



Athlete
365

ATHLETE EXPRESSION CONSULTATION

IOC ATHLETES' COMMISSION REPORT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. [EXECUTIVE SUMMARY](#)
2. [IOC ATHLETES' COMMISSION \(AC\) RECOMMENDATIONS](#)
3. [INTRODUCTION](#)
4. [OUTCOME AND RESULTS OF QUANTITATIVE SURVEY](#)
5. [QUALITATIVE CONSULTATION WITH ACS](#)
6. [FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ASSESSMENT](#)
7. [APPENDIX](#)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Following the publication by the IOC Executive Board in June 2020 of a resolution condemning discrimination in the strongest possible terms, the IOC Athletes' Commission (AC) was asked to explore additional ways in which Olympic athletes can express their support for the principles enshrined in the Olympic Charter, including at the time of the Olympic Games, while respecting the Olympic spirit.

Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter and its associated Guidelines are designed to provide clarity on the opportunities for athletes to express their views at Games time, while protecting the neutrality of sport and the Olympic Games. Although wide-ranging opportunities currently do exist for athletes to freely express their views at the Olympic Games within the boundaries of Rule 50 – such as in the mixed zone at competition venues, in press conferences, on social and traditional media – the IOC AC sought to explore whether a greater appetite exists among athletes worldwide to express themselves and to understand if athletes would welcome additional ways to express their views during the Olympic Games.

Throughout the last 11 months, the IOC AC has regularly engaged in a consultation process with the global network of ACs. It further encouraged athlete representatives to consult with their athletes on a sport or national level to better understand the sentiment among them. The IOC AC encouraged the ACs to share all their feedback and, further, extended invitations to any ACs that expressed a wish to be involved directly in the consultation process.

To ensure that the consultation process was as extensive and far-reaching as possible, a methodology was adopted which used both quantitative and qualitative assessments. The quantitative approach ensured that elite athletes from every country would have the opportunity to participate, while the qualitative approach ensured more in-depth feedback from the ACs. The IOC AC contracted two professional research agencies ([Publicis Sport & Entertainment \(PSE\)](#) and [FORS](#)) to scrutinise every aspect of the methodology and ensure that it adhered to the most rigorous of scientific standards.

The IOC AC has consulted with respected experts in the field of human rights to gain their perspectives on freedom of expression and Rule 50.2. The IOC AC engaged with Lenz & Staehelin (L&S) to seek feedback and advice from the human rights, sports law and non-profit governance perspectives.

The quantitative segment of the consultation involved the development of an online survey, intended to capture the opinions of as many Olympians and elite athletes as possible. For the integrity of the study, it was crucial to ensure that those completing the survey were eligible (athletes who have competed internationally at any International Federation (IF)-sanctioned events).

In total, 3,547 Olympians and elite athletes completed the survey, representing 185 different National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and all 41 Olympic sports. The results revealed that the places most likely to be deemed appropriate by respondents, for athletes to demonstrate or express their individual views, were in the media (42% deemed it “appropriate”), in press conferences (38%) and in the mixed zones (36%). In contrast, the places least likely to be deemed appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their individual views were on the podium (16%), on the field of play (14%) and during the Opening Ceremony (14%).

Moreover, a clear majority of athletes believe that it is not appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their views in these three places (67% think that “the Podium” is “not appropriate”, 70% for each of the “field of play” and “during the Opening Ceremony”).

Among the new ways that were proposed in the quantitative survey as important to introduce were, holding a moment of solidarity against discrimination during the Opening Ceremony (with 48% of respondents rating it as “important”) and to have unified messaging around inclusion and solidarity on the field of play (with 46% of respondents rating it as “important”). Additionally, the research revealed a clear result whereby unified messaging promoting the Olympic values and Olympic Truce (47%) was preferred over individual messaging about a specific cause (8%).

The qualitative segment of the consultation saw the IOC AC engage with a number of ACs from NOCs and IFs that had asked to be involved in the process. Qualitative feedback was collected from ACs through a variety of means, such as video conferences, domestic AC surveys, AC position statements and emails from ACs. In total, 21 different ACs contributed to the qualitative research by providing in-depth feedback which reflected the views of athletes in their country or sport.

Responses from ACs varied from support for introducing additional ways for athletes to express their views during the Games, to those ACs that supported maintaining Rule 50 in its current form. The majority of ACs, regardless of whether they were supportive or not of additional ways for athletes to express their views, were against any forms of expression or demonstration taking place on the podium and field of play.

On the topic of new ways for athletes to express their views, there was greater support for a unified moment of expression at the Opening Ceremony as well as for a designated space in the Olympic Village for athletes to express their views. Another key theme that emerged from the qualitative data was the need for greater clarity on Rule 50 itself, as well as further information on the Rule and its objective. Some ACs also referenced a need for greater clarity on the sanctions in place for breaches of Rule 50.

Recommendations

After thorough analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data received as a result of the consultation process, the IOC AC has developed the following recommendations for submission to the IOC Executive Board:

1. Increase opportunities for athletes’ expression during the Games
 - a. At the Opening and Closing Ceremonies
 - b. In Olympic Village branding
 - c. Through the Olympic Truce Mural
 - d. Through athlete apparel
 - e. Through social media campaigns
 - f. Through digital messaging during sports presentation
2. Increase athletes’ expression outside the Games
3. Preserve the podium, field of play and official ceremonies
4. Provide clarity on sanctions
5. Provide more information around Rule 50
6. Restructure Rule 50 into two rules and increase clarity of Rule 50.2

The proposed recommendations take into consideration the quantitative study and qualitative consultation, as well as the feedback from human right experts, and are aligned with the majority of the feedback received from athletes and ACs. It was apparent that the majority of athletes did not deem it appropriate for athletes to express individual views during the Opening Ceremony, on the podium or on the field of play. Support for unified messaging was considerably stronger.

The IOC AC hopes that these recommendations will be approved by the IOC EB after which the Commission will turn its attention towards implementing them for the upcoming Olympic Games Tokyo 2020 and Olympic Winter Games Beijing 2022.

2. IOC AC RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below are proposed by the IOC Athletes' Commission to the IOC Executive Board, with the former having conducted a thorough consultation process, including qualitative and quantitative feedback from the athlete community, feedback from human rights and sports law experts, and an independent expert review of the methodology.

1. Increase opportunities for athletes' expression during the Olympic Games

Recommendations

a. At the opening and closing ceremonies

- Highlight the importance of solidarity, unity and non-discrimination at the opening and closing ceremonies.
- Adapt the Olympic Oath to include messaging on inclusion and non-discrimination.

Below is the proposal for changes to the Oath:

"In the name of the athletes", "In the name of all judges" or "In the name of all the coaches and officials".

*"We promise to take part in these Olympic Games, respecting and abiding by the rules and in the spirit of fair play, **inclusion and equality. Together we stand in solidarity and** ~~all~~ commit ourselves to sport without doping, ~~and~~ without cheating, without any ~~kind~~ form of discrimination. We do this, ~~for the glory of sport,~~ for the honour of our teams, ~~and~~ in respect for the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, and to make the world a better place through sport."*

b. In the Olympic Village branding

- Incorporate collective messaging into the Olympic Village "look" to celebrate Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

c. Through the Olympic Truce Mural

Context: The concept behind the design of the Olympic Truce Mural in the Olympic Village is "Frame of Peace", recognising diversity, connecting people and bringing harmony. Athletes should be made more aware of this opportunity in the Olympic Village to express their support for these values.

Recommendation

Further leverage the Olympic Truce Mural in the Olympic Villages among the athletes for them to show their support for the Olympic Truce ideals and increase its reach through digital means of engagement.

d. Through athlete apparel

- Produce athlete apparel with inclusive messaging and make it available for athletes and their entourage during the Games.
- Proposed words are: Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

e. Social media campaign

Build on the “Stronger Together” campaign with the athlete community to increase awareness of our shared values of Peace, Respect, Solidarity, Inclusion and Equality.

f. Digital messaging in sports presentation

Incorporate messaging around our shared values as part of the digital messages in the competition venues and the sports presentation.

2. Increase athletes’ expression outside the Olympic Games

Context: As Olympic athletes, we are passionate about our sports. For each and every one of us, that passion continues into everyday life, where we advocate change on issues of great importance to us and our societies. Athletes should not be silent about the issues they care deeply about.

It should be noted that these causes vary for athletes from different parts of the world, backgrounds and cultures, and different issues are important to them.

The unique nature of the Games enables athletes from all over the world to come together in peace and harmony. By becoming Olympians, and through the platform that the Olympic Games provide, our visibility and reach within society is amplified beyond the 16 days of the Games. We believe that the example we set by competing with the world’s best, while living in harmony in the Olympic Village, is a uniquely positive message to send to an increasingly divided world.

Recommendation

Provide athletes with a platform, including Athlete365, to discuss and highlight topics that are important to them. The expression of views should always be respectful and in line with the Olympic values.

3. Preserve the podium, field of play (FoP) and official ceremonies

Context: In the quantitative study, a clear majority of athletes said that it is not appropriate to demonstrate or express their views on the field of play (70% of respondents), at official ceremonies (70% of respondents) or on the podium (67% of respondents).

This position was also widely expressed in the IOC AC qualitative consultation. The argument the IOC AC heard was the need to ensure that athletes and their special moments are respected, and that the focus of the Olympic Games remains on the celebration of the athletes’ performances, sport and the Olympic values. However, some athlete representatives took a different view, using freedom of expression and freedom of speech as their argument, and felt that this outweighed the other arguments.

The IOC AC took both views into account and consulted human rights and sports law experts. In these discussions it became clear that:

- i. While freedom of speech and expression is a universally recognised fundamental human right, it is not absolute. Such a right comes with duties and responsibilities.
- ii. Freedom of speech and freedom of expression may be restricted under a very limited set of conditions, the assessment of which is delicate and varies depending on the circumstances (hence Recommendations 4, 5 and 6 below).

Listening to ACs as part of the qualitative consultation, the IOC AC is very concerned about the risk of politicisation of the athletes and the risk that athletes may be put under external pressure. It is important to protect athletes from the potential consequences of being placed in a position where they may be forced to take a public position on a particular domestic or international issue, regardless of their beliefs. In such cases, the political neutrality of the Olympic Games is a way to protect athletes from political interference or exploitation. (See the freedom of expression assessment section for details.)

