



Sports Governance In India: An Institutional Analysis Of Policy Implementation And Outcomes

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Abstract

Sports governance has emerged as a critical area of public policy due to its direct impact on talent development, institutional accountability, and international sporting performance. In India, despite increased public investment and policy attention, structural and governance-related challenges continue to affect the efficiency of sports administration. This study examines the framework of sports governance in India through an institutional analysis of policy implementation and outcomes. The paper is based entirely on secondary data collected from government policy documents, annual reports of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, reports of the Sports Authority of India, Comptroller and Auditor General audit reports, Parliamentary Standing Committee reports, and peer-reviewed academic literature. Using a descriptive and analytical approach, the study evaluates the roles of key institutions, coordination mechanisms, and accountability structures in India's sports governance system. The findings indicate that while policy initiatives have strengthened infrastructure and athlete support mechanisms, issues such as bureaucratic dominance, weak monitoring, limited autonomy of sports bodies, and regional imbalance persist. The paper concludes by suggesting institutional reforms aimed at enhancing transparency, decentralisation, and outcome-oriented governance in Indian sports administration.

Keywords: Sports Governance, Public Policy, Sports Administration, Institutional Analysis, India

1. Introduction

Sports have increasingly been recognised as an important component of public policy, contributing not only to physical well-being but also to social cohesion, youth development, national identity, and international diplomacy. In contemporary governance discourse, effective sports administration is viewed as a prerequisite for achieving sustained sporting excellence and mass participation. In India, sports governance has historically been characterised by fragmented institutional arrangements, limited accountability, and inadequate coordination among stakeholders.

The responsibility for sports administration in India primarily lies with the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS), supported by institutions such as the Sports Authority of India (SAI) and various National Sports Federations (NSFs). Over the years, the government has introduced multiple policy initiatives and governance reforms to strengthen the sports ecosystem. However, repeated observations by audit agencies and parliamentary committees suggest that governance-related deficiencies continue to undermine policy outcomes.

Against this background, the present study seeks to analyse sports governance in India as an institutional and policy issue. By focusing on policy implementation mechanisms and their outcomes, the paper attempts to understand how governance structures influence the effectiveness of sports policies. The study is significant as it moves beyond programme-specific analysis and instead examines the broader governance framework that shapes sports development in India.

The paper is organised as follows. Section I introduces the research problem and its significance. Section II reviews existing literature to identify conceptual and empirical gaps. Section III outlines the research methodology. Subsequent sections analyse the sports governance framework, institutional performance, policy outcomes, and governance challenges, followed by findings, recommendations, and conclusion.

2. Review of Literature

The issue of sports governance has attracted increasing scholarly attention in recent decades, particularly in the context of public policy, institutional accountability, and administrative efficiency. Existing literature on sports governance in India and abroad provides valuable insights into the relationship between governance structures and sports performance; however, significant gaps remain.

2.1 Sports Policy and Governance in India

Several studies have examined the evolution of sports policy in India. Scholars note that post-independence sports administration remained largely state-centric and federation-dominated, with limited emphasis on transparency and grassroots development. Analyses of the National Sports Policy, 2001 argue that while the policy articulated ambitious objectives, it lacked effective enforcement mechanisms, clear accountability norms, and measurable performance indicators. Subsequent policy debates have highlighted the persistence of structural weaknesses in implementation despite increased public spending on sports.

2.2 Institutional Performance and Accountability

A substantial body of literature focuses on the functioning of key sports institutions, particularly National Sports Federations and the Sports Authority of India. Research published in peer-reviewed journals has pointed to issues such as bureaucratic dominance, political interference, weak internal democracy, and prolonged tenures of office-bearers. Audit-based studies drawing on Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) reports document irregularities in fund utilisation, delays in infrastructure development, inadequate athlete support mechanisms, and limited monitoring and evaluation systems. These studies collectively underline the gap between policy intent and institutional performance.

2.3 Global Perspectives on Sports Governance

International literature on sports governance emphasises principles of autonomy with accountability, stakeholder participation, ethical administration, and outcome-oriented management. Comparative studies indicate that countries with independent regulatory frameworks, transparent funding mechanisms, and clearly defined institutional roles tend to achieve better results in both elite sports performance and mass participation.

