

Are the Olympics reaching the finish line?



The specter of terrorism has made putting on the Olympic Games much more expensive. (Brian Cassella/Chicago Tribune 2016)

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As rumored, the [International Olympic Committee](#) voted Tuesday to award simultaneously the 2024 and 2028 [Summer Olympics](#) — one to Paris and the other to Los Angeles. Assuming the two cities can agree which will go first, an IOC announcement about 2024 and 2028 is expected in September. Including Rio de Janeiro in 2016 and Tokyo for 2020, this means four different continents in four consecutive Summer Games. But beneath the short-term bravado, there are signs that this worldwide spectacle could be on the ropes.

The spin from IOC headquarters in Lausanne, Switzerland: We have two outstanding proposals for 2024 and it would be a shame to reject either one, so let's reward them both. A less charitable interpretation: Given there were only two bids for 2024, the IOC did not want to risk the embarrassment of having no other suitors for 2028. For the most part, the IOC has been able to count on competing bidders to raise the financial stakes and revenues. That may no longer be a viable business model. In addition, a number of major long-term Olympic sponsorship partners — McDonald's among them — have chosen to deploy their advertising dollars elsewhere.

These quadrennial pageants seem to be attracting fewer suitors. Why? One reason is that the specter of terrorism has made them much more costly. Another is that two non-democratic strongholds, China in 2008 and Russia in 2014, raised the ante significantly — Russia spent more in Sochi in 2014 than had been spent on all previous [Winter Games](#) combined. In addition, economists began to put out the word that these three-week parties, with their post-Games white elephants surrounded by chain-linked fences and weeds, constituted very poor public investments.

The usual pattern for either the Winter or Summer games is that the IOC attracts a half-dozen initial bidders. For the 2016 Games, there were five U.S. applicant cities — Philadelphia, Houston, San Francisco, Los Angeles and Chicago; the first three bowed out, and the [U.S. Olympic Committee](#) selected Chicago, which then competed on the world stage with Tokyo, Madrid and Rio de Janeiro. Rio won.

For 2024, the USOC chose Boston. I was part of a consulting team for the mayor of Boston and governor of Massachusetts to evaluate Boston's proposal and make recommendations. Boston withdrew its bid in August 2015, shortly after receiving our report. The USOC begged L.A. to replace Boston. There were initially five international candidate cities, but Hamburg, Budapest and Rome dropped out, leaving only Paris and Los Angeles.

For the 2022 Winter Games, there were initially six bids, but four withdrew, leaving the IOC with just two somewhat unattractive contenders: Almaty, Kazakhstan, and China. The committee picked China — and although Beijing is nominally the official host city, many of the events will be held in other Chinese locales far from Beijing. Los Angeles is blessed with a plethora of existing facilities, from the Rose Bowl to first-rate sports complexes and plenty of empty dormitory space, and is the only U.S. city that should ever seriously consider serving as the Summer Games host.



After its next Olympics, Los Angeles will have been the site of three Summer Olympics, and it has never had a rival. It was the "Depression host" in 1932 and had no competing bidders. In 1984, when the Soviet Union and 13 allies boycotted the Olympics in retaliation for a similar boycott by the U.S., China and other nations of the 1980 Moscow Olympics, the Los Angeles Games turned a modest profit — in large part by keeping track of pennies and throwing a relatively small party.

Selecting Paris also has a charm. Assuming the city gets the 2024 Games, which is expected, it would be the 100-year anniversary of the 1924 Paris Olympics, celebrated in the 1981 Oscar-winning film, "Chariots of Fire." But will the Olympics survive past the next few Games?

World's Fairs used to be a staple on the international stage. No longer. Owing to changes in tastes and technologies, we've witnessed the decline of shopping malls, department stores, landline phones, paper currency and circuses. Thus it is not out of the question that big-ticket global events could also disappear and be replaced with smaller, individual competitions as viewers pick and choose what they want to watch.

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