



FÉDÉRATION
INTERNATIONALE
DE L'AUTOMOBILE
BACKGROUND GUIDE

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Letter from the Executive Board

With immense pleasure to serve as your Executive Board, we welcome you to the simulation of the Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile(FIA), held at SHISMUN'25. Our committee shall deliberate upon:

Crisis of legitimacy- Investigating allegations of misconduct within FIA leadership and regulatory bias

The primary aim of this document is to provide a course of research and a base of knowledge. It however, by no means, limits the scope of discussion or the creation of new dimensions. We request you to sincerely read the document so that all of you at least have a common ground of understanding. Simultaneously, we request that you don't treat this guide as a source of citation in the committee as it is a mixture of arguments and facts constructed to ease understanding.

Furthermore, it is of the utmost importance that you as delegates rise above a simplistic “copy-paste” approach to this committee. As an unconventional committee, FIA provides you more than ample room to get creative and present ideas beyond a straightforward google search. With agendas as riveting as the ones at hand, we hope each one of you is not just reading out speeches, but critically analysing the situation and applying your logic to deliberate in committee.

Lastly, keeping the above in mind and hoping you all put it into practice, we only ask that you let the F1 fan in you thrive, of course, in the scope of your allotments. On that note, we look forward to captivating sessions and hope we all take something back home. Please don't hesitate from reaching out for assistance in case any doubts arise.

Happy Researching!

Regards,
The Executive Board
Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile

Permissible evidence/proofs allowed in committee

Evidence in committee will be accepted from:

1. FIA documents/Formula 1's Website - Any F1 article that makes clear mention of the fact or any FIA document pertaining to the topic will be accepted as clear evidence in committee.
2. Team Documentation - Any documents/statements released by the team will be taken into account in committee as evidence on stance.
3. News reports - Sources like ESPNF1, Sky F1, BBC Sport, etc. will be taken into consideration in committee, based on the nature of the article presented to the executive board.
4. Top Journalists - Top Journalists and stakeholders such as Will Buxton, Martin Brundle, David Croft, Nico Rosberg, etc. will also be taken into account when debating opinions in the committee.
5. Fans - The fans being the most important stakeholder in Formula 1 means that their opinions will also be reflected in the committees, for which social media posts from sites like Twitter can be used in the committee as well.

Introduction

In the realm of elite motorsport, where millisecond decisions and billion-dollar interests collide, the legitimacy of the governing authority is not just procedural. The Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile (FIA), as the global regulator of Formula 1 and numerous other racing disciplines, holds immense responsibility: it must act as both rulemaker and adjudicator, preserving sporting integrity, ensuring safety, and arbitrating disputes without fear or favour. However, recent developments have triggered growing concern within the paddock and beyond regarding the transparency, consistency, and impartiality of FIA leadership and its regulatory functions.

Allegations of misconduct and regulatory bias have plagued the FIA in various forms over the past two decades. Yet, the past few seasons have seen these issues reach a critical mass. From the fallout of the controversial 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix to accusations of politically motivated rule enforcement, secretive settlements, and personal interference by high-ranking officials, the FIA now faces an erosion of public trust and internal confidence. Whistleblowers, investigative journalists, and disillusioned stakeholders alike have pointed to patterns of inconsistent stewardship, opaque decision-making, and undue influence within the organization's top ranks.

This agenda invites delegates to deliberate on the ongoing **crisis of legitimacy** within the FIA, to investigate both specific allegations and broader structural deficiencies that have enabled regulatory capture and misconduct. The committee is tasked not only with assessing past failures but also with imagining a future in which F1 governance can regain its credibility. This includes evaluating the adequacy of current oversight mechanisms, proposing reforms to safeguard impartiality, and debating the role of executive power in sports governance.

What is the FIA?

The **FIA (Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile)** is the governing body for motorsport worldwide. It is a non-profit organisation that was founded in 1904 and is headquartered in Paris, France. The FIA's primary role is to regulate and promote various forms of motorsport, ensuring fair competition and safety standards are met.

