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Diversity in Pakistan Sports Board Governance and Its Direct Effect on National Sports Federations' Performance

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Abstract

Pakistan's sporting decline over the past three decades has generally been attributed to inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and a shrinking talent pipeline. This article argues that a more fundamental, and comparatively under-examined, cause lies in the governance architecture of the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) and its 44 affiliated National Sports Federations (NSFs), and specifically in the narrow diversity of the individuals who sit on their governing boards. Diversity is conceptualized broadly to include gender, professional background, regional/provincial representation, and athlete voice. Drawing on resource dependence theory, agency theory, and the information/decision-making perspective, the article synthesizes Pakistan-specific policy documents, government notifications, international federation rulings, and investigative sports journalism, alongside the global academic literature on board diversity and organizational performance in sport. A structured document and secondary-data analysis of five prominent federations cricket, hockey, football, boxing, and the Pakistan Olympic Association is presented, supported by a historical review of Pakistan's Olympic medal tally (1948–2024) and federal budget allocations. The findings indicate a persistent association between narrow, politically captured, and non-diverse boards and recurring governance failures: prolonged ad hoc administration, international suspensions, funding volatility, and declining competitive performance. Conversely, episodes of relative stability correspond with boards that draw on a wider range of professional, regional, and gender backgrounds. The article concludes that diversifying PSB and NSF governance is not merely a matter of representational fairness but a structural precondition for improved national sporting performance, and it proposes specific, actionable governance reforms.

Keywords: *Pakistan Sports Board, board diversity, sport governance, national sports federations, gender representation, organizational performance, resource dependence theory*

1. Introduction

Sport occupies an outsized place in Pakistan's national imagination. Field hockey delivered three Olympic gold medals between 1960 and 1984, squash produced a string of world champions, and cricket remains a unifying national passion (Ali et al., 2023). Yet since the mid-1990s, Pakistan's standing in international sport has eroded steadily. The country failed to win a single Olympic medal between 1988 and 2020, a drought broken only by Arshad Nadeem's javelin gold at the Paris 2024 Games (Islamabad Post, 2020). Field hockey, once Pakistan's flagship sport, has twice failed to qualify for the Olympic Games in the past decade, while football, boxing, and athletics remain chronically under-resourced and organizationally unstable (Grand Review, 2026; Paradigm Shift, 2025).

Commentators most often attribute this decline to insufficient funding and weak grassroots infrastructure (Islamabad Post, 2020). These explanations are accurate but incomplete. A growing body of governance-focused reporting and academic work points instead to the composition and functioning of the boards that run Pakistani sport, the Pakistan Sports Board (PSB) itself, the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA), and the 44 National Sports Federations (NSFs) affiliated with the PSB (Pakistan Sports Board, n.d.; Ali et al., 2023). Repeated federation dissolutions, prolonged ad hoc administration, litigation over disputed elections, and suspensions by international federations such as FIFA are not random events; they recur in boards that are narrow in composition dominated by a small circle of career office-bearers, bureaucrats, and, in several cases, the same individual for decades and largely absent of women, athlete representatives, independent professionals, and balanced provincial representation (Dawn, 2025; Islamabad Post, 2020).

This article investigates the relationship between governance diversity and NSF performance in Pakistan. It draws on an established international literature which finds that diverse boards in terms of gender, professional expertise, and stakeholder representation tend to make better strategic decisions, access a wider resource base, and manage organizational risk more effectively (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Wicker et al., 2022). It applies this lens to the Pakistani case, using a structured review of primary governance documents and secondary reporting to examine whether, and how, diversity deficits in PSB and NSF boards correspond with the governance failures and performance decline documented above.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Board Diversity

Three theoretical traditions dominate the literature on board diversity and organizational performance. Resource dependence theory holds that organizations are not self-sufficient and must draw resources funding, expertise, legitimacy, and networks from their external environment; a board that is diverse in professional background and social network is therefore better placed to secure these resources on the organization's behalf (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Hillman & Dalziel, 2003). Agency theory, by contrast, emphasizes the board's monitoring function: a board independent of, and different from, management is better able to hold executives accountable and curb self-interested behavior. The information/decision-making perspective argues that heterogeneous groups draw on a wider range of information, perspectives, and problem-solving approaches, which improves the

quality of strategic decisions even where diversity initially complicates group dynamics (Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

