Who Governs the Game? An Empirical Examination of Women's Power and Regulatory Compliance in Indian Sports Institutions

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Abstract

India's sports governance landscape shifted considerably when the National Sports Governance Act 2025 introduced a binding requirement for at least four women on every National Sports Body Executive Committee. This was a legislative step that was long overdue. However, does placing women's names on a committee actually place power in their hands? This study aims to answer this question. Through a survey of 110 athletes drawn from swimming, athletics, badminton, cricket, triathlon, and shooting competing at the local, state, national, and international levels, this study investigates how male and female athletes in India perceive governance, leadership, and policy support in their sporting environments. In most domains, men and women showed similar responses regarding resources, societal attitudes, and policy awareness. Nonetheless, a distinct and statistically significant gender disparity was evident in leadership opportunities. This gap, though narrow, is pronounced and suggests a structural issue rather than an incidental one

These findings indicate a governance paradox specific to India's reform period: while regulatory frameworks are increasingly gender-conscious in theory, institutional power structures continue to hamper the genuine inclusion of women. Counting women is not the same as counting them. This study concludes with concrete, enforceable recommendations for closing this gap within the NSGA 2025 framework.

Keywords

Women in sports governance, regulatory compliance, NSGA 2025, leadership, gender equity, Indian sports institutions, empirical study.