The FIA is responsible for overseeing numerous international motorsport championships, including Formula One (F1), World Rally Championship (WRC), World Endurance Championship (WEC), and many others. It establishes the rules and technical regulations for each championship, manages the sporting calendar, and grants licences to teams, drivers, and circuits.

In addition to its involvement in motorsport, the FIA is also responsible for promoting road safety and sustainable mobility. It works closely with its member organisations, national automobile clubs from around the world, to develop and implement initiatives to improve road safety and raise awareness about sustainable transportation.

The FIA has played a crucial role in shaping the development of motorsport over the years, ensuring the safety of competitors and spectators, promoting fair competition, and advancing technological innovation in the automotive industry.

Historical Allegations and Patterns of Misconduct

1. A Pattern of Governance Controversy

While Formula 1 is governed by a framework of sporting and technical regulations intended to ensure fairness and consistency, the institution responsible for enforcing these rules, the FIA, has long been dogged by allegations of internal misconduct, selective enforcement, and political bias. These issues are neither new nor isolated. Instead, they form a discernible pattern of controversy that has periodically resurfaced, often in high-stakes moments, raising fundamental questions about the impartiality and transparency of the FIA's leadership.

2. Precedents Under Max Mosley and Jean Todt

In the early 2000s, then-FIA President Max Mosley faced multiple scandals, both personal and institutional, which drew criticism over the lack of internal accountability mechanisms. His tenure saw increasing concentration of power within the executive office, setting a precedent for centralized, and at times opaque, decision-making. Jean Todt, who succeeded Mosley and had previously served as Ferrari's team principal, was often accused, though never proven guilty, of allowing regulatory decisions to favour Ferrari or suppress scrutiny into grey areas of the technical rulebook.

3. The 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix and its Aftermath

The most notable flashpoint in recent memory came during the 2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix, when then-Race Director Michael Masi's improvised interpretation of safety car procedures effectively altered the outcome of the Drivers' Championship. The FIA's subsequent internal review fell short of accepting wrongdoing or establishing clear accountability, prompting public backlash and sowing doubt about the integrity of race direction processes.

4. The Ben Sulayem Era

More recently, allegations have emerged implicating current FIA President Mohammed Ben Sulayem in a range of ethically questionable practices. These

include attempts to interfere with stewards' decisions, the alleged suppression of penalties against certain teams, and reported sexist remarks made toward female officials. Additionally, anonymous claims and leaked communications suggest the existence of informal compensation systems used to secure regulatory leniency or political loyalty, an accusation that, if substantiated, would represent a profound breach of both the FIA's Code of Ethics and its obligations under the International Sporting Code.

5. Systemic Practices Undermining Transparency

Outside of individual actors, certain structural practices have drawn suspicion. These include secretive settlements such as the unresolved conclusion to Ferrari's 2019 power unit investigation, and inconsistent penalty standards across seasons and teams. In particular, smaller or independent teams have often claimed that enforcement tends to favour manufacturers with greater financial and political clout.

6. Consequences for Institutional Legitimacy

These episodes, viewed collectively, indicate more than occasional lapses. They expose an institutional fragility within the FIA, one that makes it vulnerable to regulatory capture, personal agendas, and erosion of legitimacy. As this committee investigates the crisis of legitimacy, understanding these historical precedents is essential to crafting reforms that not only address symptoms, but also confront root causes embedded in the FIA's governance model.

Understanding Regulatory Bias

While formal rules in Formula 1 are codified within the FIA's Sporting and Technical Regulations, the real-world enforcement of those rules is often shaped by discretionary power. Regulatory bias, in this context, refers to any pattern of selective or inconsistent rule enforcement, leniency, or procedural irregularity that benefits one party—be it a team, driver, manufacturer, or executive—over others. In a sport where margins are tight and perception is critical, even minor irregularities can create disproportionate advantages or undermine the credibility of outcomes.