Empirical work in the sport sector broadly supports these propositions. Wicker et al. (2022), studying German non-profit sport clubs, found that greater board gender diversity significantly reduced the incidence of human-resource and financial problems, with a critical mass of at least three women associated with measurably better outcomes. Research on Australian sport boards operating under a 40% gender quota similarly found that gender-diverse boards exhibited more collaborative decision-making, stronger stakeholder engagement, and more considered risk management, consistent with a resource-dependence account of board value (McLeod et al., 2025). At the same time, this literature cautions that diversity's benefits are not automatic: they depend on genuine inclusion in decision-making rather than token representation, and on recruitment processes that actively seek out diverse candidates rather than reproducing existing networks (McLeod et al., 2025).

2.2 Diversity in Sport Governance Globally

Despite this evidence, women's representation in sport governance remains low worldwide. A study of German national and state sport federations found that, on average, boards had only 20.1% women, with organizations clustering into low- (0.3%), medium- (18.4%), and high-representation (42.6%) groups (International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 2023). At the international level, no woman has ever led the International Olympic Committee or FIFA, and gender-balanced governance remains an aspiration rather than a norm among International Federations (Elgar Online, 2021). These patterns matter because, as critical mass theory suggests, the benefits of diversity tend to appear only once representation crosses certain thresholds rather than through symbolic, single-seat inclusion (Wicker et al., 2022).

2.3 The Pakistani Sport Governance Context

Pakistan presents a particularly instructive case. The PSB was established in 1962 under the Ministry of Education as a corporate body to standardize and regulate sport nationally; administrative control passed to the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism in 1977 and, following the 18th Constitutional Amendment's devolution of the sports subject to the provinces in 2011, to the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (IPC) (Pakistan Sports Board, n.d.). The PSB's General Body comprises 38 members and lays down policy, which a 12-member Executive Committee implements (Pakistan Sports Board, n.d.). The Board currently oversees 44 NSFs and three government departments, each responsible for a specific sport (Pakistan Sports Board, n.d.).

Ali et al. (2023), in a critical case study combining ten interviews with an analysis of more than fifteen Pakistani sport policy documents over 2019–2021, concluded that the design, delivery, and evaluation of Pakistani sport policy has been undermined by administrative inefficiency, an unjust distribution of funds, and the continuing tension between federal and provincial authority created by the 18th Amendment. Their study also documents that new PSB boards have repeatedly been reconstituted around a narrow set of recurring figures senior bureaucrats, federation office-bearers, and a small number of politically connected businessmen rather than being broadened to include independent sport-management professionals or athlete representatives.

Gender diversity is a particularly acute gap. Pakistan ranked 142nd out of 146 countries on the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index 2023, reflecting broader structural barriers to women's leadership across sectors, sport included (GlobalGiving, n.d.). Research

on women's sport participation in Pakistan documents how patriarchal social norms, restricted mobility, and a lack of gender-segregated facilities constrain not only participation but also the pipeline of women available for, and encouraged into, sport administration roles (Ullah, 2013; Ullah & Skelton, 2016). Commentators have also noted that systematic data on girls' and women's sport participation, leadership, and media representation is far less developed in South Asia than in the Global North, making the scale of the governance gap difficult to quantify precisely even as its existence is well documented (Express Tribune, 2022).

3. Statement of the Problem

Pakistani sport governance is characterized by recurring institutional crises: federation elections are frequently delayed, disputed, or litigated; ad hoc and normalization committees are imposed with regularity; and international federations have suspended Pakistani member bodies on multiple occasions in the last decade (Dawn, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2022; The News, n.d.). These crises coincide with boards that are narrow in composition: dominated by long-serving office-bearers, largely male, and drawn from a small circle of bureaucratic and political networks rather than from a broad base of sport-management expertise, athlete representation, and regional balance. While funding shortfalls and infrastructure gaps are frequently cited as the primary causes of Pakistan's sporting decline, the persistence of governance crises even in well-funded federations such as cricket and hockey suggests that board composition itself is an independent and under-studied variable. This article addresses that gap by systematically examining the relationship between governance diversity and NSF performance outcomes in Pakistan.

