# FIFA president Gianni Infantino faces backlash over Gulf trip amid governance and human rights concerns



Gianni Infantino, President of FIFA, is under scrutiny following his recent trip to the Gulf, where he accompanied U.S. President Donald Trump to Qatar and Saudi Arabia. This trip has prompted significant criticism from Human Rights Watch, which has called for the FIFA leader to clarify what this journey accomplished for both football and human rights. Minky Worden, the director of global initiatives at Human Rights Watch, has expressed concerns regarding FIFA's lack of meaningful accountability, emphasising that such trips can undermine the essential governance structures of the sport.

The timing of Infantino’s Gulf visit coincided with FIFA's annual congress held in Paraguay, where his late arrival sparked outrage among European delegates. Accusations arose that Infantino's priorities lay primarily with his “private political interests,” a sentiment echoed by the European football governing body, UEFA. The congress, where national associations traditionally gather to address important governance issues, experienced delays of over two hours due to Infantino's absence.

UEFA insiders expressed their discontent, with some labelling Infantino as having lost touch with the responsibilities of his role. Reports included colourful characterisations of his behaviour, comparing it to that of a “puppy” following Trump. This discontent raises questions about Infantino's future leadership, particularly with the next FIFA elections set for 2027. While some insiders believe this behaviour jeopardises his chances of re-election, Infantino still appears to maintain significant global support for his presidency.

The scenario at the congress revealed tensions not only related to Infantino's travel choices but also connected to broader issues of governance within FIFA. Delegates from various confederations were left frustrated, highlighting a growing dissatisfaction with how FIFA operates under Infantino's leadership.

In contrast, Concacaf's Victor Montagliani defended Infantino, suggesting that walking out in protest was counterproductive. Nevertheless, FIFA must navigate emerging divides among its constituents, particularly in light of increasing scrutiny over human rights issues related to its events. The upcoming FIFA meeting in Miami, which coincides with the anticipated Club World Cup, may prove to be another pivotal moment for discussions surrounding governance reform.

Despite the uproar, Infantino sought to justify his absence, stating that representing football and making crucial decisions were his primary responsibilities. He maintained that his meetings in the Gulf were vital and that they served the interests of the organisation. However, the recurring calls for accountability suggest a disconnect between FIFA’s mandate and its current practices, raising the stakes for leaders like Infantino, who find their decisions increasingly subject to public and international scrutiny.

Furthermore, FIFA's relationship with Saudi Arabia, particularly following the kingdom being awarded the hosting rights for the 2034 World Cup, underscores the growing influence of financial considerations in global football governance. Despite Saudi Arabia's questionable human rights record, the financial support from the region, combined with Infantino's frequent collaborations, has led to a perception that FIFA's ethical stance may be wavering under the weight of lucrative partnerships.

The ongoing issues beg the question of how FIFA can improve its governance and regain the trust of its constituents, ensuring that the sport remains fair and equitable at all levels. As the pressure mounts, Infantino's ability to balance these challenges with the ambitions of FIFA will be crucial in charting a path forward in the complex world of international football.

### Reference Map

1. Paragraph 1: (1), (2)
2. Paragraph 2: (1), (3), (4)
3. Paragraph 3: (1), (2), (3)
4. Paragraph 4: (1), (3)
5. Paragraph 5: (1), (5), (6)
6. Paragraph 6: (1), (7)
7. Paragraph 7: (1), (7)
8. Paragraph 8: (1), (3), (7)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/16/human-rights-watch-calls-on-gianni-infantino-to-release-details-of-trump-trip-fifa> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/16/human-rights-watch-calls-on-gianni-infantino-to-release-details-of-trump-trip-fifa> - Human Rights Watch has called on FIFA President Gianni Infantino to provide detailed information about his recent trip accompanying U.S. President Donald Trump to Qatar and Saudi Arabia. The organization seeks clarity on how the trip benefited football and human rights, highlighting concerns over FIFA's accountability and governance. European delegates at FIFA's annual congress in Paraguay protested Infantino's absence, accusing him of prioritizing personal political interests over the integrity of international football governance.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/fifa-presidents-tardiness-triggers-uefa-backlash-congress-2025-05-15/> - FIFA President Gianni Infantino's late arrival at the FIFA Congress in Asuncion, Paraguay, due to accompanying U.S. President Donald Trump on Middle East state visits, sparked backlash from UEFA. UEFA criticized the timing changes, accusing Infantino of prioritizing personal political interests over the integrity of international football governance. The Congress experienced delays, leading to early departures by some UEFA and CONCACAF members, emphasizing the importance of the Congress in addressing critical issues in global football.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/start-fifa-congress-delayed-delegates-wait-infantinos-arrival-paraguay-2025-05-15/> - The FIFA Congress in Paraguay was delayed by over two hours due to the late arrival of FIFA President Gianni Infantino. The delay was caused by Infantino’s return from a Middle East trip, during which he accompanied U.S. President Donald Trump on state visits to Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. FIFA notified delegates about the delay, citing 'unforeseen reasons.' The Congress was held at the CONMEBOL convention center, located near Silvio Pettirossi International Airport.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/us-will-welcome-international-fans-world-cup-says-fifa-president-2025-05-15/> - FIFA President Gianni Infantino announced that the United States will welcome international fans for the 2026 FIFA World Cup and the 2025 Club World Cup, emphasizing that the U.S. government assured complete hospitality for global visitors. This follows a meeting with the U.S. administration, amid ongoing concerns about restrictive immigration policies under President Donald Trump. The 2026 World Cup will be jointly hosted by the U.S., Mexico, and Canada, while the Club World Cup will run from June 14 to July 13, 2025, in 11 U.S. cities.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/infantino-says-every-idea-is-good-idea-after-suggestion-64-team-2030-world-cup-2025-05-15/> - At the 75th FIFA Congress held in Paraguay, FIFA President Gianni Infantino expressed openness to the South American football confederation CONMEBOL's proposal to expand the 2030 World Cup to include 64 teams. This suggestion was made by CONMEBOL President Alejandro Dominguez during his opening remarks, emphasizing the need for creative thinking to ensure broad participation in the centennial edition of the World Cup. Infantino praised Dominguez's appeal, stating that 'every idea is a good idea' and deserves consideration.
7. <https://www.ft.com/content/abfb932a-f688-4970-b160-f07e30bc8918> - In December 2024, Saudi Arabia was awarded the hosting rights for the 2034 men’s World Cup, solidifying the kingdom's growing influence in global sports. This decision followed extensive efforts by Saudi Arabia, led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, to bolster its presence in international football through strategic investments and fostering relationships with FIFA. FIFA president Gianni Infantino’s frequent visits to Saudi Arabia and the substantial financial support from Saudi entities played key roles in this development. Despite these efforts, the decision has faced significant criticism due to Saudi Arabia’s human rights record. Critics argue that FIFA has compromised its governance and transparency reforms, prioritizing financial over ethical considerations.