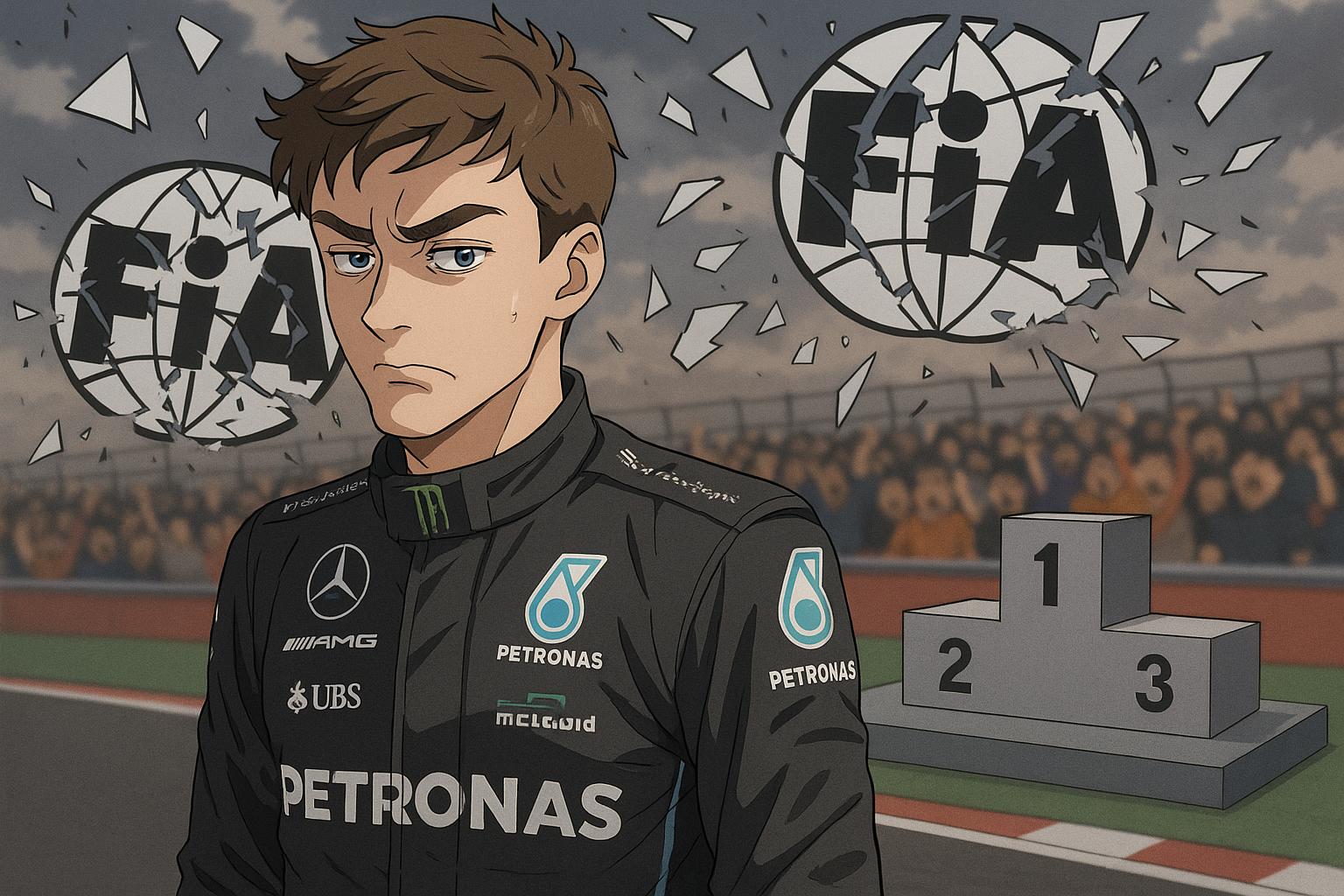
# George Russell criticises FIA’s swearing penalty easing as political manoeuvre ahead of elections



George Russell's recent comments on the FIA's decision to ease its strict enforcement of swearing penalties have reignited a fierce debate within the motorsport community. Sporting a clear sense of frustration, Russell critiqued the decision as “ridiculous,” suggesting it was more about the personal agenda of FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem—who seems more focused on securing his re-election than genuinely improving the sport—than about any real need for reform. This retreat follows an eight-month period where the FIA appeared excessively zealous in its attempts to regulate language within the sport's high-pressure environments.

