audiences will tempt any political activist.

Finally, this will all be happening in liberal democracies as, over the next decade, global sport takes one of its strange geographical tours to the Western world.

Between now and the 2034 Fifa World Cup in Saudi Arabia, the world's biggest sporting tournaments will almost exclusively be held in the US, Europe or Australia. This will give all the groups above added confidence to make a progressive statement. For example, there is less risk and more reward than in China or Qatar.

All of this is to say that sport and politics have arguably never been so complicated. It is not a safe space where brands can be blindly neutral. The idea that by not acting, you can't offend anyone no longer exists. Brands need to be clearer than ever on why they're in sport and what they're trying to achieve. If you don't have this clarity, it's very easy to get swept up in someone else's narrative.

Document 5

