

## Differences between the Olympic and Paralympic medal tables may tell us something about the presence and activity of Paralympic associations in each country

**Valentino Larcinese** compares Olympic and Paralympic performances for countries in order to try and reflect the difference in attention and resources devoted to individuals with disabilities relative to others.



With the closing ceremony of the Paralympics, the inspiring summer of London 2012 is now over. Although Olympics and Paralympics should represent an opportunity to go beyond national boundaries, in the end the summer has mostly been about superstars and national pride. If London 2012, according to its motto, was meant to “inspire a generation”, then I found the Paralympics far more inspiring than the Olympics.

Still, medal tables by countries tell us something about the effort and resources that individual nations devote to sport. The size of a country (in population terms) and its wealth per capita go a long way in explaining its performance in sport. But in the end some countries manage to do much better than what their size and wealth would predict, and this is usually not by chance.



Members of the Olympic and Paralympic athletic teams at the London 2012 parade

However, when analysing data differences may often contain more information than absolute values. An interesting difference is that between the Olympics and the Paralympics performance. This difference may arguably reflect the different attention and resources devoted to individuals with disabilities relative to others, at least for what concerns their access to sport. Since the Paralympic movement is formed by various associations, this difference may also tell us something about the presence and activity of these associations in each country.

Comparing Olympic and Paralympics performance is not straightforward. The most important problem is that there are many more medals distributed in the Paralympics than in the Olympics. Since it is more difficult to guarantee a level playing field among individuals with disabilities, a more complex classification of sport events is often required. This year an overall 962 medals were awarded at the Olympics and 1522 at the Paralympics.

I will focus here on the total number of medals abstracting from their colour, since this is probably the most reliable indicator of the performance of a country once we abstract from the very small differences that often separate the top athletes (with some notable exceptions, of course). Given the difference in the total number of medals awarded in the two competitions, what it makes sense to compare is then the share obtained by each country.

The table below reports the percentage of medals obtained by countries in the Olympics and in the Paralympics and the difference between the two. I exclude from the table countries that obtained less than 0.5 per cent of the medals in both the Olympics and the Paralympics since small numbers could be due to exceptional individuals and be less informative about the country itself. The remaining countries are ranked by their differential performance in the Olympics and the Paralympics. As you can see, this gives us a rather unusual ranking.

country	Olympic share	Paralympic share	difference
China	9.15	15.18	6.03
Ukraine	2.08	5.52	3.44
Australia	3.64	5.58	1.95
Poland	1.04	2.37	1.33
South Africa	0.62	1.91	1.28
Algeria	0.10	1.25	1.14
Great Britain	6.76	7.88	1.13
Brazil	1.77	2.83	1.06
Spain	1.77	2.76	0.99
Tunisia	0.31	1.25	0.94
Austria	0.00	0.85	0.85
Nigeria	0.00	0.85	0.85
Egypt	0.21	0.99	0.78
Hong Kong	0.10	0.79	0.68
Mexico	0.73	1.38	0.65
Greece	0.21	0.79	0.58
Ireland	0.52	1.05	0.53
Israel	0.00	0.53	0.53
Netherlands	2.08	2.56	0.48
Switzerland	0.42	0.85	0.44
Iran	1.25	1.58	0.33
Thailand	0.31	0.53	0.21
Canada	1.87	2.04	0.17
Turkey	0.52	0.66	0.14
Norway	0.42	0.53	0.11
Sweden	0.83	0.79	-0.04
New Zealand	1.35	1.12	-0.23
Germany	4.57	4.34	-0.24
Azerbaijan	1.04	0.79	-0.25
Croatia	0.62	0.33	-0.30
Czech Republic	1.04	0.72	-0.32
Cuba	1.46	1.12	-0.34
Mongolia	0.52	0.00	-0.52
Lithuania	0.52	0.00	-0.52
India	0.62	0.07	-0.56
France	3.53	2.96	-0.58
Belarus	1.25	0.66	-0.59
Denmark	0.94	0.33	-0.61
North Korea	0.62	0.00	-0.62
Ethiopia	0.73	0.07	-0.66
Colombia	0.83	0.13	-0.70
Georgia	0.73	0.00	-0.73
Kenya	1.14	0.39	-0.75
Romania	0.94	0.13	-0.80
Hungary	1.77	0.92	-0.85
Italy	2.91	1.84	-1.07
South Korea	2.91	1.77	-1.14
Jamaica	1.25	0.07	-1.18
Kazakhstan	1.35	0.00	-1.35
Russia	8.52	6.70	-1.82
Japan	3.95	1.05	-2.90
USA	10.81	6.44	-4.37

*Note: This article gives the views of the authors, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.*

### **About the author**

**Valentino Larcinese** joined the LSE Government Department in 2001. Previously he worked as an economist in the research department of the Bank of Italy. He received degrees from Bocconi University (Laurea in Economic and Social Disciplines), from the University of York (MSc in Economics), from the University of Milan (Doctorate in Economics) and from the LSE (PhD in Economics).

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