1. The Nature of Discretion in Motorsport Governance

Formula 1's regulatory structure requires interpretation at multiple levels: stewards interpret incidents during races; the Race Director exercises real-time authority on procedural decisions; and FIA leadership influences regulatory policy and technical directives. This multi-layered structure leaves room for bias to manifest—especially when decision-makers are not adequately shielded from political or commercial pressure.

Regulatory bias is not necessarily always overt. It can take the form of:

- Inconsistent application of penalties for comparable infractions;
- Delayed investigations or resolutions that favour certain timelines;
- Privately communicated warnings instead of public reprimands;
- Selective transparency in sharing findings or settlements.

When these practices become routine, they create a two-tiered regulatory environment: one for politically or commercially influential entities, and another for less powerful actors.

2. Key Examples of Suspected Bias

Over recent years, several high-profile incidents have raised concerns about regulatory consistency:

- *Ferrari's 2019 Power Unit Settlement*: After a season of performance questions, the FIA and Ferrari reached a private agreement over the legality of their engine. The secrecy of this settlement led to widespread distrust, especially among rival teams who were never informed of the findings.
- *Red Bull's Budget Cap Breach (2021)*: While Red Bull was found to have breached the financial regulations, the penalties were seen by many as lenient and poorly timed. Critics claimed that the FIA appeared reluctant to meaningfully impact competitive balance in fear of destabilizing a top team.
- *2021 Abu Dhabi Grand Prix*: The Race Director's deviation from standard safety car procedure directly impacted the outcome of the championship. Although the FIA acknowledged a "human error," the lack of sanctions or structural reform undermined confidence in race direction.
- *Track Limits and Stewarding Variability*: Over multiple seasons, track limits enforcement has differed between circuits, sessions, and drivers, with some teams arguing that stewards appear more lenient toward certain manufacturers or title contenders.

Mechanisms of Accountability: What Exists and What's Missing

The legitimacy of any regulatory body rests not only on its rules but also on the transparency, independence, and credibility of its enforcement structures. For the FIA—an organization that simultaneously legislates, executes, and adjudicates within the world of motorsport—ensuring internal accountability is critical. However, numerous recent controversies have exposed both the fragility and limitations of the FIA's current oversight framework, suggesting that the mechanisms in place may be inadequate to prevent misconduct, address bias, or rebuild public trust.

1. *Existing Oversight Bodies and Procedures*

At least on paper, the FIA maintains a series of internal structures intended to preserve regulatory integrity and professional conduct. These include:

- 1.1. *The FIA Code of Ethics*: This document outlines the expected standards of conduct for all members of the FIA, including those in leadership and governance roles. It proscribes conflicts of interest, mandates impartiality, and requires adherence to fairness and transparency in decision-making.
- 1.2. *The FIA Compliance Officer and Ethics Committee*: These bodies are tasked with ensuring that ethical breaches, conflicts of interest, or procedural irregularities are reported and investigated. In theory, they provide an internal check on both elected and appointed officials.
- 1.3. *Stewards' Panels and Technical Working Groups*: While not accountability mechanisms per se, these panels are designed to decentralize power over race control and regulatory interpretation. Their rotating composition is intended to reduce undue influence from any one individual or team.
- 1.4. *Appeals Processes and the International Court of Appeal (ICA)*: Teams or individuals may appeal decisions through the FIA's formal dispute resolution system. The ICA, which functions as an appellate tribunal, is empowered to overturn or revise stewarding and regulatory decisions.

