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Sport Soft Power 2026 States Ranking by **PIDS** | Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy

What is this ranking?

The ranking is the first in Central and Eastern Europe to assess the extent to which countries use sports to conduct policy and build their image and brand. The ranking was created as a result of the Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy's (PIDS) original research on sport soft power.

Primary objective of this analysis is to determine the real power of sports diplomacy of selected states.

Study includes analysis of 60 countries. 30 of them are ranked in the Report.

The analysis takes into account: the degree to which sports are used in states' policies, sports sponsorship of public and private entities, the presence of sport executives of a given nationality in the decision-making bodies of international federations, the recognition and successes of athletes, and the involvement of states in organizing sporting events.

The PIDS ranking is released annually, allowing trends to be identified and highlighting changes in the degree of states' involvement in conducting sports diplomacy.

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Photos: Unsplash



CRITERION NO. 1

Number of representatives of
a country in the governing bodies
of international sports
organizations

CRITERION NO. 2

The degree of use of sport in the
state's foreign policy

CRITERION NO. 3

Sports performance of individual
athletes, national teams and sports
clubs

CRITERION NO. 4

Global recognition of athletes,
teams, sports tournaments,
leagues and events

CRITERION NO. 5

Hosting international sports events

CRITERION NO. 6

Involvement of state and private
enterprises in sponsoring sports
organizations and big events



Evaluation criteria and methodology

The ranking presents **30 countries** with the **most developed sports diplomacy skills and those most actively building and using sport soft power**. In the process of creating the ranking, **6 criteria** were taken into account.

In **criterion No. 1**, points were awarded in proportion to the number of representatives of a country in the governing bodies of the analyzed international sports organizations (list in the following section).

In **criterion No. 2**, the authors individually evaluated the degree to which sports is used by a given country as a political tool and a way to shape its image.

Criterion No. 3 involves an analysis of sports performance in the selected sporting events (list in the following section). Points were awarded according to the importance and prestige of the event.

In **criterion No. 4**, the authors evaluated the global recognition of a country's athletes, teams, tournaments and events. They took into account their media coverage and marketing potential.

For **criterion No. 5**, the hosts of the most important and prestigious sporting events were analyzed. Host countries were awarded points depending on the importance and media coverage of a particular event. Additional points were awarded to the organizers of the Summer Olympic Games, as the largest sporting event. Points were also given to the hosts of the recent and future Winter Olympics, as well as the FIFA World Cups and Euros. This is to recognize the importance of these events over a period longer than it was conducted.

Criterion No. 6 is an analysis of the involvement of state and private companies from a given country in sponsorship of international sports. Points were awarded for sponsorship of selected events (in proportion to their importance and prestige) and sports organizations, as well as for the presence in the sponsors' grid of the most recognizable sport clubs and teams.

Due to the nature of the Report, higher points were given to companies that directly indicate country of their origin in their name.

Each criterion is rated separately on a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means the weakest and 10 means the strongest potential.

The individual scores for each criterion make up the final score, which is a weighted average. The final score is a calculated index. The maximum index value is 10, and the lowest is 0. The index is presented to two decimal places.

Athletes representing England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are considered as representatives of the United Kingdom. In the case of Russia and Belarus, the results of athletes from these countries were included, even if they competed as neutral athletes.

The assessment is based on data for the year 2024. Setting specific time frames ensures transparency in assessments and maintains their real, current value.

At the same time, in the case of the Olympic Games (Summer and Winter), as well as the World and European football championships (as football is the most global and media-attracting sport), the results achieved at those events and the fact that they are hosted by a given country are taken into account for more than a year. This is due to the fact that these events resonate in public opinion and the offices of sports and political organizations for much longer than their duration.

PIDS Ranking 2026

Place	Country	Index	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	9,60	=
2.	ITALY	8,50	+1
3.	SPAIN	6,87	+3
4.	FRANCE	6,56	-2
5.	GREAT BRITAIN	6,42	-1
6.	CHINA	5,72	-1
7.	GERMANY	4,77	=
8.	AUSTRALIA	4,73	+2
9.	CANADA	4,40	+4
10.	SAUDI ARABIA	4,34	+1
11.	JAPAN	4,18	-2
12.	SWITZERLAND	4,14	+5
13.	MEXICO	4,13	+11
14.	QATAR	4,12	-7
15.	NETHERLANDS	3,73	-3
16.	BELGIUM	3,64	+9
17.	POLAND	3,60	+9
18.	MOROCCO	3,39	NEW
19.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	3,38	=
20.	ARGENTINA	3,33	-6
21.	BRAZIL	3,19	-5
22.	SLOVENIA	3,17	+5
23.	PORTUGAL	3,08	NEW
24.	AUSTRIA	3,08	-4
25.	DENMARK	3,07	NEW
26.	SWEDEN	3,06	-3
27.	SOUTH KOREA	2,91	-12
28.	UKRAINE	2,81	=
29.	KENYA	2,76	NEW
30.	NORWAY	2,57	-1