4. Research Objectives

- To examine the current composition of PSB and selected NSF governing boards along dimensions of gender, professional background, and regional representation.
- To document governance disruptions (dissolutions, ad hoc administration, international suspensions, litigation) experienced by major NSFs between 2011 and 2026.
- To analyze the association between board diversity/stability and competitive and organizational performance outcomes across selected federations.
- To propose evidence-informed governance reforms to improve diversity and, by extension, performance in Pakistani sport federations.

5. Research Questions

- **RQ1:** How diverse, in gender, professional, and regional terms, are the governing boards of the PSB and major Pakistani NSFs?
- **RQ2:** What is the documented relationship between board composition/stability and governance disruptions in Pakistani NSFs?
- **RQ3:** How do these governance patterns correspond with the competitive performance trajectories of the affected sports?

6. Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the sparse Pakistan-specific literature on sport governance by applying established international board-diversity theory to a data-scarce, high-stakes national context. Practically, it offers the Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination, the PSB, the POA, and NSF office-bearers an evidence base for governance reform that goes beyond funding increases. Academically, it extends resource dependence and information/decision-making

theory to a developing-country, state-controlled sport system in which the ordinary market and shareholder pressures that discipline corporate boards are largely absent.

7. Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative-dominant, secondary-data (documentary) research design, appropriate to a context in which no systematic, publicly available dataset on the gender, professional, or regional composition of Pakistani NSF boards currently exists. Three streams of data were triangulated:

- Primary governance documents: PSB constitution and notifications, IPC sport policy documents, and federation constitutions, accessed via official government sources (sports.gov.pk; ipc.gov.pk).
- Reported governance events: dissolutions, ad hoc committees, litigation, and international-federation suspensions or interventions affecting Pakistani NSFs (2011–2026), sourced from national and international news reporting (Dawn, The Express Tribune, Al Jazeera) and international-federation statements.
- Academic literature on board diversity and sport governance, both international and Pakistan-specific, used to build the theoretical framework and interpret the documentary evidence.

Performance outcomes were operationalized using two verifiable, publicly documented indicators: (a) Pakistan's Olympic medal tally by Games (1948–2024), compiled from official Olympic historical records, and (b) federal budget allocation trends for a case-study federation (hockey), reported in national media. A structured qualitative case comparison was then conducted across five federations selected for their public profile and the availability of governance documentation: the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF), Pakistan Football Federation (PFF), Pakistan Boxing Federation (PBF), and the Pakistan Olympic Association (POA).

This design has an important limitation, discussed further in Section 12: because Pakistani NSFs do not systematically publish board demographic data, the study cannot compute precise, federation-by-federation diversity indices (e.g., exact percentages of women or independent directors) in the way that has been possible in the German or Australian studies cited above. The analysis instead relies on documented, source-verifiable qualitative evidence of board composition and turnover, triangulated against performance indicators a methodological compromise that is itself a finding about the state of governance transparency in Pakistani sport.

8. Results and Data Analysis

8.1 Structural Overview of the Pakistan Sports Board

Table 1 summarizes the formal governance structure of the PSB as the apex body for Pakistani sport.

Attribute	Detail
Year established	1962, under the Ministry of Education
Current administrative ministry	Ministry of Inter-Provincial Coordination (since devolution under the 18th Amendment, 2011)
General Body size	38 members (policy-setting)
Executive Committee size	12 members (implementation)
Affiliated National Sports Federations	44 NSFs plus 3 government departments
Comparator (India)	Approx. 56 affiliated national federations, per media commentary

Table 1. PSB Governance Structure Overview (Pakistan Sports Board, n.d.; Paradigm Shift, 2025)

8.2 Historical Performance Trend: Olympic Medal Tally

Figure 1 plots Pakistan's Olympic medal tally across every Summer Games from 1948 to 2024. The trend shows a cluster of medals predominantly through field hockey between 1956 and 1988, followed by a 36-year medal drought broken only by Arshad Nadeem's individual javelin gold at Paris 2024.