In conclusion, the quantitative and qualitative findings indicate that the majority of athletes want to protect the field of play, official ceremonies and podium.

Recommendation

- Preserve the podium, FoP and official ceremonies from any kind of protests and demonstrations, or any acts perceived as such.

4. Provide clarity on sanctions

Recommendation

- As it is the current practice according to the IOC disciplinary procedures and IOC Rule 50 Guidelines, examine breaches of the current paragraph 2 of Rule 50 on a case-by-case basis to ensure due process and the proportionality of sanctions.
- The IOC AC recommends that the Legal Affairs Commission clarify, in due course, the range of sanctions that would be imposed for a breach of the Rule, taking into consideration the respective context of each individual case.

5. Provide more information around Rule 50

Recommendation

Provide increased and enhanced information on:

- The purpose and scope of Rule 50.2 (athlete expression) and the related Guidelines.
- How the Olympic values and the non-discrimination principle are implemented and promoted by all stakeholders.

6. Restructure Rule 50 into two rules and increase clarity of Rule 50.2

Context: The combination of Rule 50.1 and Rule 50.2 in Rule 50 leads to a lack of clarity on the scope and purpose of Rule 50.

Recommendation

- Separate Rule 50.1 and Rule 50.2 into two rules.
- Provide more clarity on the scope of Rule 50.2, including by incorporating some elements that are currently included only in the Rule 50 Guidelines, into the Rule itself.

3. INTRODUCTION

Background

Rule 50 of the Olympic Charter provides a framework to protect the neutrality of sport and the Olympic Games. In addition, it ensures that the focus at the Olympic Games remains on athletes' performances, sport and the international unity and harmony that the Olympic Movement seeks to advance.

In addition to prohibiting commercial installations and advertising signs, Rule 50 states that: "No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas".

In 2019, the [IOC Athletes' Commission](#) (AC) conducted a consultation with athlete representatives around Rule 50. As the result of this consultation, in January 2020, the IOC published the [Rule 50 Guidelines](#) to provide athletes with clarity on existing opportunities to express their views at the Olympic Games and where such expression is not appropriate.

It is important to highlight that the IOC and the IOC AC are fully supportive of freedom of expression. This principle is included in the [Athletes' Rights and Responsibilities Declaration \(Athletes' Declaration\)](#).

Additionally, the Athletes' Declaration states that athletes should be able to: "Practise sport and compete without being subject to discrimination on the basis of race, colour, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, disability, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other immutable status."

Reflecting the critical importance of the Olympic Games as a symbol of peace and unity in diversity, the IOC is keen to ensure that competitions on the field of play as well as celebrations of special moments at the official ceremonies and on the podium are conducted with mutual respect and understanding towards all athletes.

Racism or any form of discrimination have no place in sport. The Olympic Games are a very powerful global demonstration of inclusion, bringing together athletes from 206 National Olympic Committees (NOCs) and the Refugee Olympic Team.

Existing opportunities to express views at the Olympic Games

Events of recent years, and enhanced possibilities to reach out to wider audiences, have led athletes to question how they can use their voices and express themselves on topics that they feel strongly about. This is important. Athletes are a source of inspiration. They are role models.

Whereas once upon a time, platforms for expressing athletes' concerns were more limited, today the advent of social media and other digital tools means that there are many more channels for communication, and athletes can reach many more people. This is a welcome development.

There are already multiple opportunities at Games time for athletes to fully and openly express their views, including in official press conferences, through social and traditional media, and in mixed zones in competition venues. In non-Olympic venues, there are no restrictions, except for those resulting from local laws and regulations.

Further consultation on athlete expression

In June 2020, the IOC Executive Board (EB) published a [resolution](#) against discrimination. As part of this resolution, the EB supported a proposal from the IOC AC to lead a consultation with athletes on athlete protests and non-discrimination and in support of freedom of expression.

The athlete consultation was intended to gather feedback in light of these developments and explore additional ways in which athletes can express their views during the Olympic Games while respecting the Olympic spirit.

Methodology and process

In light of this, the IOC AC launched a new consultation process with athletes and athlete representatives, to explore, building on existing opportunities, new ways in which athletes can express their views during the Games while respecting the Olympic spirit.

The IOC AC consultation was undertaken with the global network of athlete representatives and directly with the wider athlete community.

The consultation process started with calls between the IOC AC and with the ACs of NOCs and International Federations (IFs) that had asked to be involved, to discuss key issues related to athlete demonstrations and gather initial feedback.

All NOC and IF ACs were encouraged to consult and engage with athletes within their local and sporting contexts, and subsequently to discuss the results of these consultations with the IOC AC. This was intended to both empower ACs around the world in their roles, and to obtain a truly global perspective. Consultations and surveys were conducted at a local level by a number of NOCs; and debates and webinars were also used as a means to discuss the topic further.

A global survey was then launched to collect feedback from athletes from all over the world. The survey had a mix of quantitative and open-ended questions to ensure that all the nuances of the topic were captured.

The goal was to hear athletes' thoughts on existing and potentially new opportunities to express their views at the Games and on how the IOC can amplify the voices of athletes everywhere, and ultimately better support efforts to tackle racism and all kinds of discrimination.

The consultation process is outlined in our [Consultation Framework and its Timeline](#).

Quantitative study

A professional research agency, Publicis Sport & Entertainment (PSE, see below for more detail), was contracted to help build the quantitative survey and analyse the data captured from it. The design and development of this study was based on the agency's decades of experience in undertaking multi-lingual survey research akin to this one.

Multiple considerations need to be taken into account when conducting online quantitative research to ensure the collection of high-quality information. For this study, two in particular stand out:

- a) Careful planning of the fieldwork to ensure as many respondents as possible have an opportunity to participate.
- b) Careful development of the measurements to be included in the survey.

The primary objective of the quantitative study was to gather opinion from as many Olympians and elite athletes as possible across the world with regard to “additional ways for athletes to express views during the Olympic Games”. Acknowledging that the study needed to rely on athletes giving up their time to fill in the survey meant that it could not be overly long, laborious or complex, and needed to be transferable across 10 different languages, so as to be easily understood.

Fieldwork

The fieldwork methodology was based on a desire to reach as wide a group of Olympians and elite athletes (athletes who have competed internationally at any IF-sanctioned events) as possible, whilst ensuring that only those falling into this group were able to participate.

As such, all verified Olympians and elite athletes who were already registered in the Athlete365 database were invited, via email, to participate in the survey and provided with a unique online link to do so. Athlete365 is easily accessible and available to the whole athlete community.

This allowed a clear identification of the potential group of respondents to be included in the study, whilst also guaranteeing the anonymity of all athletes’ responses. To enhance the study and make it more open and inclusive, athletes and Olympians who were not previously registered in the database were encouraged to register and, having done so, were invited to complete the survey, again by providing them with a unique survey link.

The opportunity to take part in the survey was promoted on Athlete365 social media and through NOCnet (a platform open to all NOCs), as well as via several email reminders, in a clear effort to get as representative and as global a response as possible. Additionally, the Continental Associations’ Athletes’ Commissions and World Olympians Association promoted the survey within their communities.

Measurement

The first stage of the process was to outline the main concepts to be covered in the study. These were then shaped into questions and response categories tailored to a 10-minute questionnaire. Ten minutes was identified by the research experts involved as the optimal survey length – not too long to deter athletes from completing the whole survey, whilst being long enough to cover as many topics as possible, in the appropriate level of detail.

The next step in the design phase was to ensure that the questionnaire flowed well, was easily understood, and was not overly complex nor laborious for the respondents to fill in. As is typical in questionnaire design, to aid clearer thought and understanding amongst the respondents, the questionnaire began with more generic questions, accompanied by only essential descriptions and definitions; questions subsequently became more detailed and topic-specific as the questionnaire progressed. Mirroring good practice, repetition from one question to the next was limited, especially when the repetition involved small or nuanced variations to questions or response options, as these could

lead to confusion or false/exaggerated distinctions, resulting in a lack of clarity in the responses. Where it was necessary or unavoidable to include response options with only small differences, these distinctions were highlighted using bold or underlined text in the online survey.

As part of efforts to limit the survey to no more than 10 minutes in duration, it was also important to strike a balance between the range of topics covered and the level of detail in which each one was explored. Both of these elements were carefully discussed amongst, and agreed between, several relevant parties in the IOC AC, the research agency and the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), all the while keeping the overall objectives of the study in mind.

Considerable effort was deployed by the experts to develop the precise wording of the questions and response options so as to limit the possibility of question or answer wording being misinterpreted. The challenge was to ensure that questions and responses were easily understood without needing lengthy explanations, as this would be contrary to the best practice approaches described above.

An introduction to the survey was drafted with the intention of highlighting the subject matter of the study for each participating athlete and ensuring that each athlete could complete the survey under the best possible conditions. Moreover, causes that athletes were believed to be likely to have a view on during the Olympic Games were outlined at the start of the survey.

Once the questionnaire was drafted, it was reviewed by the IOC AC, as well with the team from the FORS. Various points were then discussed, and adjustments made, before the questionnaire was signed off by the IOC AC.

Finally, the questionnaire was scripted into an online survey prior to being translated from English into the nine other languages. The same care and attention, which was afforded to the design of the questionnaire, was also applied to translation.

Translation

Given the importance of gathering as global a perspective as possible, translations were a key part of the research process. Translation requires that a balance be struck between strict and literal translation of the English wording into other languages and using wording that is most appropriate in the given language. A pragmatic approach was applied to this study, with specific translation queries being addressed by a wide range of native speakers, plus very experienced researchers at the agency.

Well-briefed professional linguists, specialising in the market research sector, were contracted to translate the English master survey into nine other languages, namely French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean and Arabic. Translations went through a thorough checking process by native speakers at the translation and research agencies, as well as at the IOC. Moreover, given the importance and prominence of the terms “express and demonstrate views” in the survey, an explicit brief was given to the linguists in relation to the requirements of translating this term, to optimise consistency across the 10 languages.

General

The survey phase of the consultation opened on 7 December and closed on 7 January. The data captured from the survey was independently analysed by the research agency. To further ensure transparency and an independent process, the FORS reviewed the responses received from athletes through this survey and the interpretation and reporting of that data by the research agency.