2. *Structural Limitations and Institutional Weaknesses*

The core issue with FIA accountability mechanisms is that they largely operate internally, with no separation between the regulatory authority and the oversight body. This creates several risks:

- 2.1. *Lack of Independence*: Committees such as the Ethics Panel or Compliance Office report to the same leadership they are meant to investigate, raising doubts about their ability to act autonomously.
- 2.2. *Opaque Processes*: Investigations into alleged misconduct, such as those involving Ferrari's engine settlement, or Ben Sulayem's reported interference in sporting decisions, have been conducted without clear disclosure of findings, procedures, or consequences.
- 2.3. *Limited Whistleblower Protections*: The FIA lacks a publicly robust whistleblower framework. As a result, individuals may be reluctant to come forward for fear of reprisal or career harm, especially in a tight-knit and politically sensitive ecosystem like Formula 1.
- 2.4. *Minimal Stewarding Continuity and Oversight*: The changing composition of steward panels each race weekend contributes to inconsistent enforcement, while the absence of a standing regulatory audit team prevents post-race accountability.

3. *International Comparisons and Precedents*

Other sporting institutions have faced similar crises and responded with reform:

- 3.1. FIFA implemented external ethics and audit committees following widespread corruption scandals.
- 3.2. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) now requires greater transparency in executive decision-making, especially around rule changes and hosting rights.
- 3.3. Some national motorsport bodies have proposed independent compliance monitors to act as public-facing oversight authorities.

Formula 1 and the FIA, despite their global visibility, lag behind in adopting such standards.

Questions to Consider

1. Does the FIA's current governance structure allow for true independence between rule-making, rule-enforcement, and oversight?
2. Should an independent external body be created to investigate misconduct or bias within the FIA's leadership?
3. How can consistency in stewarding and penalty decisions be ensured across races, teams, and drivers?
4. To what extent should FIA disciplinary and regulatory decisions be made public to improve transparency?
5. Have certain teams or individuals historically received preferential treatment, and how should such power imbalances be corrected?
6. Are existing bodies like the Ethics Committee and Compliance Office sufficient, or merely symbolic?
7. What safeguards should be in place to prevent political interference in sporting decisions by the FIA President or other executives?
8. What role should stakeholders like drivers, teams, or sponsors have in shaping or overseeing regulatory decisions?
9. How should whistleblower protection and complaint mechanisms be improved within the FIA?
10. What are the long-term consequences for Formula 1 if legitimacy and impartiality continue to be questioned?

Silly Season

The ‘Silly Season’ derives its name in Formula 1, referring to a period of time during the racing calendar, usually in the summer break, when teams, drivers and organisations make big waves through F1 Media, they negotiate contracts, create speculations about change. The media and fans play a huge role here, characterised by rumours, intense media coverage, and sometimes unexpected driver or team changes, creating excitement and speculation among fans and stakeholders in the Formula 1 community.

In this committee, alongside the agenda we expect all teams to operate in a manner as they would in a regular F1 season, that is along with deliberations , they must also ensure their team remains competitive, and operates at the highest level.

What this means is, each and every team must operate parallelly to ensure their team remains (or becomes) successful by revamping team structures, signing new sponsors or strengthening existing ones, and regularly introducing developments in this year’s car.

What to improve is your choice, however to improve is your goal.

Research Links:

1. <https://www.the-race.com/formula-1/attacking-ben-sulayem-illusions-tim-mayer-fia-president-bid-explained/>
2. <https://www.skysports.com/f1/news/12433/13272687/fia-controversial-changes-to-f1-governing-bodys-ethics-committee-voted-through-amid-criticism-of-mohammed-ben-sulayem>
3. <https://www.total-motorsport.com/f1-christian-horner-case-beyond-red-bull-fia-receive-formal-complaint/>
4. <https://www.the-race.com/formula-1/fia-driver-misconduct-guidelines-f1-what-is-really-at-play/>
5. https://repository.uclawsf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1836&context=hastings_commentary_law_journal
6. <https://www.motorsport.com/f1/news/fia-governance-structure-given-the-green-light/10682208/>

(These links are by no means exhaustive, nor must they be relied upon as concrete sources of information. Their inclusion is merely to provide a starting point for research and to build understanding)