These global governance norms have increasingly influenced Indian policy discourse, particularly debates surrounding sports codes and governance reforms.

2.4 Research Gap

Despite the growing body of scholarship, existing studies in the Indian context remain largely programme-specific or normative in nature. There is limited comprehensive research that systematically examines sports governance as an integrated institutional framework linking policy formulation, implementation processes, and outcomes using authenticated secondary data. This gap justifies the present study, which adopts an institutional and policy-oriented approach to analyse sports governance in India.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Nature of the Study

The present study is descriptive and analytical in nature. It seeks to examine sports governance in India through an institutional and policy-oriented lens, focusing on the relationship between governance structures and policy outcomes.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study is based entirely on secondary data. Data have been collected from official and authenticated sources, including:

- ¹ Annual Reports of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS)
- ² Publications and reports of the Sports Authority of India (SAI)
- ³ Reports of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India (CAG)
- ⁴ Parliamentary Standing Committee reports on Youth Affairs and Sports
- ⁵ National Sports Policy documents and sports governance codes
- ⁶ Peer-reviewed journals, books, and reputed newspapers

3.3 Method of Analysis

The collected data have been analysed using qualitative content analysis and policy analysis techniques. Institutional roles, governance mechanisms, and accountability structures have been examined to assess their effectiveness in achieving policy objectives. Where relevant, descriptive statistical indicators reported in official documents have been used to support the analysis.

3.4 Scope of the Study

The study focuses on the central-level sports governance framework in India, with specific reference to key institutions such as MYAS, SAI, and National Sports Federations. State-level variations are discussed only where secondary data are available.

3.5 Limitations of the Study

The study relies exclusively on secondary data, which limits the scope for primary-level verification. Additionally, variations in data reporting across institutions may affect comparability. Despite these limitations, the use of authenticated government and audit data ensures reliability and validity of the findings.

4. Sports Governance Framework in India

Sports governance in India operates within a multi-institutional framework involving the central government, autonomous bodies, and sport-specific organisations. The effectiveness of sports policy implementation largely depends on the clarity of institutional roles, coordination mechanisms, and accountability structures within this framework.

4.1 Role of the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS)

The Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports functions as the nodal authority for policy formulation, funding, and overall coordination of sports development in India. MYAS is responsible for drafting national sports policies, issuing guidelines for governance reforms, allocating financial resources to sports institutions, and monitoring the performance of funded programmes. The ministry also exercises regulatory influence over National Sports Federations through recognition norms and compliance requirements, thereby shaping governance standards within the sports ecosystem.

4.2 Sports Authority of India (SAI)

The Sports Authority of India serves as the primary implementing agency for sports development programmes. It is tasked with talent identification, athlete training, infrastructure development, and capacity building. SAI operates a network of training centres and academies across the country and plays a critical role in translating policy objectives into operational outcomes. However, its dual role as an implementing agency and a service provider often raises questions regarding administrative efficiency and coordination with other institutions.

4.3 National Sports Federations (NSFs)

National Sports Federations are autonomous bodies responsible for the promotion and regulation of specific sports disciplines. They oversee athlete selection, conduct competitions, and represent India in international sporting forums. While NSFs are expected to function independently, their dependence on government recognition and funding places them within the broader governance framework. Literature and audit reports frequently highlight governance challenges within NSFs, including limited transparency, weak internal democracy, and inconsistent compliance with prescribed governance norms.

4.4 Coordination and Regulatory Mechanisms

Effective sports governance requires coordination among MYAS, SAI, NSFs, and state-level sports bodies. Policy instruments such as recognition criteria, funding guidelines, and monitoring frameworks are intended to ensure alignment between institutional objectives and national sports priorities. However, the absence of a dedicated independent regulator and overlapping jurisdictions often result in implementation gaps and accountability deficits.

4.5 Legal and Policy Framework

India's sports governance framework is guided by policy instruments such as the National Sports Policy, governance guidelines issued by MYAS, and proposed sports codes aimed at improving transparency and accountability. Although these instruments provide a normative framework, their enforcement largely depends on administrative discretion rather than statutory authority, limiting their effectiveness.