Qualitative process

The IOC AC invited all of the ACs to submit feedback and encouraged them to consult with their athlete communities. The qualitative process of the consultation began with a series of calls with the ACs of NOCs and IFs that had asked to be involved. Discussion focused on key issues related to athlete protests and gathering initial feedback.

All NOC and IF ACs were encouraged to consult and engage with athletes within their local and sporting contexts, and to discuss the results with the IOC AC. This process was intended both to empower ACs around the world in their roles and to obtain a truly global perspective.

Written statements were also received from various ACs around the world. Those statements that are public can be consulted on Athlete365 [here](#).

Qualitative results can be found in section 5.

Information on experts involved in the consultation

To ensure the consultation and entire process was as strong and robust as possible, a professional research agency (PSE) was mandated to design, implement and analyse results from the quantitative study. In addition, the IOC AC engaged with the FORS, which provided a further layer of independent expertise and advice on the project.

In order to understand and collect expert feedback on the human rights aspect around freedom of expression, the IOC AC consulted with experts in the field. Their analysis of Rule 50 and its impact on freedom of expression was very useful for the IOC AC. The information they provided is included in section 6.

Publicis Sport & Entertainment (PSE)

Publicis Sport & Entertainment (PSE) is a wholly owned division of the Publicis Groupe and is headquartered in London, with 14 offices in 12 markets around the world. Drawing on over two decades of experience in implementing large-scale, international research studies for some of the world's biggest rightsholders and brands, PSE's consumer research division worked with the IOC AC to design the questionnaire for this study, script the online survey and translate it. On completion of fieldwork, PSE undertook independent and thorough processing and analysis on the data collected, and produced a full report of the results.

FORS, the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences

In order to also have an independent review of the whole process for the survey, including auditing the methodology, reviewing the questionnaire and its execution, as well as interpreting the data, the IOC AC engaged with the Swiss Centre of Expertise in the Social Sciences (FORS), an organisation with extensive experience in high-quality academic surveys. The FORS implements large-scale national and international surveys, offers data and research information services to researchers and academic institutions, and conducts methodological and thematic research.

Lenz & Staehelin (L&S)

As one of the largest and highly respected law firms in Switzerland, Lenz & Staehelin (L&S) has more than 200 highly specialised, multilingual lawyers, the majority of whom have international experience. As part of its work, the IOC AC engaged with L&S to seek feedback and advice from the human rights, sports law and non-profit governance perspectives.

4. OUTCOME AND RESULTS OF THE QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

The online survey, which [launched](#) on 7 December 2020 and closed on 7 January 2021, complements the qualitative feedback received through a series of calls held by the IOC AC with many ACs of NOCs and IFs, along with findings from national consultations conducted independently by NOCs and NOC ACs.

The IOC AC 10-minute survey was made available in 10 languages, and deployed using unique online survey links, so as to reach as wide a group of Olympians and elite athletes as possible, whilst simultaneously ensuring that only those falling into this elite group were able to participate.

All verified Olympians and elite athletes who were **already registered** in the **Athlete365 database** received an email from the **IOC AC** inviting them to participate in the survey and providing them with a **unique online survey link**.

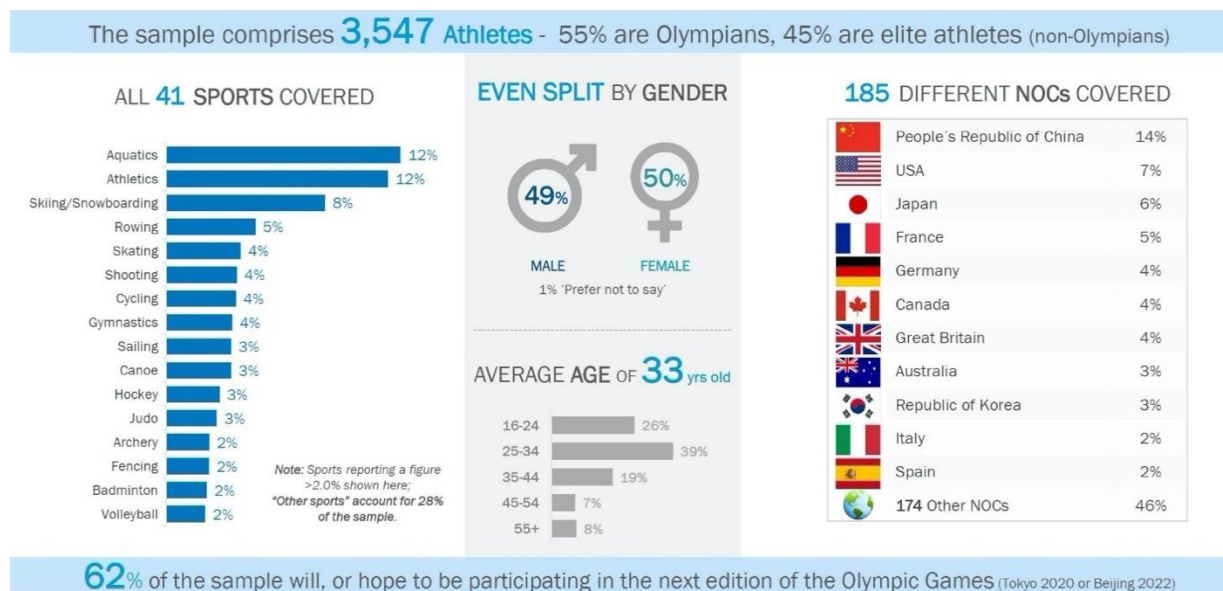
Elite athletes and Olympians who were **not previously registered** in the database were **able and encouraged to register** and, having done so, were invited to complete the survey using a unique survey link.

The opportunity to participate in the survey was widely **promoted** on **Athlete365 social media** and through **NOCnet** (a platform open to all NOCs), as well as via **several email reminders** and reminders via the athlete representative network and global calls with the network.

The data captured from the survey was independently processed and analysed by a professional research agency (PSE). To further ensure a robust and independent process supported by experts in this field, the IOC AC engaged with the Swiss Centre of Expertise in Social Sciences ([FORS](#)).

Link to full PSE report [here](#).

Profile of the sample



3,547 athletes (Olympians, current or retired elite athletes) completed the survey.

Responses were received from all 41 Olympic sports and 185 NOCs.

NOC:

The largest contributors (all of which comprised more than 100 respondents each) were:

- China 14%
- USA 7%
- Japan 6%
- France 5%
- Germany 4%; Canada 4%; GB 4%
- Australia 3%

Sports:

- Aquatics 12%; Athletics 12%
- Skiing/Snowboarding 8%
- Rowing 5%
- Skating 4%; Shooting 4%; Cycling 4%; Gymnastics 4%

Gender:

- 49% Male
- 50% Female
- (1% 'Prefer not to say')

Age:

- The average age of the respondents was 33 years old

Summary of topline results

Typically, a small proportion (10%) of athletes often demonstrate or express their views publicly; 49% never do so publicly, while 41% do so occasionally.

In terms of appropriate ways for athletes to demonstrate or express views during the Olympic Games:

- Places involving the media are most likely to be deemed appropriate by athletes to demonstrate or express their individual views (42% deem “In the media” appropriate (4 or 5 out of 5); 38% for “Press conferences”; 36% for “Mixed zone”).
- Only around 1 in 7 deem it appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their views on the podium (16% considering it “appropriate (4 or 5 out of 5)”, on the field of play (14%) or during the Opening Ceremony (14%).
- Moreover, a clear majority believe that it is not appropriate for athletes to demonstrate or express their views in these three places (67% think that “the Podium” is ‘not appropriate (1 or 2 out of 5)’; 70% for both the “Field of play” and “during the Opening Ceremony”).
- Over 40% agree other athletes’ actions on the podium or field of play would detract from their Olympic experience/performance.

Looking at new ways* to give athletes further opportunity to demonstrate or express their views during the Olympic Games:

- “A moment of solidarity during the Opening Ceremony” (48% “important (4 or 5 out of 5)”) and “Unified messaging on the field of play” (46%), are most likely to be deemed important to introduce.
- 37% would not use one of the new ways if they were introduced, but would not be opposed to other athletes doing so.
- 19% would not do so and would be opposed to others doing so.

**New ways: “A moment of solidarity against discrimination during the Opening Ceremony”; “An area for athletes to demonstrate or express their views openly in the Olympic Village”; “Unified messaging around inclusion and solidarity on the field of play”; “Wearing clothing or armbands in an Olympic venue with collective messaging on”; “Wearing clothing or armbands in an Olympic venue with an individual/personal message on”; “Allowing physical gestures in an Olympic venue, as a way to demonstrate or express a view”*

Ways that promote the Olympic values are popular amongst athletes to demonstrate or express views during the Olympic Games:

- “Unified messaging promoting the Olympic values and Olympic Truce” is the preference for 47% of athletes to demonstrate or express their views, rather than via individual/personal messaging about a specific cause (8%), or wanting to do both (28%).
- “Displaying a message on an armband/tattoo/badge/clothing that promotes the Olympic values” is the most appropriate option, among those put forward.

Online communication is a popular choice amongst athletes:

- Athletes seem to be open to a variety of online platforms that sports organisations could provide to help them demonstrate or express their views.
- Email and social media are commonly cited as the best ways to communicate various guidelines to athletes.