The governing body's initial crackdown included a sliding scale of fines that raised the prospect of race bans for drivers who swore, targeting prominent figures like Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc. However, ahead of the Imola Grand Prix, the FIA announced significant reductions to these penalties—halving maximum fines from €10,000 to €5,000 and allowing more discretion for stewards in considering offences. This sudden signalling of newfound leniency comes amid sustained pressure from drivers across disciplines—including backlash from Formula One and rally competitors—who deemed the original penalties draconian and counterproductive.

Russell, who holds a leadership position within the Grand Prix Drivers' Association (GPDA), underscored that the entire matter felt farcical and diverted attention from genuine issues in motorsport governance. He described the FIA's communication—or lack thereof—as “zero,” resonating with growing frustrations over their approach to dialogue with drivers. The easing of penalties raises significant doubts about whether it represents a genuine shift in the FIA’s governance; many are calling for transparency and honesty, especially with elections looming.

Lewis Hamilton, another prominent figure in Formula 1, echoed Russell's discontent by describing the current state of the FIA as “a mess.” Hamilton's ongoing concerns about governance in motorsport mirror a broader sentiment that stringent regulations often overlook the emotional intensity of racing. The FIA's apologies for insufficient communication and hurried rule changes have left many, including emerging voices within political circles, sceptical about the motives behind these sudden shifts.

Meanwhile, renowned rally driver Adrian Fourmaux faced penalties under this questionable system, leading fellow competitors to raise eyebrows. His experience has spurred a wider discourse on the emotional dynamics of motorsport. As drivers engage in high-stakes competition, spontaneous language is a natural reaction to immense pressure—a reality that the FIA’s earlier policies failed to acknowledge.

In the backdrop of these controversies, some members of the motorsport community view Carlo Sainz Sr., a respected figure with a distinguished background, as a potential challenger to Ben Sulayem. While his familial ties to an active Formula E driver fuel speculation about possible conflicts of interest, Russell has vocally endorsed Sainz Sr.'s candidacy as a positive evolution for the sport, asserting that he would manage such complexities with integrity.