5. Institutional Performance and Policy Implementation

The effectiveness of sports governance in India can be assessed by examining how key institutions perform in translating policy objectives into tangible outcomes. Institutional performance is shaped by decision-making processes, funding mechanisms, administrative capacity, and accountability structures.

5.1 Policy Implementation Mechanisms

Sports policies in India are implemented through a combination of administrative guidelines, funding allocations, and programme-based interventions. MYAS issues operational guidelines and allocates financial resources, while implementation responsibilities are largely entrusted to SAI and National Sports Federations. Although this structure is intended to ensure specialisation and efficiency, in practice it often leads to coordination challenges and delays in execution.

5.2 Financial Management and Resource Utilisation

Public expenditure on sports has increased over the years; however, several audit reports indicate inefficiencies in financial management. CAG reports have highlighted instances of underutilisation of allocated funds, delayed release of grants, and deviations from approved expenditure norms. Such financial irregularities adversely affect infrastructure development, athlete training programmes, and long-term planning.

5.3 Administrative Efficiency and Accountability

Administrative efficiency remains a major concern in India's sports governance framework. The absence of robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms limits the ability of authorities to assess programme performance in real time. Furthermore, accountability mechanisms within National Sports Federations are often weak, with limited transparency in decision-making and inadequate grievance redressal systems for athletes.

5.4 Centre–Federation and Centre–State Relations

The relationship between the central government, sports federations, and state-level bodies plays a crucial role in policy implementation. While the central government provides funding and policy direction, states and federations are responsible for execution at the ground level. Variations in administrative capacity across states and federations contribute to uneven policy outcomes and regional disparities in sports development.

5.5 Impact on Athletes and Grassroots Development

Institutional performance directly influences athlete welfare and grassroots sports development. Implementation gaps often result in inconsistent access to training facilities, coaching support, and financial assistance. Although elite-level interventions have improved in recent years, grassroots and rural sports development continues to face systemic constraints arising from governance inefficiencies.

6. Outcomes of Sports Governance Reforms

An evaluation of sports governance reforms in India necessitates an examination of observable outcomes supported by officially reported data from government dashboards and institutional reports. Recent secondary data provide empirical grounding to assess policy effectiveness in infrastructure development, athlete support, and administrative outcomes.

6.1 Development of Sports Infrastructure

Official statistics indicate a significant expansion of sports infrastructure under central institutions. As per data reported by the Sports Authority of India, the national sports training ecosystem currently includes **24 National Centres of Excellence, 69 SAI Training Centres, and 26 extension centres** spread across different regions of the country. These facilities constitute the core institutional base for athlete training and high-performance preparation. While the expansion of such infrastructure reflects increased policy commitment, its spatial distribution continues to show concentration in urban and semi-urban regions, limiting accessibility for rural and remote areas.

6.2 Athlete Support Systems and Talent Development

Governance reforms have also resulted in structured athlete identification and support mechanisms. Government records indicate that **over 2,700 athletes** have been formally identified and supported under national talent development initiatives, receiving financial assistance, coaching, medical support, and exposure to competitive platforms. This marks a shift towards athlete-centric governance; however, audit observations suggest that delays in fund disbursement and uneven monitoring reduce the overall effectiveness of these interventions.

6.3 Public Expenditure and Budgetary Trends

Budgetary allocations provide another measurable indicator of policy priority. The Union Budget for **2025–26 allocated ₹3,794 crore** to the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, representing a substantial increase compared to earlier years. A significant portion of this allocation has been directed towards sports development and institutional strengthening. Despite increased funding, governance reports highlight issues of underutilisation and procedural delays, indicating that higher expenditure does not automatically translate into proportional outcomes.

6.4 Administrative and Institutional Outcomes

From an administrative perspective, the introduction of governance guidelines and standard operating procedures has contributed to greater procedural formalisation within sports institutions. However, compliance levels vary across federations and implementing agencies. The absence of a comprehensive performance evaluation dashboard linking funding to outcomes limits real-time assessment of institutional efficiency.