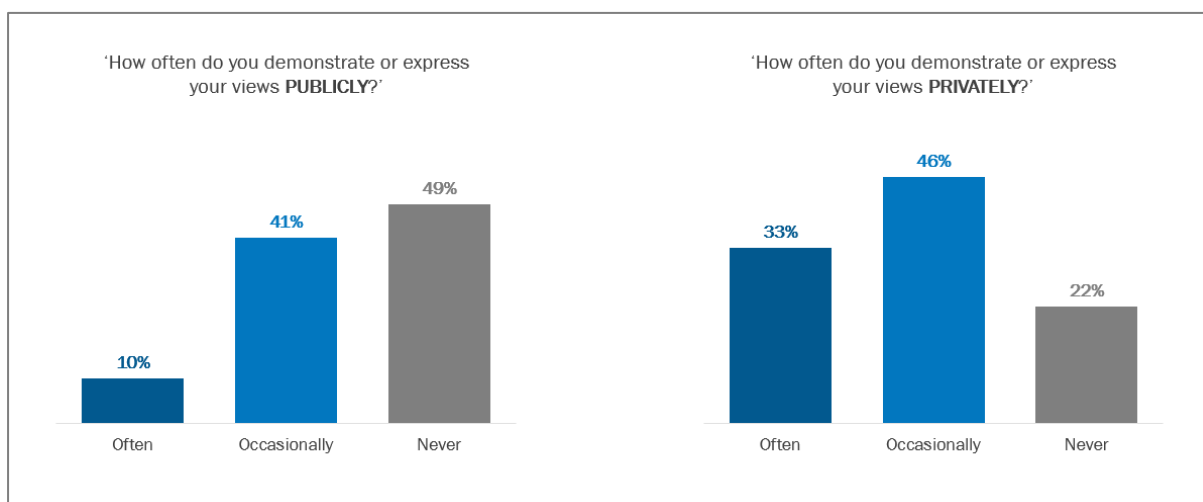
Results by question

Q1 - 8 were specific demographic profiling questions, the results of which are summarised under the “Profile of the sample” section of this chapter.

The base for each question reported is all 3,547 athletes, unless otherwise stated.

Q9. How often do you demonstrate or express your views on politics, religion, sexuality, racism, the environment, gender, forms of discrimination or other causes in a public manner or privately?

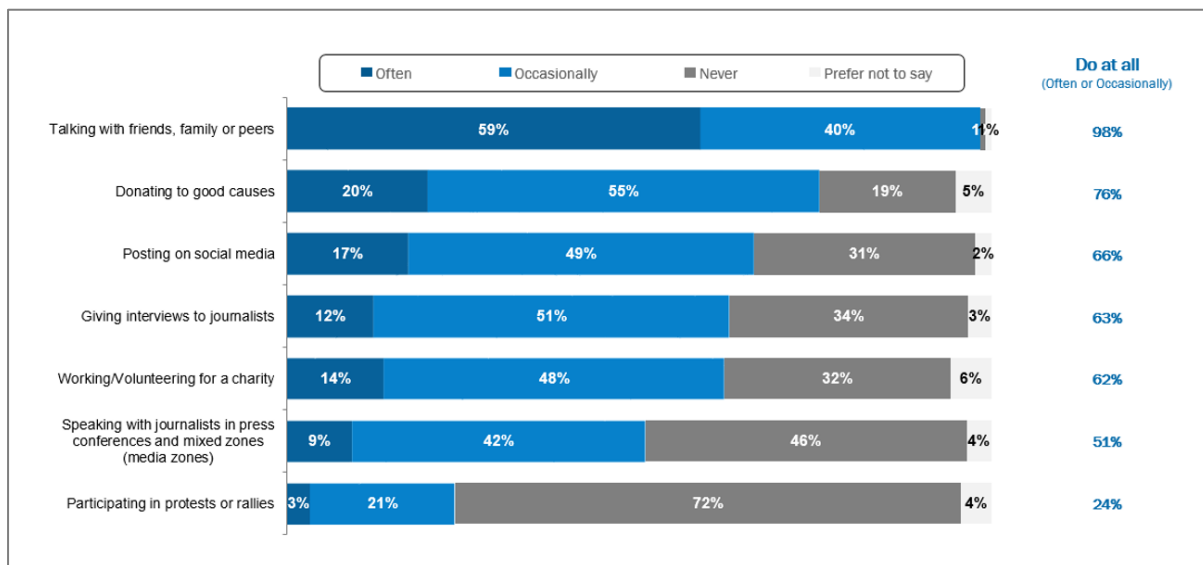
Only one-tenth of athletes often demonstrate or express their views publicly. 78% of athletes demonstrate or express their views privately, often or occasionally.



Q10. How often do you demonstrate or express your views in the following ways?

[Base: Respondents who express their views publicly or privately at all (often or occasionally), n=2,808]

Amongst athletes who demonstrate or express their views publicly or privately, the most common way is by talking with friends, family or peers. The least common way is participating in protests or rallies.

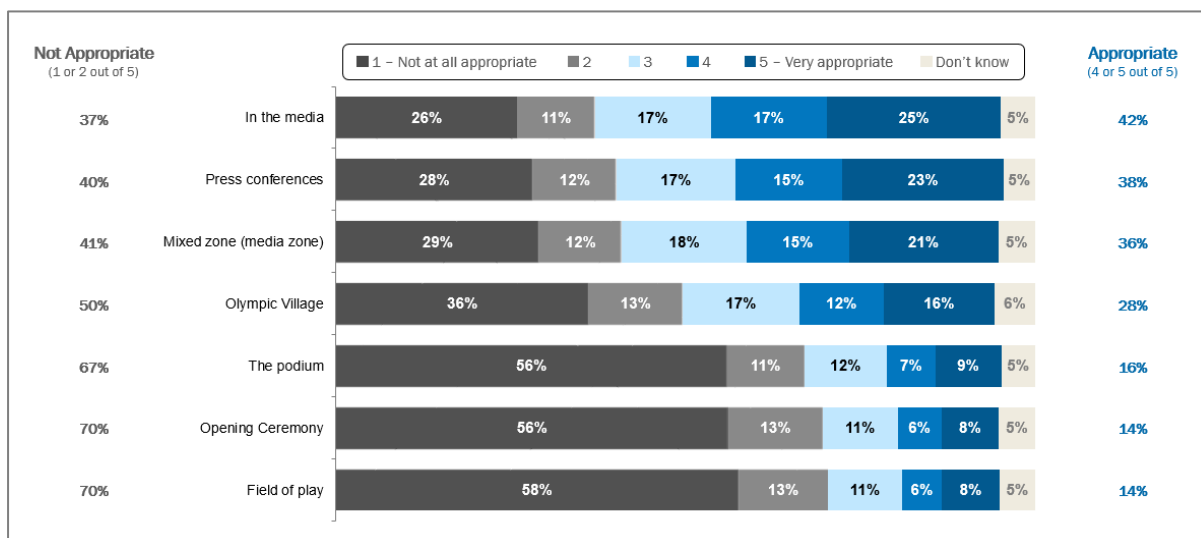


Q11. In Olympic venues, during the Olympic Games, how appropriate do you think it is for athletes to have an opportunity to demonstrate or to express their individual views on political issues and other topics, in the following places?

[Respondents used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “Not at all appropriate” and 5 means “Very appropriate”.]

Of the options presented, athletes are most likely to deem specific media-related places, such as press conferences and mixed zones, as appropriate to demonstrate or express their individual views, though many also feel that such places are not appropriate.

Only small proportions deem the field of play (14% “appropriate (4 or 5 out of 5)”), the Opening Ceremony (14%) and the podium (16%) to be appropriate places. Moreover, a clear majority of athletes believe that it is not appropriate to demonstrate or express their views in these three places – **67% deem the podium “not appropriate (1 or 2 out of 5)”**, and **70% think the same for the Opening Ceremony and for the field of play.**



Q12. How important do you think it is that the following new ways are introduced to give athletes further opportunity to demonstrate or express their views during the Olympic Games?

[Respondents used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “Not at all important” and 5 means “Very important”.]

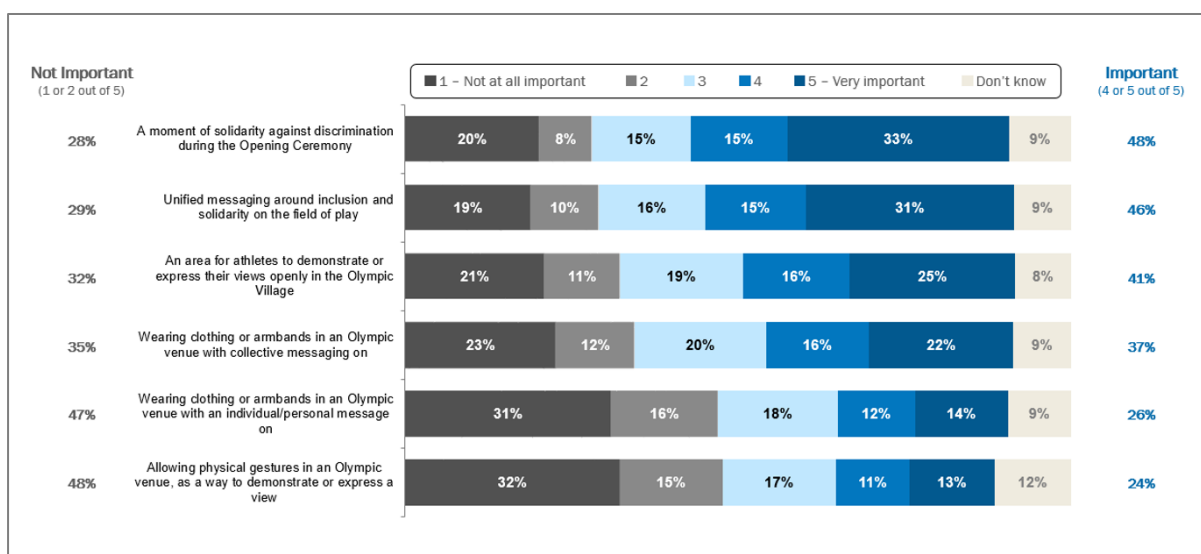
Introducing

“a moment of solidarity during the Opening Ceremony”

and having

“unified messaging on the field of play”,

are most likely to be deemed important new ways to give athletes further opportunity to demonstrate or express their views during the Olympic Games.



