

Can you separate the individual from the nation?

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Emblem used to represent Individual Neutral Athletes (AIN) at the 2024 summer Olympics

Carilyn Pointer – Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022, a blanket ban was placed on [athletes](#) from Russia and Belarus that wished to compete in the Olympic games. This has been reevaluated and now individual athletes that qualify will be allowed to participate in the summer 2024 Olympic games in Paris. They are only allowed to participate as "individual neutral athletes" and under strict conditions. The attempt to remove national identity from individuals, points to the importance of identity within a conflict.

[National identity](#) refers to people's sense of attachment or belonging to a nation. This attachment is formed through seemingly mundane activities that support the existence of this country — for example paying taxes, celebrating national holidays, and cheering on national teams in the Olympic Games. Originally, by banning Belarusian and Russian athletes from competing, the goal was to condemn the actions of war by excluding those countries from events of international importance. By removing an activity that helps to foster a sense of belonging and support toward a nation, the hope was that the individual's sense of national identity would shift from one of pride and support, to one of disdain and embarrassment. The shift of policy by the International Olympic Committee, however, shows a greater concern for the individual. Part

of national identity is understanding that each person relates differently to their nation, and not all people may be in support of the actions of the country that they live in. By allowing athletes to participate by denouncing their national identity, the council created a way to still exclude Russia and Belarus, while not punishing the individual for actions that are outside of their control. As such some of the requirements for participation, include not wearing national colors or flags and not actively supporting the war.

It is also important to note that the terms state and nation are distinct and not interchangeable. A [state](#) is the sovereign political entity, commonly referred to as a country, whereas [nation](#) refers to the group identity created by shared histories and culture. Distinguishing the differences between these two terms is important, because the forming of national identity generates a sense of loyalty to that state entity. The blurring of these terms is intentional because it unconsciously fosters support for the state by simply participating in your community and group of belonging. This phenomenon explains the importance of national identity within geopolitics and why the debate over allowing athletes to participate in the Olympics has been a debate for so long. By competing as "individual neutrals" are athletes really separating themselves from their country? Do they still see themselves representing their nation?

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