6.5 Overall Assessment of Outcomes

Overall, dashboard-based and report-backed data suggest that sports governance reforms in India have yielded **visible but uneven outcomes**. Infrastructure expansion, enhanced athlete support, and increased public spending signal positive policy intent. At the same time, governance deficits related to accountability, coordination, and monitoring continue to constrain inclusive and sustainable sports development.

7. Challenges and Governance Issues

Despite visible improvements in infrastructure and athlete support, sports governance in India continues to face several structural and administrative challenges. These issues undermine the effectiveness of policy implementation and limit the achievement of inclusive and sustainable sports development.

7.1 Bureaucratic Dominance and Political Interference

One of the persistent challenges in Indian sports governance is excessive bureaucratic control and political interference in decision-making processes. While government oversight is necessary for accountability, excessive administrative intervention often restricts institutional autonomy of sports bodies. Political influence in leadership positions within National Sports Federations has also been criticised for affecting merit-based decision-making and long-term planning.

7.2 Weak Accountability and Transparency Mechanisms

Audit reports and parliamentary observations have repeatedly highlighted deficiencies in transparency and accountability within sports institutions. Inadequate financial disclosures, limited internal audits, and weak grievance redressal mechanisms reduce institutional credibility. The absence of independent oversight further constrains effective monitoring of policy outcomes.

7.3 Inconsistent Policy Implementation

Variations in administrative capacity across institutions and states result in uneven policy implementation. Delays in fund disbursement, non-compliance with governance guidelines, and lack of standardised monitoring frameworks contribute to inconsistent outcomes. Such disparities adversely affect grassroots sports development and regional equity.

7.4 Centre–State and Inter-Institutional Coordination Gaps

Sports governance in India involves multiple stakeholders operating at different levels of administration. Weak coordination between the central government, state authorities, and sports federations often leads to duplication of efforts and policy fragmentation. The absence of a unified governance framework limits synergy among institutions.

7.5 Limited Focus on Grassroots and Marginalised Regions

Although elite-level sports development has received increased attention, grassroots sports and marginalised regions continue to face neglect. Rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged areas often lack adequate infrastructure and trained personnel. Governance shortcomings exacerbate these inequalities by failing to prioritise inclusive development.

7.6 Legal and Regulatory Constraints

The absence of a comprehensive statutory framework governing sports administration restricts enforceability of governance norms. Existing policies and guidelines rely heavily on executive discretion rather than legal mandates, reducing their effectiveness. This regulatory gap remains a major obstacle to institutional reform.

8. Discussion

The analysis of sports governance in India reveals a complex interaction between policy intent, institutional structures, and implementation outcomes. The preceding sections demonstrate that while the government has articulated ambitious objectives and increased public investment in sports, governance-related constraints continue to mediate the effectiveness of these initiatives.

A key issue emerging from the analysis is the gap between institutional autonomy and accountability. On the one hand, sports bodies such as National Sports Federations are expected to function autonomously to ensure technical expertise and flexibility. On the other hand, weak accountability mechanisms and limited oversight

have often resulted in governance failures. This imbalance undermines both policy credibility and athlete welfare.

The findings also highlight the significance of institutional coordination in shaping policy outcomes. Fragmentation among central ministries, implementing agencies, federations, and state-level bodies has led to inconsistent implementation and regional disparities. In the absence of a unified governance framework or an independent regulatory authority, coordination remains largely administrative rather than strategic.

From a public policy perspective, the outcomes of sports governance reforms indicate that programme-level interventions alone are insufficient to address systemic challenges. Infrastructure development and elite athlete support, while necessary, do not automatically translate into sustainable sports ecosystems without parallel reforms in governance, monitoring, and evaluation mechanisms.

Comparative insights from global sports governance literature further suggest that countries with clearly defined institutional roles, transparent funding systems, and independent oversight mechanisms tend to achieve better outcomes. The Indian experience, as analysed in this study, reflects partial alignment with these norms but lacks effective enforcement and institutional capacity.

