# FIFA faces fresh governance crisis a decade after corruption scandal



A decade has passed since the infamous arrests of seven senior officials at FIFA on corruption charges, yet the organisation is reportedly in a parlous state of governance. In an open letter addressing FIFA, a coalition comprised of non-governmental organisations, legal experts, academics, and supporter groups has stated that the body is “arguably more poorly governed today than it was 10 years ago.” This stark assessment comes at a critical time as the global football community reflects on the regulatory changes that have unfolded since the scandal.

The letter urges FIFA to confront its “key structural flaws,” particularly highlighting the troubling power dynamic between FIFA's executive branch and its member associations. While FIFA has maintained that a significant portion of its generated revenue is redistributed to these associations and confederations, critics argue there is scant evidence to suggest that this practice has substantially benefitted the sport's growth. Instead, they claim it serves primarily to secure loyalty from member bodies, thus fostering an environment that disincentivises ethical conduct and stymies meaningful reform.

Upon his election in 2016 following the scandals, Gianni Infantino vowed to usher in a new era of transparency and accountability within FIFA, claiming a commitment to restore the body's reputation. However, as the landscape of global football evolves, expert opinion increasingly reflects dissatisfaction with the reforms purportedly instituted under his leadership. Notably, the criticism underscores ongoing governance failures, such as the decision to award the 2034 World Cup to Saudi Arabia amidst concerns about the nation's human rights record. This decision has amplified debates around FIFA's decision-making opacity and the broader implications for the sport.

Nick McGeehan, co-director of FairSquare, a human rights advocacy group that helped coordinate the open letter, articulated the discontent with the ongoing situation at FIFA: "This statement demonstrates not only the rank failure of the reforms enacted under the presidency of Gianni Infantino, but also the breadth of expert opposition to and frustration with FIFA’s dysfunctional governance model." Furthermore, Bonita Mersiades, a prominent whistleblower from the previous decade, voiced similar sentiments, underscoring that while procedural changes have occurred, the underlying culture within FIFA has failed to evolve. "True reform demands more than new systems—it requires new values," she remarked, emphasising the need for a fundamental cultural shift.

In the backdrop of these governance challenges, FIFA has faced legal challenges from various quarters. Notably, in June 2024, FIFPRO, the global players' union, lodged a legal claim against FIFA, asserting that the expanded 32-team format for the Club World Cup infringes upon players' rights by monopolising their time and disregarding established laws. They argue that this unilateral approach exemplifies a troubling disregard for stakeholder interests, a sentiment echoed by critics of FIFA's governance practices.

Moreover, external pressure is mounting. The Norwegian Football Federation has publicly condemned FIFA's bidding processes for upcoming World Cups as "flawed and inconsistent," while U.S. Senators have urged against granting hosting rights to Saudi Arabia due to its dubious human rights record. The situation is further complicated by a collective of over 100 professional women footballers urging FIFA to end its partnerships with entities like Saudi Aramco, arguing that such collaborations tarnish the sport’s values.

In response to these critiques, a FIFA spokesperson has suggested that recent interactions with U.S. authorities, who had previously intervened in the 2015 scandal, represent a partnership pivot towards responsible governance. They highlighted internal reforms that have reportedly enhanced financial governance and transparency, as well as a sevenfold increase in investment in football development across the globe. Nonetheless, whether these efforts will suffice to quiet the discontent among stakeholders remains an open question.