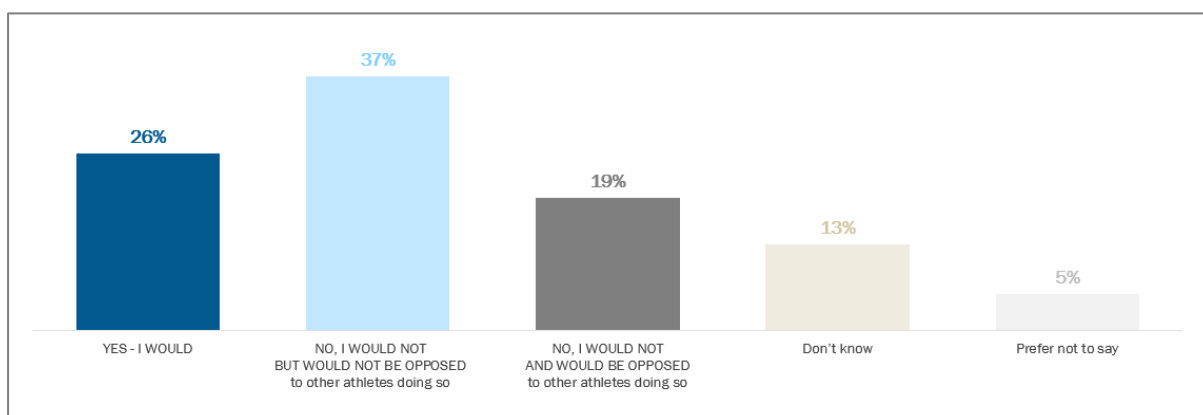
Q13. Would you demonstrate or express your views during the Olympic Games in one or more of the ways* you have just been shown?

**Ways just shown: “A moment of solidarity against discrimination during the Opening Ceremony”; “An area for athletes to demonstrate or express their views openly in the Olympic Village”; “Unified messaging around inclusion and solidarity on the field of play”; “Wearing clothing or armbands in an Olympic venue with collective messaging on”; “Wearing clothing or armbands in an Olympic venue with an individual/personal message on”; “Allowing physical gestures in an Olympic venue, as a way to demonstrate or express a view”*

A quarter (26%) of athletes would demonstrate or express their views in one or more of the ways outlined*.

A further 37% would not do so, but would not be opposed to other athletes doing so.

One-fifth (19%) would not do so, and would be opposed to others doing so.



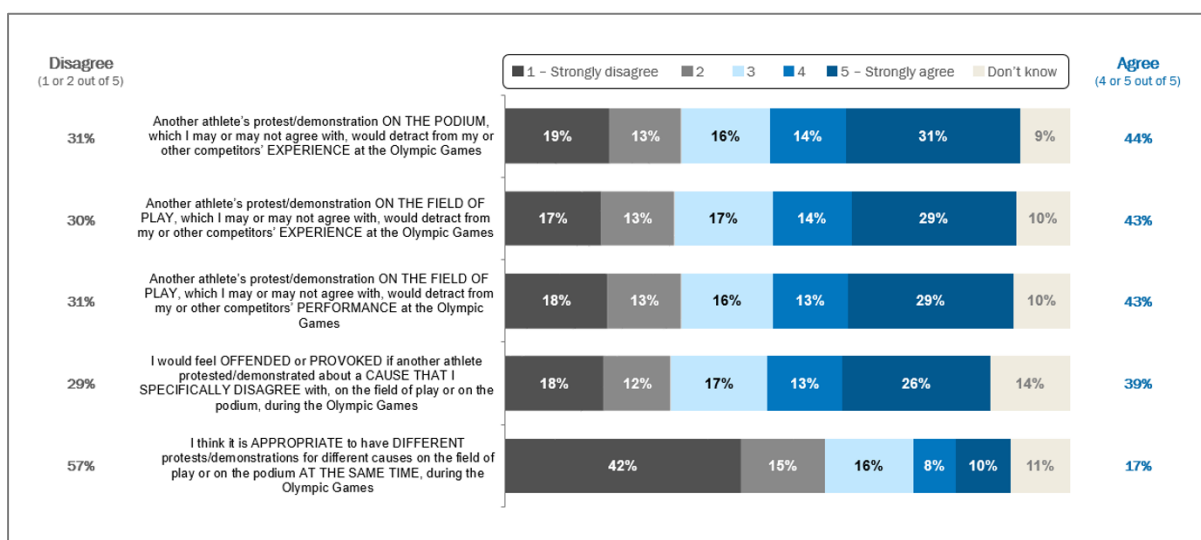
Q14. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?

[Respondents used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “Strongly disagree” and 5 means “Strongly agree”.]

17% of athletes think it’s “appropriate to have different protests/demonstrations for different causes on the field of play or on the podium at the same time, during the Olympic Games”.

While, over 40% think other athletes’ actions on the podium or field of play would detract from their experience/performance.

Opinions are somewhat split in terms the impacts of other athletes’ actions.



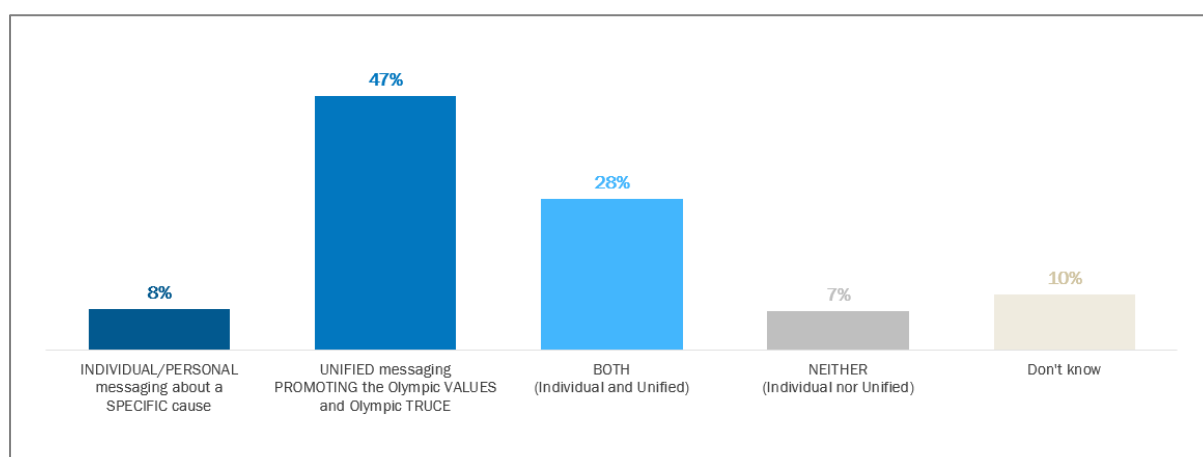
Q15. During the Olympic Games, would you prefer to be able to demonstrate or express your views through individual/personal messaging about a specific cause or would you prefer to be part of a unified message promoting the Olympic values of excellence, respect and friendship and the Olympic Truce?

“Unified messaging promoting the Olympic values and Olympic Truce”

is the preference for 47% of athletes to demonstrate or express their views, rather than via

“individual/personal messaging about a specific cause” (8%),

or “both” an individual and unified messaging (28%).

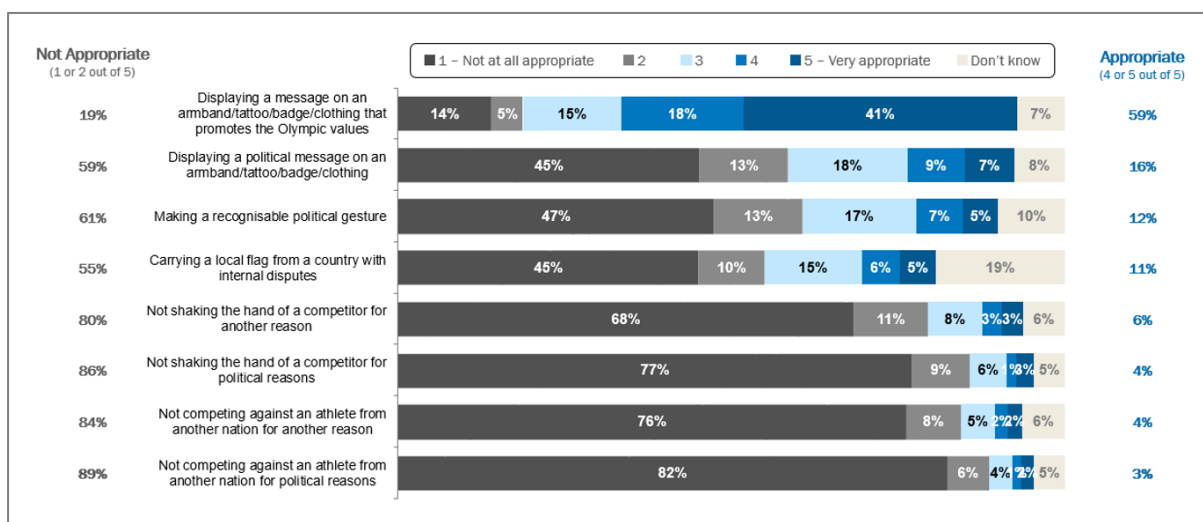


Q16. During the Olympic Games, how appropriate do you think each of the following ways of demonstrating or expressing a view are?

[Respondents used a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “Not at all appropriate” and 5 means “Very appropriate”.]

Of the options put forward, **59%** deemed “displaying a message on an armband/tattoo/badge/clothing that promotes the Olympic values” to be an appropriate way for athletes to demonstrate or express their views.

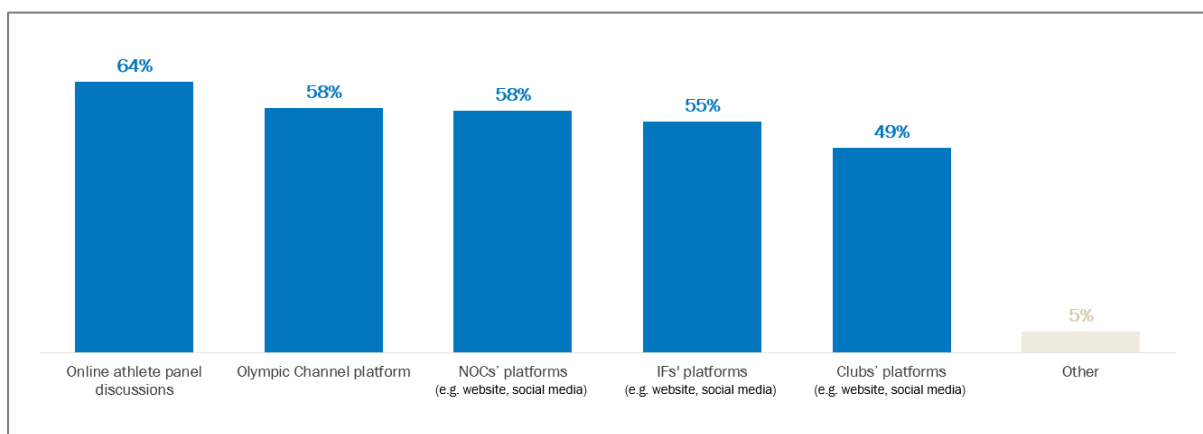
Not shaking hands with, or competing against, another athlete for political or other reasons are clearly deemed not appropriate.