Overall, the discussion underscores that sports governance in India requires a shift from scheme-driven administration to outcome-oriented institutional reform. Strengthening governance structures, enhancing accountability, and improving coordination are essential for translating policy objectives into long-term sports development outcomes.

9. Findings

Based on the analysis of secondary data and institutional performance, the study arrives at the following key findings:

- I. **Fragmented Governance Structure:** Sports governance in India is characterised by a fragmented institutional framework involving multiple agencies with overlapping roles, leading to coordination gaps and diluted accountability.
- II. **Policy–Implementation Gap:** Despite well-articulated policy objectives and increased financial allocations, implementation outcomes often fall short due to administrative delays, inconsistent compliance, and weak monitoring mechanisms.
- III. **Limited Institutional Autonomy with Weak Accountability:** National Sports Federations exhibit limited functional autonomy in practice, while accountability mechanisms remain inadequate, resulting in governance inefficiencies.
- IV. **Uneven Infrastructure Development:** Sports infrastructure development has improved overall; however, significant regional disparities persist, particularly affecting rural and marginalised regions.
- V. **Athlete-Centric Support Remains Inconsistent:** Although structured athlete support systems have been introduced, their reach and effectiveness vary widely due to uneven implementation and fund utilisation.
- VI. **Absence of Independent Regulatory Oversight:** The lack of a statutory, independent sports regulator limits enforceability of governance norms and transparency standards.
- VII. **Incremental Performance Gains:** Improvements in international sporting performance are evident, but the absence of a comprehensive evaluation framework makes causal attribution to governance reforms difficult.

These findings collectively indicate that governance-related constraints continue to shape the effectiveness of sports policy outcomes in India.

10. Policy Recommendations

In light of the findings and discussion, the study proposes the following policy recommendations to strengthen sports governance in India:

10.1 Establishment of an Independent Sports Regulatory Authority

A statutory, independent sports regulatory body should be established to oversee governance standards, ensure compliance by sports federations, and enhance transparency and accountability. Such an authority would reduce excessive bureaucratic discretion while ensuring effective oversight.

10.2 Clear Demarcation of Institutional Roles

The roles and responsibilities of MYAS, SAI, National Sports Federations, and state-level bodies should be clearly defined to minimise overlap and coordination gaps. A structured framework outlining functional boundaries would improve administrative efficiency and accountability.

10.3 Strengthening Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanisms

Robust monitoring and evaluation systems should be institutionalised to assess policy outcomes on a regular basis. Performance indicators linked to funding allocation can help promote outcome-oriented governance and timely corrective action.

10.4 Enhancing Transparency and Internal Democracy in Sports Federations

Governance reforms must prioritise transparency, regular audits, term limits for office-bearers, and inclusive decision-making within National Sports Federations. Strengthening internal democracy would improve institutional credibility and athlete trust.

10.5 Focus on Grassroots and Inclusive Sports Development

Policy emphasis should shift towards strengthening grassroots sports infrastructure, particularly in rural, tribal, and economically disadvantaged regions. Capacity building at the local level and decentralised implementation can promote inclusive sports development.

10.6 Legal Backing for Sports Governance Norms

Key governance guidelines and policy norms should be supported by legislative backing to ensure enforceability. A comprehensive sports governance law would strengthen institutional reform and reduce reliance on executive discretion.

11. Conclusion

Sports governance in India represents a critical dimension of public policy with significant implications for athletic performance, institutional accountability, and social inclusion. This study, based on secondary data and institutional analysis, demonstrates that while policy initiatives and increased investment have produced visible outcomes, governance-related challenges continue to constrain sustainable sports development.

The analysis highlights that fragmented institutional arrangements, weak accountability mechanisms, and coordination gaps undermine the effectiveness of sports policies. Although reforms have improved infrastructure and athlete support at certain levels, the absence of strong regulatory oversight and outcome-oriented governance limits long-term impact.

The study concludes that meaningful progress in Indian sports development requires a shift from scheme-centric administration to comprehensive institutional reform. Strengthening governance structures, ensuring transparency, and enhancing coordination among stakeholders are essential for translating policy intent into enduring outcomes. Future research may build upon this study by incorporating primary data and comparative analyses to further enrich understanding of sports governance in India.

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