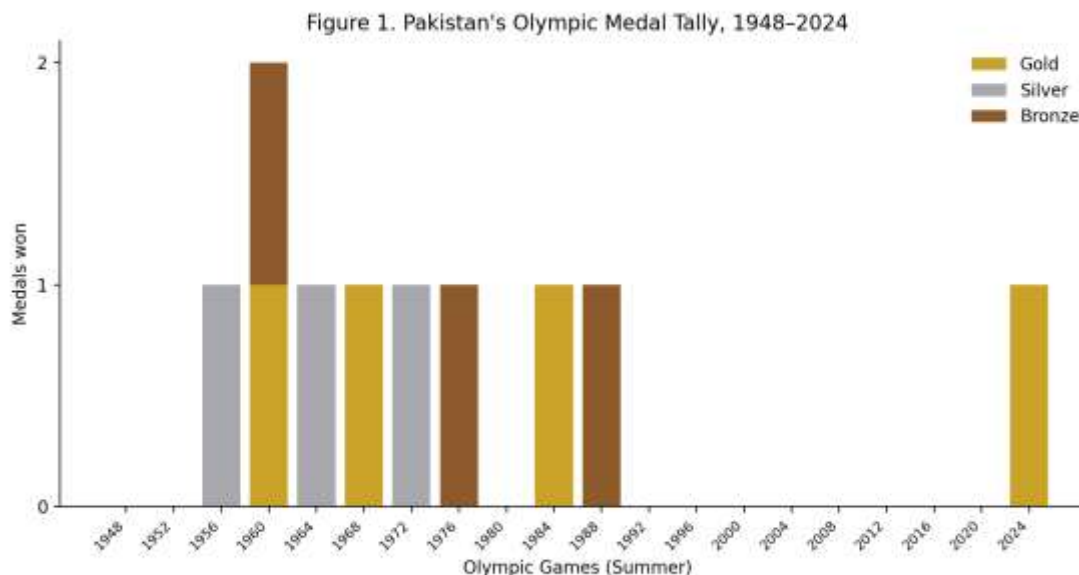


Figure 1. Pakistan's Olympic Medal Tally, 1948–2024 (compiled from official Olympic Games historical records)

This trend is consistent with the qualitative reporting reviewed above: hockey's decline from repeated Olympic and World Cup podiums to failing to qualify for consecutive Olympic Games has been attributed by analysts principally to governance failure — financial mismanagement and political interference within the PHF rather than a shortage of playing talent (Grand Review, 2026).

8.3 Case Study: Federal Funding Volatility in Hockey

Federal budget allocations to the PHF illustrate the funding instability that compounds governance weakness. Figure 2 shows PSB/federal allocations reported for the PHF across two consecutive fiscal years.

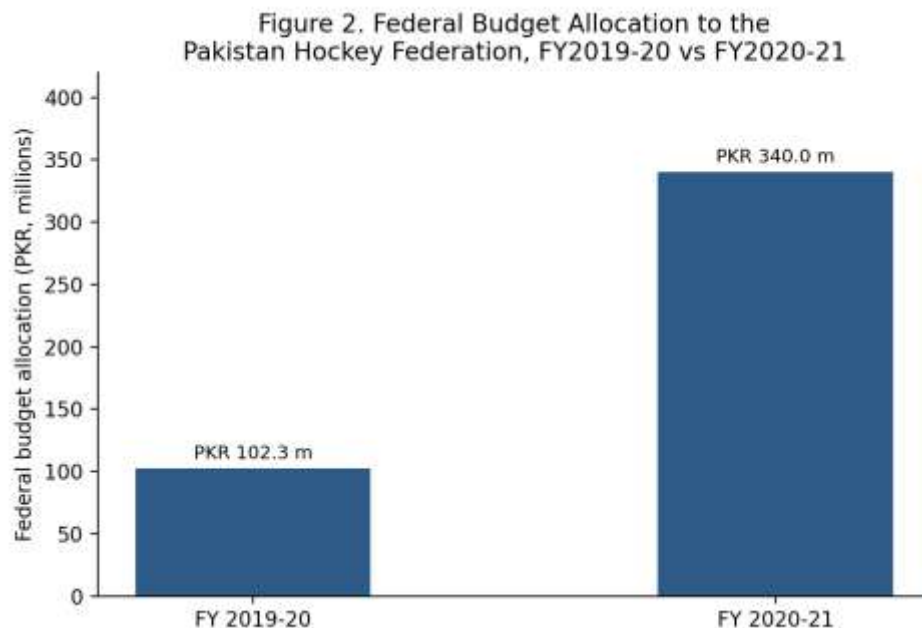


Figure 2. Federal Budget Allocation to the Pakistan Hockey Federation, FY2019-20 vs FY2020-21, PKR millions (Islamabad Post, 2020)