Q17. What online platforms or opportunities would you like sporting organisations to provide you with before, during or after the Olympic Games to demonstrate or express your views?

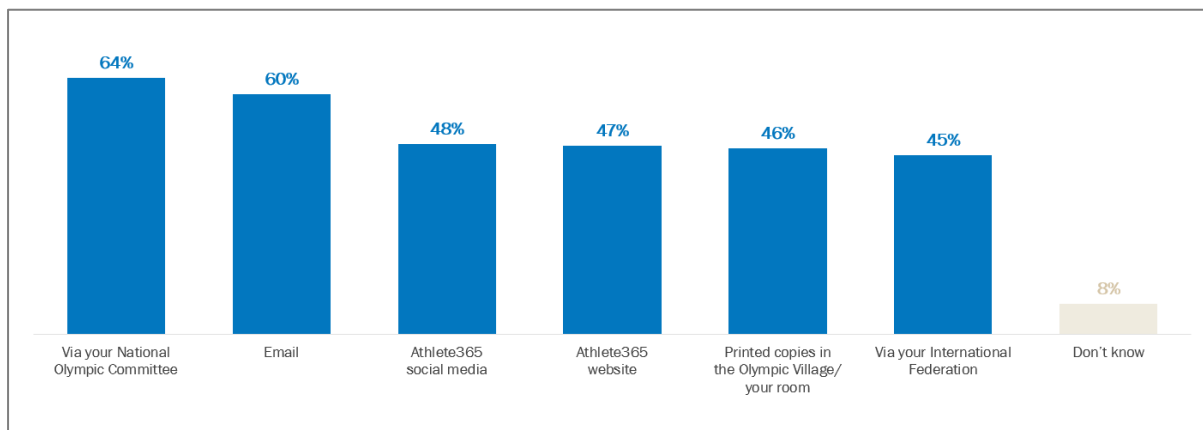
[Respondents were required to answer “Yes”, “No” or “Don’t know” for each option. Results for responses of “Yes” are reported here.]

Athletes seem to be open to a variety of online platforms, provided by sporting organisations, to help them demonstrate or express their views, with “online athlete panel discussions” marginally the most popular.



Q19. What do you think are the best ways to communicate various guidelines, including Rule 50, to athletes?

A variety of ways are deemed suitable to communicate various guidelines, including Rule 50, to athletes.



5. SUMMARY OF THE QUALITATIVE CONSULTATION WITH ACS

All NOC and IF ACs were encouraged to consult and engage with athletes within their local and sporting contexts, and to discuss the results with the IOC AC. This process was intended both to empower athletes' commissions around the world in their roles and to obtain a truly global perspective.

The qualitative process of the consultation began with a series of calls lead by IOC AC members with the ACs of NOCs and IFs that reached out to the IOC AC.

Discussions focused on key issues related to athlete protests and gathering feedback from the consultations that had taken place within their athlete communities.

Written statements that are public can be consulted on Athlete365 [here](#) and are also linked individually below.

The quotes below are taken from those publicly available statements which were submitted to the IOC AC and non-public statements where the AC consented to the IOC AC using its quotes in this report.

A list of AC consultations is available in the appendix.

a) Additional ways for athletes to express views

i. General supportive quotes for introducing additional ways to express opinions

Responses from ACs acknowledged an appetite for introducing additional ways for athletes to express their views during the Games. For example, the first of the recommendations produced from the Australia AC's national consultation stated:

"Athletes should be provided opportunities to express themselves in forums away from the field of play and podium" ([Australia AC](#))

On a similar note, the Canadian AC – through its seven recommendations to the IOC AC – acknowledged the need to "protect" spaces such as the field of play, but to explore and implement other opportunities to express their views:

"V. Maintain neutral or protected spaces as they are critical to the success of the Olympic Games. This includes the addition of designated spaces inside the Olympic Village. The field of play must be a protected space.

VII. Find and implement other opportunities to meaningfully celebrate unity and inclusion with specific emphasis on taking a stand against racism and discrimination." ([Canada AC](#))

The Ireland AC also believes that some relaxation to the current Rule 50 guidelines should take place, as long as any expression does not detrimentally impact another athlete's Olympic Games experience:

"We believe that Irish athletes feel Rule 50 should be reformed rather than abolished – Rule 50 should allow for some forms of protest as long as it is done in a respectful and peaceful way that does not detract from the spirit of the Olympics or have a detrimental personal impact on other athletes and their Olympic experience..." ([Ireland AC](#))

The Lesotho AC suggested that its athletes would like to have increased opportunities to express their views, but also highlighted that the current framework allowed athletes to express their views “in a fair manner, without fear of intimidating other athletes”:

“The Lesotho NOC athletes would like to have increased opportunities for expression leading up to the Games and at the Olympic Games... The athletes feel that this is the right piece of legislation that lets them express themselves during the Games in a fair manner and without fear of intimidation from the other athletes.” (Lesotho AC)

Similarly, the Namibia AC, although agreeing with Rule 50 in its current form, when asked if its athlete community would like to have increased opportunities for expression, understood that other athletes did feel the need to express themselves:

“Not necessarily. We have enough opportunities; however, we do understand that athletes feel the need of more opportunities to express themselves.” (Namibia AC)

Additionally, the New Zealand AC believes that increased opportunities are needed in Olympic venues for athletes to express their views, as long as the expression aligns with the Olympic values:

“As such, the New Zealand Olympic Committee Athletes’ Commission believes a framework that permits free speech within Olympic Venues should be developed. The framework should ensure any element of free speech does not incite hate, or violence, or is not intolerant of minorities and its expression aligns with the Olympic Values of excellence, friendship, and respect

The New Zealand Olympic Committee Athletes’ Commission accepts the challenges freedom of speech may pose if expressed on the podium.” ([New Zealand AC](#))

The USOPC AC adopted the “Team USA Council on Racial and Social Justice Recommendations for IOC Rule 50” and supports protests and demonstrations that promote human rights and social justice initiatives being permitted at the Games.

“Establish a no-punishment-policy for protests and demonstrations that are aimed at promoting human rights/social justice initiatives and advancing the human rights mission of the Olympic and Paralympic movements.” ([USOPC AC](#))

ii. Opening/Closing Ceremonies (quotes from the ACs)

It can be generally understood that, when the position of an AC is favourable towards additional ways for athletes to express their views, it would also be supportive of athletes having an opportunity for expression – of varying kinds – during the opening or closing ceremonies. For example:

“Athletes would support a moment of solidarity at the Opening and Closing Ceremonies.” ([Australia AC](#))

“Opening and closing ceremony could be a good place where those who choose to wear/show something in addition to national uniform could be appropriate.” (Yuhan Tan, AC Chair - [Belgium AC](#))

“Recommendation 7: Explore other opportunities to meaningfully celebrate unity and inclusion, taking a stand against racism and discrimination. Possible examples include... during Opening or Closing Ceremonies” ([Canada AC](#))

In contrast, some ACs specifically stated that they would be against athlete protests or demonstrations during the opening/closing ceremonies:

“We feel that the field of play and ceremonies should remain neutral and utmost respect for all athletes as a core value of the IOC.” (Papua New Guinea AC)

“TOC Athletes' Commission support Rule 50 as it stands and is not in favour of any demonstrations at the field of play, during ceremonies or on the podium” (Turkey AC)

iii. Olympic Village (quotes from the ACs)

Among those ACs that were generally supportive of additional ways for athletes to express their views, the Olympic Village was a popular area for such expression to take place, provided it would not be disruptive to athletes' experience or performance.

“Athletes would like the opportunity to express themselves or engage in discussion with fellow Olympians in a forum within the Olympic Village” ([Australia AC](#))

“Establish a designated space within the Olympic Village where athletes can peacefully demonstrate, creating space for dialogue and opportunities to learn.” ([Canada AC](#))

“If there was a place in the village that could host this [unified messaging], it would give respectful meaning and an equal opportunity to support a cause.” (Papua New Guinea AC)

“it should be noted that 49% were also in favour of this being extended to designated zones within the Olympic Village.” ([France AC](#))

In contrast, some ACs stated their positions that they would be specifically against athletes being able to express their views in the Olympic Village:

“The field of play, the podium and the village should always be protected so as to safeguard the Olympic Spirit” ([China AC](#))

“We strongly feel that the Olympic Games should be fully protected from any political demonstrations or protests, especially the podium, field of play and the Olympic Village.” ([Slovakia AC](#))

iv. Field of play (quotes from the ACs)

The vast majority of ACs, regardless of whether they were supportive of additional ways for athletes to express their views, were against expression or demonstration taking place on the field of play.

“Recommendation 5: Demonstrations should not interfere with the competition itself. Thus, the Field Of Play, exclusive of the Mixed Zone, should be protected space.” ([Canada AC](#))

“The field of play, the podium and the village should always be protected so as to safeguard the Olympic Spirit” ([China AC](#))

“Each individual athlete has the right to her/his opinion, but the Field of Play is not the place to conduct politics.” (World Archery AC)

“Athletes should be provided opportunities to express themselves in forums away from the field of play and podium.” ([Australia AC](#))

“More than 80% of all respondents said a protest on the field of play would detract from the performance or experience of athletes.” ([Australia AC](#))

“Olympic Games must remain [focused] on athletes' performances, spirit and the international unity and harmony. No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda should be permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.” ([Lithuania AC](#))

“TOC Athletes' Commission support Rule 50 as it stands and is not in favour of any demonstrations at the field of play, during ceremonies or on the podium.” (Turkey AC)

However, it is important to note that the [USOPC AC](#) would be supportive of protests and demonstrations that promote human rights and social justice initiatives (cf. section a.i.). Furthermore, the statement from [New Zealand AC](#) could also be understood as support for expression to take place on the field of play, provided the expression does not incite hate or violence or is not intolerant of minorities and aligns with the Olympic values.

v. The podium (quotes from the ACs)

Similarly, in relation to the stance on the field of play, the vast majority of ACs, regardless of whether they are supportive of additional ways for athletes to express their views, were against expression or demonstration taking place on the podium.