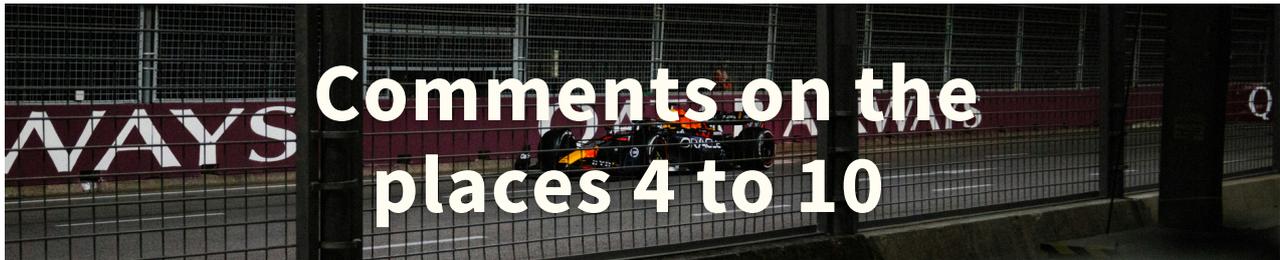
The United States has consolidated its position, achieving an even higher index score than in the previous edition of the Ranking. This was influenced by the upcoming FIFA World Cup as well as the direct inclusion of sport on the political agenda of the U.S. presidential administration. At the same time, the United States maintains a high level of sponsorship for international sporting events and has the largest representation of all states within the governing bodies of international sports organizations.



Italy. Over the past year, there has been a clear increase in the involvement of Italian companies in sponsoring international sports. At the same time, Italy has maintained a high level of sporting performance and the number of its representatives in the most important governing bodies of international sports federations. However, the key factor behind Italy's rise in the Ranking is the organization of international sporting events. As early as 2025, the upcoming Winter Olympic Games were already generating significant attention, and communication surrounding this sporting mega-event naturally continued to highlight Italy as the host country of the 2026 Winter Olympics.



Spain and its sport-based soft power continue to rest on the global recognition of its sports teams and individual athletes. This year's position in the Ranking is also significantly influenced by sporting successes, led in particular by the results of tennis player Carlos Alcaraz. Spain maintained a similar level of engagement of sport within the country's international political agenda, as well as in terms of the number of its representatives serving on the boards of international sports federations. At the same time, with a noticeable increase in the involvement of Spanish companies in sports sponsorship, combined with a decline in the sporting soft power potential of other countries, Spain was able to move up to 3rd place in the Ranking.



4th place - **France**

France's position in this year's Ranking stems primarily from the popularity of French athletes. The hosting of the Olympic Games two years ago also continues to resonate.

5th place - **Great Britain**

British sports teams, athletes, as well as globally recognized sporting events and competitions held in the United Kingdom constitute the main assets of the country's sport-based soft power. The UK's position in the Ranking is further strengthened by the sporting successes of British athletes in 2025.

6th place - **China**

The consistently very strong role of sport in China's international political agenda, together with the regular hosting of international sporting events, once again ensures the country a high position in the Ranking.

7th place - **Germany**

The main asset of Germany's sport-based soft power is the very high level of involvement of German companies in sponsoring international sport. The global recognition of German sports teams across multiple disciplines also plays a significant role.

8th place - **Australia**

Australia is one of the most highly represented countries on the boards of international sports federations. Additionally, sport ranks high on the country's international policy agenda, which translates into a strong position in this year's Ranking..

9th place - **Canada**

The main assets of Canada's sport-based soft power are the consistently high number of Canadians on the boards of international sports federations and the fact that it is co-hosting this year's World Cup, which already gave Canada above-average exposure last year.

10th place - **Saudi Arabia**

Saudi Arabia is the only representative from the Middle East in this year's top 10 of the Ranking. Saudi companies constitute one of the main economic forces in international sports sponsorship. Additionally, the very high importance of sport in the country's international policy, the growing recognition of its football teams, and the hosting of successive prestigious sporting events all contribute to its position.