As the motorsport landscape continues to shift, driven by mounting commercial interests and intensified media scrutiny, the discourse surrounding driver conduct and the framework for penalties remains critically important. With heightened visibility comes a responsibility to cultivate an environment that celebrates the spirit of competition while ensuring that regulations are judiciously upheld. Ultimately, the evolving situation may serve as a litmus test for the FIA’s adaptability and willingness to genuinely engage with the athletes it governs. The broader implications of this debate will ripple across the political fabric of the sport, reminding all involved that leadership and accountability cannot be sacrificed for personal gain.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2025/may/15/george-russell-scornful-of-crazy-fias-retreat-on-swearing-drivers> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/formula1/fia-reduces-penalty-swearing-after-driver-backlash-2025-05-14/> - The FIA has reduced the maximum penalty for drivers using inappropriate language by 50%, lowering the fine from €10,000 to €5,000, and introduced more discretion for race stewards. This follows backlash from Formula One and rally drivers against a strict crackdown on swearing. The changes differentiate between 'controlled' environments, like press conferences, and 'uncontrolled' ones, such as race tracks. For first offenses, stewards may suspend penalties entirely. Abuse of officials will now result in sporting, rather than financial, penalties. The reforms, spearheaded by FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem—who is seeking re-election—follow input from FIA World Championships, member clubs, and motorsport bodies. The adjusted rules fall under Appendix B, which guides penalties for misconduct. Notable past penalties included fines for F1 drivers Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc for swearing. FIA officials emphasized that while athletes must uphold professionalism, it's also important to acknowledge the emotional intensity of competitive racing.
3. <https://www.reuters.com/sports/formula1/russell-says-f1-drivers-want-more-than-words-fia-boss-2025-05-01/> - At the Miami Grand Prix, Formula One driver George Russell expressed skepticism about FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem’s recent remarks on potential rule changes regarding punishments for misconduct, including swearing. Ben Sulayem had indicated on social media that he was considering revisions to Appendix B of the FIA International Sporting Code, which outlines penalties such as fines and suspensions for actions deemed harmful to the FIA or motorsport. Currently, infractions in F1 entail escalating fines and possible suspension for repeated offenses. Russell, a director of the Grand Prix Drivers’ Association, appreciated the intent behind Ben Sulayem’s comments but emphasized that drivers want tangible changes, not just verbal assurances. He noted the GPDA’s original focus on safety and voiced concerns that focus has drifted toward policing behavior rather than racing. With Ben Sulayem’s term ending this year and no opposing candidates announced, drivers hope for meaningful rule updates that incorporate common sense and actively engage their feedback.
4. <https://www.racefans.net/2025/02/24/rally-drivers-urge-fia-to-relax-stance-on-swearing-inspired-by-f1-colleagues/> - Rally drivers have joined their Formula 1 counterparts in calling on the FIA to back down in its efforts to punish swearing. Last year the Grand Prix Drivers Association told FIA president Mohammed Ben Sulayem fining drivers for swearing was 'not appropriate'. However the FIA last month introduced a new system of fines for drivers who swear during official media activities. Hyundai World Rally Championship driver Adrian Fourmaux became the first person to be penalised under the new structure. He was fined €30,000, €20,000 of which was suspended, for using the word 'fucked' in an interview during the Rally of Sweden. The respect of this principle is not in question. We are not all full-time professionals, yet we all face the same extreme conditions with the same relentless passion. Whether navigating through dense forests, across frozen roads in the dead of night, or through the dust of treacherous gravel tracks, we push ourselves to the limit — against the elements, against the clock, and against our own limits. Beyond racing, our role has expanded. Today, rally drivers and co-drivers are not only athletes but also entertainers, content creators, and constant media figures. From the smartphones of spectators to the official WRC cameras, we are expected to be available at all times — before, during, and after competition, from dawn to dusk. WoRDA has always recognised our responsibilities and commitment to collaborate in a constructive way with all stakeholders, including the FIA president, in order to promote and elevate our outstanding Sport for the benefit of all. In recent months, however, there has been an alarming increase in the severity of the sanctions imposed for minor, isolated and unintentional language lapses. This has reached an unacceptable level. We strongly believe that: – Common colloquialism cannot be considered and judged as equal to genuine insult or an act of aggression – Non mother-tongue speakers may use or repeat terms without full awareness of their meaning and connotation – Seconds after an extreme adrenaline spike, it is unrealistic to expect a perfect and systematic control over emotions. – Rally is extreme: Risk level for the athletes, intensity of the focus, length of the days all the limits are reached. In such a case we question the relevance and validity of imposing any sort of penalty. Moreover, the exorbitant fines are vastly disproportionate to the average income and budget in rallying. This also raises a fundamental question where does the money from these fines go? The lack of transparency only amplifies concerns and undermines confidence in the system. Surely the negative impressions surrounding these penalties far outweigh the impact of any language lapse. We call for a direct communication and engagement between the FIA president and WoRDA members to find a mutually agreeable and urgent solution. Sportingly, The Rally Drivers and Codrivers members of WoRDA
5. <https://apnews.com/article/2099938e09d23b64b00489aa4da765b5> - Formula 1 faces ongoing controversy over strict penalties for drivers using profanity or making critical comments, as outlined in the FIA's Appendix B regulations. FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem has indicated possible reforms following driver backlash, especially concerning the €40,000 fines and suspensions for repeat offenses. Drivers like Max Verstappen and Charles Leclerc have been penalized for swearing during high-adrenaline race moments, sparking debate over whether the rules are excessively harsh. Critics argue that such expressions are often unintentional or self-directed, and the level of surveillance in F1 exaggerates their visibility compared to other sports. Ben Sulayem's earlier justification that motorsport differs from other cultural arenas like rap music, along with his crackdown, attracted accusations of racism from champion Lewis Hamilton. The controversy expanded when drivers from other series like the World Rally Championship protested similar fines. While other sports such as soccer, tennis, and basketball also penalize profanity, they typically consider context and intent. Ben Sulayem may revise punishment methods rather than the rules themselves, signaling a potential shift aimed at reducing tensions with athletes ahead of an upcoming re-election.
6. <https://www.motorsport.com/f1/news/george-russell-speaks-out-against-fia-swearing-ban-out-of-hand/10701151/> - Mercedes driver George Russell has spoken about the rising tensions between Formula 1 drivers and the FIA. This comes after the governing body's crackdown on verbal misconduct, which includes swearing. Russell has described this as 'unnecessary' and indicative of a governance that has maybe 'gone a little bit out of hand.' The FIA's 2025 International Sporting Code changes bring substantial penalties, including fines up to €40,000 and even eventual race bans for repeat offences. An FIA spokesperson said the following on the additions: 'The aim of this new appendix is to provide clear guidance to stewards regarding the penalties for violations of specific international sporting code articles.