“Athletes should be provided opportunities to express themselves in forums away from the field of play and podium.” ([Australia AC](#))

“The field of play, the podium and the village should always be protected so as to safeguard the Olympic Spirit.” ([China AC](#))

“... a strong preference for forms of protest that would not involve or impact the podium.” ([Ireland AC](#))

“It is very important to preserve and comply with the adopted rules, in particular rule 50, which at this time ensures that any demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is prohibited at the Olympic venues, competition venues and other Olympic zones.” (Ukraine AC).

“If any form of expression should be allowed, then it should mainly be about unity, gender equality, and anti-racism, and not about political or religious issues and not at all Olympic sites. For example, definitely not on the podium, as our survey shows.” (Yuhan Tan, AC Chair - [Belgium AC](#)).

“TOC Athletes’ Commission support Rule 50 as it stands and is not in favour of any demonstrations at the field of play, during ceremonies or on the podium.” (Turkey AC)

“The Olympic Games should remain a sports festival, a place where athletes are able to demonstrate their sporting achievement and successes.” ([Russia AC](#))

“By keeping Rule 50 athletes are protected from external pressures to make political statements that they don’t want to make, and allow them to compete and celebrate sport in the way that they should at the pinnacle of their career. At no moment should political actions take away the attention from the accomplishments of the athletic performance in the spirit of the Olympic Games.” (World Archery AC)

“All forms of petulant display on the podiums should be refrained to ensure the utmost respect amongst the athlete.” (South Korea AC)

It should also be noted that there were ACs that were not completely against allowing athletes to express their views on the podium, for example:

“With respect to other spaces, including the podium, Opening and Closing Ceremonies, there is no clear majority that supports whether or not to demonstrate in such places.” ([Canada AC](#)).

(Germany AC) “Athletes should be able to profess to the values of a free and democratic society at any time, including in the context of sporting competitions.’ Freedom of expression, also on the podium, should be allowed in accordance with internationally recognized human rights. New guidelines should be ‘sufficiently specified, least-intrusive and [only impose] duly justified restrictions on the expression of opinion by athletes”.

“DOSB AC is aware ‘that freedom of expression can be restricted through other fundamental rights.’ The AC also said that ‘sporting achievements of athletes should be appreciated appropriately and as undisturbed as possible.” ([Germany AC](#))

b) Current ways for athletes to express views

In contrast to the ACs that supported a relaxation of Rule 50 and additional opportunities for athletes to express their views, there was also strong support for Rule 50 to remain in its current form, and backing for the current opportunities available to athletes to express their views.

i. General quotes for not introducing additional ways, and to preserve Rule 50 in its current form

Several ACs expressed support for Rule 50 in its current form and stated that athletes have many opportunities within the current framework to express their views. The following quotes are taken from the positions of ACs which showed support for preserving Rule 50 as it is and expressed an opinion that the focus of the Olympic Games should be on sport and athletic achievement:

Olympic Games must remain on athletes' performances, spirit and the international unity and harmony. No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda should be permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas.” ([Lithuania AC](#))

“TOC Athletes' Commission support Rule 50 as it stands and is not in favour of any demonstrations at the field of play, during ceremonies or on the podium.” (Turkey AC)

“We agree with Rule 50. The focus should purely be on sport and athletes' performance.” (Namibia AC)

“The Olympic Games should remain a sports festival, a place where athletes are able to demonstrate their sporting achievement and successes, and does not become a platform for protest movement, political statements, making money and false popularity.” ([Russia AC](#))

“Nobody forbids us, athletes, to express our opinion, we have a lot of ways to express our position in public, but this should happen outside the Olympic Movement.” ([Russia AC](#))

“We acknowledge that athletes already have a lot of opportunities to be vocal and express their views on different topics, even during the Games, such as press conferences, social media, outside of the Olympic venues.” ([Slovakia AC](#))

“The majority of Chinese athletes are not inclined to allow athletes' expression of personal views at the Olympic Games, especially the personal views that have nothing to do with sport. Most respondents believe that the athletes come to the Olympic Games to compete. Some also state that the existing opportunities provided by the IOC for the athletes to express themselves are sufficient.” ([China AC](#))

“By keeping Rule 50 athletes are protected from external pressures to make political statements that they don't want to make, and allow them to compete and celebrate sport in the way that they should at the pinnacle of their career. At no moment should political actions take away the attention from the accomplishments of the athletic performance in the spirit of the Olympic Games.” (World Archery AC)

“The AC overwhelmingly agree the current rules are suitable and should remain as is.” (Papua New Guinea AC).

“The NOC of Ukraine Athletes' Commission, as well as the Ukrainian Olympians Association, discussed and unanimously expressed a clear position on the need to adhere to the Olympic Charter and, in particular, its rule 50.” (Ukraine AC).

“There appears to be no clear, unequivocal position with regard to changing Rule 50.” ([France AC](#))

ii. Mixed zones, press conferences and in the media

Across the feedback received from ACs, in addition to the generic support for the current provisions within the current Rule 50 guidelines, there was also specific support for athletes to continue to be able to share their views in the mixed zones, other press conferences and in the media:

“Demonstrations should not interfere with the competition itself. Thus, the Field of Play, exclusive of the Mixed Zone, should be protected space.” ([Canada AC](#))

“The majority however believe the field of play and medal podium should be off-limits for protest as these could detract from the performance or experience of fellow athletes. Alternative options such as social media or media interviews were preferable.” (Australia AC)

“the vast majority of respondents – 80% – said digital and traditional media, mixed zones and press conferences, i.e. the places where this is already authorised.” France AC)

Additionally, other specific mentions of social media emerged through the AC feedback, as another of the opportunities for athletes to express their views in the current Rule 50 framework:

“Olympians gain enough media attention to appeal through their social media channels, so they can certainly use their independent accounts to express their beliefs – whether that be religious or political.” (South Korea AC).

“Athletes would take part in any unified messaging that supports a worthy cause, social media posts, tagging, signatures or any binding poster/handprints/videos etc. as a way to support athlete expressions.” (Papua New Guinea AC).

c) Calls for awareness, education and additional clarity on Rule 50

Regardless of the varying positions that ACs adopted on the topic of Rule 50 and athlete expression at the Olympic Games, there was near consensus that additional education and clarity around the guidelines are needed.

“There is a need for the establishment of clear guidelines on the specific behaviours that are deemed appropriate or not appropriate during the Olympic Games, while respecting each individual’s freedom of speech.” (South Korea AC).

“Recommendation 2: Clearly define the terms used within Rule 50, including definitions of, but not limited to, ‘Demonstration’, ‘Protest’, and ‘Propaganda’ in the Olympic Charter.” (Canada AC)

“Many of our athletes are not aware yet of the Olympic charter, and we (Belgian AC), have to do better to inform our athletes of the content of the charter. On another hand, many of the responses came from athletes who haven’t participated yet at the OG, and therefore have not read it yet.” (Yuhan Tan, AC Chair - Belgium AC).

“The athletes in Lesotho were not aware of Rule 50 Guidelines until recently when the AC introduced it in the National Athletes Forum. Both the objectives and the opportunities available were introduced to them, but as AC, we believe that a lot of education still has to be done, especially of the team that will represent the NOC in the Tokyo Games.” (Lesotho AC).

“Around 90% of the athletes did not know about Rule 50 or what it was. During the Nigerian Athletes’ Forum, the AC spent time to discuss Rule 50 in more detail. More education on the topic is needed, as well as support from entourage.” (Nigeria AC).

“Our athletes are generally aware of the rule, not the specifics.” (Papua New Guinea AC).

“When we went into more detail about the terms used in the Rule and what they mean, there was quite a significant lack of understanding.” (France AC)

However, there were instances where ACs communicated to the IOC AC that their athletes were well informed on the various aspects of Rule 50:

Most Chinese athletes are aware of the Rule 50 Guidelines and its objective. Around 30% responding athletes feel not sufficiently informed about Rule 50 before and they state that the survey helps them to understand it with greater clarity.” ([China AC](#))

d) Sanctioning

A final emerging theme from the feedback received from ACs involved sanctioning. There were suggestions from some ACs for the various sanctions for Rule 50 violations to be clearly spelt out:

“There should be a framework for how Rule 50.2 breaches will be assessed and applicable sanctions.” ([Australia AC](#))

Recommendation 6: Clearly define and outline the consequences for violating rules around Demonstration, Protest and Propaganda with focus on being transparent and consistent. Establish a spectrum/tiered approach that clearly delineates “degrees of violation” with the associated repercussions for that level of violation.” ([Canada AC](#))

“DOSB AC therefore calls for the implementation of the following measures... the accompanying introduction of a clearly defined sanctioning practice for breaches and violations.” ([Germany AC](#))

“Establish an independent regulatory body charged with (a) reviewing instances of and (b) determining consequences for ‘divisive disruptions’ to the Games as defined in the Team USA Recommendations for IOC Rule 50.” ([USOPC AC](#))

“Implement a fair and transparent remedy process available to be implemented during Games time”. ([New Zealand AC](#))

“The AC overwhelmingly agree the current rules are suitable and should remain as is, only questioning the disciplinary action to be taken. Understandably it is on a case by case basis”. ([Papua New Guinea AC](#)).

Note: The themes set out in this section of the report have been identified based on the IOC AC’s review of statements provided by the ACs of NOCs and IFs that participated in the consultation process. Any references to recommendations or comments from any such ACs in this report are for summary purposes only and are qualified in their entirety by the full reports published or provided by the respective ACs. For greater clarity, the use of any quotes in this qualitative section are not an endorsement, by the ACs quoted, of this report.

6. FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION ASSESSMENT

Within the framework of this consultation the IOC AC reached out to the global network of Athletes' Commissions and to athletes directly to gauge athletes' thoughts around freedom of expression and how they mesh with Rule 50 (2) of the Olympic Charter which states: "*No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues of other areas.*" This Rule applies to athletes, but also to *all* participants and accredited persons at the Olympic Games, including spectators.