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 1 - TOP 15

Number of representatives of a country in the governing bodies of international sports organizations

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	=
2.	AUSTRALIA	+1
3.	GREAT BRITAIN	-1
4.	CANADA	=
5.	ITALY	=
6.	SPAIN	=
7.	FRANCE	=
8.	CHINA	+2
9.	JAPAN	-1
10.	SWEDEN	+2
11.	INDIA	NEW
12.	NEW ZEALAND	+2
13.	GERMANY	-4
14.	SWITZERLAND	+1
15.	QATAR	-4

The number of representatives of a country in the governing bodies of international sports organizations is a typical “cabinet” element of sport soft power. The boards create the policy of a given federation and have a decisive influence on the granting of rights to organize sporting events or on the sale of broadcasting rights. According to the statutes of these organizations, the member's nationality should not provide benefits for the country from which the official comes. However, in many cases it determines the decisions made of the official in question. The presence of representatives of a given country in the federation's governing bodies also provides an opportunity to obtain information from insiders.

Weight in Rank: 1

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 2 - TOP 15

Degree of use of sports in the foreign policy of the state

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	SAUDI ARABIA	=
2.	QATAR	=
3.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	NEW
4.	CHINA	-1
5.	RUSSIA	-1
6.	HUNGARY	-1
7.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	=
8.	FRANCE	-2
9.	AUSTRALIA	+3
10.	INDIA	=
11.	UKRAINE	+2
12.	GREAT BRITAIN	+2
13.	TURKIYE	-4
14.	MOROCCO	NEW
15.	RWANDA	NEW

The conscious use of sports as a tool in the international politics illustrates the degree to which countries believe in the potential of sport soft power.

The sports-political agenda could be realized in different ways, such as funding sports clubs and events with public money, implementing a state sports strategy, involving sports in achieving the goals of the foreign policy or naturalizing athletes to improve country's sports performance. The degree of involvement of politicians in a country's acquisition of rights to host sports events should also be considered here.

Weight in Rank: 2

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 3 - TOP 15

Sports performance of individual athletes, national teams and sports clubs from the country

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	=
2.	ITALY	=
3.	SPAIN	+1
4.	GREAT BRITAIN	-1
5.	CHINA	=
6.	SLOVENIA	+9
7.	BELARUS	NEW
8.	FRANCE	-1
9.	AUSTRALIA	+4
10.	SWITZERLAND	+1
11.	POLAND	NEW
12.	DENMARK	NEW
13.	BELGIUM	NEW
14.	UKRAINE	=
15.	GERMANY	-5

The successes of individual athletes and sports clubs are one of the most important elements of a country's sport soft power. This is because they are an exemplification of its strength, easily understandable and easily comparable for the public. Sports performance is seen as evidence of a country's high level of organizational and financial capacities. Therefore, political and economic powers of a given country are often evaluated through the prism of sports power. A high place in the medal table of the Olympic Games is an object of desire and an expression of prestige.

Weight in Rank: 3

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 4 - TOP 15

Global recognition of athletes, teams, sports tournaments and leagues from a country

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	=
2.	SPAIN	+1
3.	GREAT BRITAIN	-1
4.	FRANCE	=
5.	BRAZIL	=
6.	ARGENTINA	=
7.	ITALY	=
8.	PORTUGAL	=
9.	GERMANY	=
10.	SLOVENIA	+5
11.	CHINA	+1
12.	POLAND	-1
13.	NETHERLANDS	-3
14.	NORWAY	NEW
15.	SERBIA	-1

A country's soft power also consists of elements that are de facto outside its control. These include the popularity and recognition of athletes, clubs, leagues or tournaments from a country. This is extremely important from the point of view of building a positive image and positive impressions among the citizens of other countries. This is reflected, for example, by increasingly bold attempts to use athletes in promotional campaigns of given countries, regions or cities. An important resource here is the social media reach of the athletes in question, which today has a high marketing value not only for themselves.

Weight in Rank: 3

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 5 - TOP 15

Hosting international sporting events

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	+1
2.	ITALY	+1
3.	FRANCE	-2
4.	CANADA	+4
5.	SPAIN	+1
6.	MEXICO	+6
7.	CHINA	=
8.	QATAR	-4
9.	GREAT BRITAIN	-4
10.	AUSTRALIA	+1
11.	SAUDI ARABIA	-3
12.	JAPAN	NEW
13.	BELGIUM	NEW
14.	SWITZERLAND	NEW
15.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	-1

From sporting giga-, mega- and major-events, periodic prestigious sporting events, to world championships in disciplines with lesser media coverage, hosting the international sporting events at every level represents the most important resource of national sports soft power. The organization of these events provides evidence of efficiency and diplomatic and negotiating competences. It also provides an opportunity to showcase a country's political and cultural agenda during an event. Major events could be also a boost to the economic and social development of the host country.