As the global football community braces for the forthcoming Club World Cup and the implications of the 2034 World Cup award, the pressure is mounting on FIFA to deliver a governance structure that not only promotes the sport but fundamentally upholds its ideals of integrity and fairness.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics), [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/oct/30/one-big-mess-fifa-not-fit-to-govern-football-says-human-rights-group)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics), [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/8aa88c2a3a279824ad4f5507b6457a4f)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/oct/30/one-big-mess-fifa-not-fit-to-govern-football-says-human-rights-group), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/players-union-fifpro-files-legal-claim-against-fifa-2024-06-13/), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/nff-criticises-fifas-flawed-inconsistent-world-cup-bidding-process-2024-12-10/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics), [[3]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/players-union-fifpro-files-legal-claim-against-fifa-2024-06-13/), [[6]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/women-footballers-call-fifa-end-partnership-with-saudi-aramco-2024-10-21/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[7]](https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/35129851), [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics), [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/nff-criticises-fifas-flawed-inconsistent-world-cup-bidding-process-2024-12-10/)
* Paragraph 7 – [[4]](https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/nff-criticises-fifas-flawed-inconsistent-world-cup-bidding-process-2024-12-10/), [[5]](https://apnews.com/article/8aa88c2a3a279824ad4f5507b6457a4f)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2025/may/27/fifa-more-poorly-governed-open-letter-football-politics> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2024/oct/30/one-big-mess-fifa-not-fit-to-govern-football-says-human-rights-group> - In October 2024, the human rights advocacy group FairSquare released a report titled 'Substitute: The Case for the External Reform of FIFA', highlighting serious structural flaws within FIFA that have contributed to human rights abuses. The report, based on over 100 interviews, criticises FIFA's governance practices, including a lack of transparency in fund distribution and inadequate self-regulation. FairSquare calls for external regulation to prevent further harm and enable FIFA to realise football's transformative potential. FIFA has yet to respond to the report's findings.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/players-union-fifpro-files-legal-claim-against-fifa-2024-06-13/> - In June 2024, FIFPRO, the global players' union, filed a legal claim against FIFA over the expanded 32-team men's Club World Cup scheduled for June 2025. The unions argue that the schedule violates players' rights by providing no rest between seasons and disregards EU competition law. The case is set to be presented to the Brussels Court of Commerce, with hopes it will escalate to the European Court of Justice. FIFA has dismissed claims of unilateral decision-making, stating ongoing stakeholder engagement.
4. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/nff-criticises-fifas-flawed-inconsistent-world-cup-bidding-process-2024-12-10/> - In December 2024, the Norwegian Football Federation (NFF) criticised FIFA's bidding process for the 2030 and 2034 World Cups, deeming it 'flawed and inconsistent'. The NFF highlighted that the awarding methodology contradicts FIFA's principles of sound governance. The sole bids from Morocco, Spain, and Portugal for 2030, and Saudi Arabia for 2034, are anticipated to be confirmed by acclamation at FIFA's virtual Congress. The NFF plans to formally record their criticism and vote against the acclamation.
5. <https://apnews.com/article/8aa88c2a3a279824ad4f5507b6457a4f> - In November 2024, U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Dick Durbin urged FIFA not to choose Saudi Arabia as the host for the 2034 World Cup due to the kingdom's poor human rights record. Despite being the only candidate since FIFA initiated a rapid nomination process, the senators argue that selecting Saudi Arabia would endanger workers, athletes, tourists, and the press, and contradict FIFA's human rights policies. They highlight ongoing issues, including torture of dissidents and discrimination against LGBTQ+ people.
6. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/soccer/women-footballers-call-fifa-end-partnership-with-saudi-aramco-2024-10-21/> - In October 2024, over 100 professional women's football players collectively urged FIFA to terminate its partnership with Saudi Aramco, an oil and gas conglomerate. This appeal followed a four-year deal FIFA signed with Aramco, making it a worldwide partner for significant events like the 2026 World Cup and the Women's World Cup in 2027. Critics accuse Saudi Arabia of using sports investments to obscure its human rights record. Prominent footballers like Vivianne Miedema and Becky Sauerbrunn signed the letter advocating for sponsors whose values align more with gender equality and human rights.
7. <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/35129851> - In December 2015, acting FIFA president Issa Hayatou called for a rebuilt and fully accountable FIFA in an open letter. The letter outlined key points for FIFA's reform, including a clear separation of powers between the political side of global football and the day-to-day financial and business operations, strict term limits for senior positions, and promoting the full participation of women at all levels of football governance. These reforms aimed to address widespread corruption claims engulfing FIFA at the time.