Although debates around Rule 50 (2) usually tend to focus on it as a restriction and notably as a restriction on freedom of expression, the IOC AC consultation revealed a wide range of opinions on the subject. These varied from some athletes and Athletes' Commissions expressing the view that the Rule does not violate their rights but actually offers them a level of protection, to others calling for abolition of the Rule in the belief that it interferes with or even infringes on their right to the freedom of expression. Other expressive rights are protected under international human rights law as well, including freedom of religion and peaceful assembly, and may be relevant to this discussion.

The IOC Athletes' Commission mandate is to support athletes and the athlete community at large and take on board their concerns. In order to get as balanced a view as possible, the IOC AC consulted with specialised lawyers in the field of human rights to gain their perspectives.

This information helped the IOC AC in drafting their recommendations. The IOC AC hopes that it will also be helpful to athletes in their own deliberations around Rule 50.

FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION – SOURCES & GENERAL PRINCIPLES

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), the global standard for human rights, provides the standard for the right to freedom of expression, which is understood to include the right to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers' and through any medium.

The standard was codified in the binding International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which provides as follows:

Article 19(2): *Everyone shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of his choice.*

Article 19(3): *The exercise of the rights provided for in paragraph 2 of this article carries with it special duties and responsibilities. It may therefore be subject to certain restrictions, but these shall only be such as are provided by law and are necessary:*

- (a) For respect of the rights or reputations of others;*
- (b) For the protection of national security or of public order (ordre public), or of public health or morals.*

It is also recognised across multiple regional instruments, including:

- The European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)
- The American Convention on Human Rights (ACHR)
- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR)

In light of the extent to which the standards exist in the UDHR and binding instruments, it is widely recognised that the freedom of expression and other rights are binding under customary international law.

In principle, States are the primary subjects of international and regional human rights instruments. Private entities, international organisations and non-State actors (e.g. the IOC) may become indirectly bound by these instruments insofar as States are responsible for upholding and implementing them within their own jurisdictions through laws and the court system.

In addition to the binding international and regional instruments, the United Nations has adopted a set of non-binding guidance that private actors should follow in order to respect human rights. The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs), which the IOC has included as a requirement in host contracts, emphasise that private businesses should respect the human rights that all individuals enjoy. As a consequence of that responsibility to respect, the UNGPs encourage companies to conduct human rights due diligence and to take steps to prevent, or at least mitigate, the human rights harms that their operations may cause. In the case of many private entities, their principles and standards for responsible conduct are set out in their articles of association/incorporation (the Olympic Charter in the case of the IOC).

CONDITIONS TO RESTRICT FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

Under certain defined conditions, freedom of expression can be limited (i) where provided by law, (ii) where necessary and proportionate and (iii) to achieve a legitimate objective. An individual's right to freedom of expression may be restricted only when it can be demonstrated that the restriction meets each of these three conditions.

While all instruments noted above have their specificities, there are some general principles that are common to all of them.

- **Restrictions must be prescribed by law**

Any restrictions to freedom of expression must be contained in a law or a rule. The law must be clear enough for individuals to understand them and behave accordingly, while those responsible for enforcing them must understand which expressions are restricted and which are not.

In the case of the Olympic Charter, this stipulation is contained in Rule 50, paragraph 2 which states: "*No kind of demonstration or political, religious or racial propaganda is permitted in any Olympic sites, venues or other areas*". This stipulation is further specified by the Rule 50 Guidelines, which limit the temporal and geographical scope of the restrictions on freedom of expression to the field of play, the Olympic village, Olympic medal ceremonies and the opening, closing and other official ceremonies.

- **Restrictions need to be for a legitimate purpose**

Any restrictions imposed upon freedom of expression must have precise and legitimate reasons. Legitimate reasons are the following:

- to respect the rights and reputations of others
- to protect national security or public order
- to prevent incitement to violence (e.g. in the context of hate speech, racism, religious hatred, propaganda for war)
- for public health or moral reasons.

Legitimate purposes supporting restrictions to freedom of expression have been further specified in regional instruments and case law; for example, the restriction of freedom of expression to protect the political neutrality of an institution.

Rule 50 (2) should be read in conjunction with the missions and role of the IOC, including Rule 2 (5), which states that one of IOC's roles is to *"take action to strengthen the unity of the Olympic Movement, to protect its independence, to maintain and promote its political neutrality and to preserve the autonomy of sport"*. It also needs to be read in conjunction with Rule 2 (11), which provides that the IOC also has a role to *"oppose any political or commercial abuse of sport and athletes"*.

Similarly, Rule 50 should also be read in the context of the Fundamental Principles of Olympism, notably Principle 2: *"to place sport at the service of the harmonious development of humankind, with a view to promoting a peaceful society concerned with the preservation of human dignity"*. As well as Principle 5, *"sports organisations within the Olympic Movement shall apply political neutrality"*.

In the context of the Olympic Games, such limitations as stipulated in Rule 50 (2) are drawn from the following reasons:

- out of respect for fellow competitors and their sports performance (an athlete who has achieved glory on the field of play has the right to celebrate that performance without it being overshadowed by the activities and behaviour of others)
- to protect the political neutrality of the Olympic Games and ensure
 - o the focus of the Games remains on celebrating sport, Olympic values and athletes' performance; and
 - o no-one is put in a position of having to choose the legitimacy of a cause over another
- to protect athletes from external pressure to take a public position on a topic on which they may or may not wish to express their views publicly.

- **Restrictions need to be necessary and proportionate**

Any restrictions imposed on freedom of expression must be necessary and proportionate to protect the legitimate objective asserted. The necessity standard means that the authority must demonstrate that the restriction is the least intrusive way to protect the legitimate interest and that it imposes no more restraint than necessary to achieve that objective. The same applies to any sanction for breaching such restrictions.

Rule 50 Guidelines' application is specific to the following geographical and temporal scope, covering only the field of play, the Olympic Village, Olympic medal ceremonies and the Opening, Closing and other official Ceremonies. Therefore, Rule 50 (2) does not restrict freedom of expression in the mixed zones, during media interviews, or on social media.

Meanwhile, although Rule 50 (2) does not set forth specific consequences for a breach of the ban on demonstration or propaganda, these are covered by Rule 59 (2), which provides for an array of measures and sanctions in case of violation of the Olympic Charter in the context of the Olympic Games, including disqualification (with return of medals won). The Rule 50 Guidelines specify that in case of a Rule 50 breach, "*disciplinary action will be taken on a case-by-case basis as necessary*". The Guidelines, therefore, provide sufficient leeway to impose proportional sanctions for breaches of Rule 50 (2) at the Olympic Games, taking into account the context of each specific case.

WHAT THIS MEANS IN PRACTICE

Rule 50 provides for limited restrictions to freedom of expression, both in terms of space (for athletes it only applies to very limited areas such as the field of play) and time (it only applies to specific moments such as Official Olympic Ceremonies). The IOC does not seek to restrict freedom of expression outside of this limited space and limited time, bearing in mind that the Olympic Games only take place for 16 days once every four years. Outside of this limited geographical and temporal scope, including during the 16 days of the Olympic Games, athletes can express themselves, freely without any kind of interference from the IOC (e.g. on social media, at press conferences or in interviews with media).

Rule 50 does not aim to silence athletes or make them apolitical. The IOC appreciates that athletes may wish to be vocal or political about issues they feel strongly about. Rule 50 aims to protect the political, religious and racial neutrality of a few strictly defined locations (field of play, Olympic Village) and of a few strictly defined moments (Olympic medal ceremonies, Opening, Closing and other official Ceremonies) which form the core of the Olympic Games. In other words, the purpose of Rule 50 is not to make athletes politically neutral, nor does the IOC wish to do so, rather it is to keep the Olympic Games politically neutral.

The IOC is keen to protect the political, religious and racial neutrality of the Olympic Games in line with historical tradition (Olympic Truce, UN General Assembly resolution) and the fundamental principles of Olympism (harmony, peace, political neutrality).

Similarly, the IOC's priority is on keeping the focus of the Olympic Games on showcasing sport and athletes' sporting achievements. This is particularly significant on the field of play and at Olympic Ceremonies.

Equally, the IOC is keen to protect the universality of the Olympic Games, in order to fulfil the Olympic Charter. The expression of political opinions at such key locations or moments of the Olympic Games may deter individual athletes or nations from taking part in the Games, hosting them, or even broadcasting them.

Likewise, the IOC seeks to foster unity through sport in the Olympic Village and on the field of play. Turning the Games into a potential tribune for international or domestic shows of political religious or social stances carries a risk of conflict among athletes from rival countries or within the same countries.

Athletes take part in the Olympic Games not (only) in their personal capacity but also as representatives of their country and of the Olympic movement more generally. As such, they can legitimately be expected to show a certain level of restraint in the expression of their personal political or religious opinions, in particular on the field of play, on the podium and at opening and closing ceremonies.

For the same reasons, the IOC is wary of the risk of politicisation of athletes and of putting athletes at risk from external pressure. This is particularly important also to protect athletes from the potential consequences of being placed in a position where they are forced to take a public position on a particular domestic or international issue regardless of their beliefs. For such athletes, political neutrality can serve as a way to protect them from political interference or exploitation.

Although the restriction imposed by Rule 50 may appear too sweeping, especially if compared to some sports organisations which allow expression in support of social (as opposed to political) causes, there are significant difficulties that an organisation as diverse and universal as the IOC would face in distinguishing between admissible and inadmissible causes. For this reason, a blanket policy of neutrality is deemed an appropriate and proportionate solution, including from a human rights perspective, given the risk of politicising the IOC and alienating countries or athletes.

7. APPENDIX

List of consultation calls with NOC ACs

GERMANY

GREAT BRITAIN

IRELAND

LITHUANIA

NEW ZEALAND

NIGERIA

RUSSIA

THE NETHERLANDS

USA

List of statements from NOC and IF ACs

AUSTRALIA

BELGIUM

CANADA

CHINA

FRANCE

GERMANY

IRELAND

LITHUANIA

LESOTHO

MEXICO

NAMIBIA

NEW ZEALAND

PAPUA NEW GUINEA

RUSSIA

SLOVAKIA

SOUTH KOREA

TURKEY

UKRAINE

USA

WORLD ARCHERY