Weight in Rank: 4

Ranking PIDS 2026

Criterion No. 6 - TOP 15

Involvement of state-owned and private companies from the country in sponsoring international sports organizations and big sporting events

Place	Country	Change vs 2025
1.	UNITED STATES OF AMERICA	=
2.	SAUDI ARABIA	=
3.	GERMANY	+1
4.	UNITED ARAB EMIRATES	-1
5.	JAPAN	+1
6.	ITALY	NEW
7.	CHINA	-2
8.	FRANCE	+2
9.	QATAR	-2
10.	GREAT BRITAIN	-1
11.	SWITZERLAND	=
12.	AUSTRIA	=
13.	SPAIN	+2
14.	NETHERLANDS	=
15.	RWANDA	-2

Involvement in sports sponsorships goes beyond the classic understanding of sports marketing - both for private and state-owned companies. Sponsorship agreements related to major sporting events, organizations and the most recognizable football clubs should be considered in a broader context than just business. For some companies, sports sponsorship directly impacts the formation of the so-called national brand. Of particular importance here are companies building direct links to their country of origin, for example by including it in their name.

Weight in Rank: 2

International sports organizations included in the analysis

- International Olympic Committee (IOC)
- The continental Olympic committees (OCA, EOC, PSO, ANOCA, ONOC)
- International Paralympic Committee (IPC)
- Association of National Olympic Committees (ANOC)
- International Federation of Football (FIFA)
- Continental football federations (AFC, UEFA, CONCACAF, CONMEBOL, CAF, OFC)
- International Basketball Federation (FIBA)
- International Volleyball Federation (FIVB)
- International Handball Federation (IHF)
- International Tennis Federation (ITF)
- International Ice Hockey Federation (IIHF)
- International Skating Union (ISU)
- International Gymnastics Federation (FIG)
- International Ski and Snowboard Federation (FIS)
- International Cycling Union (UCI)
- International Cricket Council (ICC)
- World Athletics
- World Rugby
- World Aquatics
- World Sailing
- International Boxing Association (IBA), World Boxing
- International Automobile Federation (FIA)
- International Baseball and Softball Federation (WBSC)
- International Chess Federation (FIDE)
- International Table Tennis Federation (ITTF)
- Association of Professional Tennis Professionals (ATP)
- Women's Tennis Association (WTA)
- World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)
- The International Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne (CAS).

In addition, leagues, tournaments, boxing matches, races and sports clubs with the highest global recognition were also included in the analysis on the adopted criteria.

International sporting events included in the analysis

- Olympic Games Paris 2024
- Paralympic Games Paris 2024
- Olympic Games Milano-Cortina 2026
- Paralympic Games Milano-Cortina 2026
- FIFA World Cup 2026
- Women's UEFA Euro 2025
- Africa Cup of Nations 2025/2026
- UEFA Nations League Final Four
- FIFA Club World Cup 2025
- UEFA Champions League, AFC Champions League, CAF Champions League, Copa Libertadores
- Euroleague
- Australian Open, Roland Garros, Wimbledon, US Open
- ATP 1000 and WTA 1000 tournaments
- ATP Finals, WTA Finals
- Davis Cup, Billie Jean King Cup
- Tour de France, Giro d'Italia, Vuelta a Espana
- Diamond League
- Formula 1 Grand Prix season
- WRC season
- Ice Hockey World Championships Top Division
- 2025 FIVB Volleyball World Cup
- 2025 UCI Road World Championships
- FIS Alpine World Ski Championships 2025

And other competitions of world championship rank - also in less media-attracted disciplines - and other prestigious events and tournaments.

ABOUT US

The **Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy** is a research center (think-tank) that conducts analytical activities in the field of the relationship between sports and politics, with a particular focus on sports diplomacy. Sport and politics, as we understand them today, have been interacting since the early 20th century, but it is only in the last two decades that research into this phenomenon has intensified - in the public sphere as well as in the scientific sphere.

Sports diplomacy in the 21st century involves international policy actors, public institutions, sports organizations, athletes, fans, NGOs, advertisers and sponsors, and the public.

The research and analysis of the Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy covers a broad spectrum of issues, which include the political science of sports, sports in international politics, the economics of sports, the sociology of sports, the cultural significance of sports, sports law, sports marketing and sponsorship, and technological development in sports.

The mission of the Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy is to raise awareness of, and educate all participants in sports diplomacy about the processes involved and their importance.

The Institute's published commentaries, opinions, research, analysis and reports will help achieve these goals. The Polish Institute for Sports Diplomacy also provides expertise to sports organizations (federations and clubs), athletes and public institutions, in order to equip athletes and sports activists with basic knowledge of the current geopolitical situation, with regard to current and future sports events and their non-sports significance.

The Institute is also open to cooperation with academic centers, private entities and the media.

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The funds obtained will be used to develop the Institute



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