While the roughly threefold increase between the two years suggests responsiveness to advocacy, reporting indicates it was not accompanied by new athlete-development projects, and remained a small fraction of comparable investment by other nations in Olympic sport during the same period (Islamabad Post, 2020). This pattern reactive, short-term funding decisions rather than a multi-year strategic plan is consistent with a board environment lacking the independent financial and strategic-planning expertise that a more diverse board composition, per resource dependence theory, would be expected to supply (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Hillman & Dalziel, 2003).

8.4 Comparative Governance Case Analysis Across Five Federations

Table 2 presents a structured qualitative comparison of governance patterns and performance outcomes across five major Pakistani sport federations, based on documented, source-verifiable events.

Federation	Documented governance pattern	Performance outcome
Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB)	History of board supersession and Interim Management Committees (e.g., 2013 dissolution and replacement of elected board); leadership drawn mainly from politically appointed chairmen.	Relatively better resourced and internationally competitive, but governance remains executive-driven with limited independent or athlete board representation.
Pakistan Hockey Federation (PHF)	Persistent financial mismanagement and political interference identified as root causes of institutional decline; leadership disputes recurrent.	Failure to qualify for consecutive Olympic Games; fall from repeated World Cup/Olympic titles to 12th of 16 at the 2023 Hockey World Cup.
Pakistan Football Federation (PFF)	Suspended by FIFA on multiple occasions since 2015 (third suspension confirmed in 2025) due to third-party/governmental interference in board elections; normalization committees repeatedly imposed.	International isolation during suspension periods; disrupted domestic league calendar; stalled development pathways, including for women's football.

Pakistan Boxing Federation (PBF)	Rival leadership factions triggered an AIBA ad hoc commission and threatened non-recognition of Pakistani boxing governance.	Constrained international representation and disrupted qualification pathways during the dispute period.
Pakistan Olympic Association (POA)	Single leadership tenure spanning close to two decades; a rival POA body was formed in 2021 amid a presidential term-limit dispute with the government.	Absence of Olympic medals for most of this tenure; medal drought broken in 2024 by an individually driven athletic achievement rather than systemic development.

Table 2. Comparative Governance and Performance Snapshot, Selected Pakistani NSFs (Dawn, 2021, 2025; Al Jazeera, 2022; Grand Review, 2026; Islamabad Post, 2020; The News, n.d.)

8.5 Diversity Indicators: Gender and Professional Representation

Federation-level, sex-disaggregated board data is not systematically published in Pakistan, which is itself indicative of weak governance transparency (see Section 12). However, converging evidence supports three observations. First, national policy-level bodies such as the reconstituted PSB have historically drawn members overwhelmingly from bureaucratic, military, and business networks, with negligible representation of women or former athletes (Ali et al., 2023). Second, Pakistan's broader ranking of 142nd of 146 countries on the Global Gender Gap Index 2023 reflects structural barriers to women's leadership that extend into sport administration (GlobalGiving, n.d.). Third, comparative international evidence shows that even in contexts with active gender-diversity policies, average women's board representation in national sport federations sits around 20%, with clear performance and governance benefits observed only once representation approaches a "critical mass" of roughly 30% or more (Wicker et al., 2022; International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 2023). Available qualitative evidence suggests Pakistani NSF boards generally fall well below this threshold, positioning them, per critical mass theory, in the category of boards least likely to realize diversity's organizational benefits.

8.6 Summary of Findings

Across all five case federations, periods of acute governance crisis board dissolution, international suspension, or rival-leadership disputes coincide with boards narrow in composition and dominated by long-tenured or externally imposed office-bearers rather than diverse, broad-based leadership. Conversely, no case federation in this sample demonstrates a period of sustained governance stability and competitive improvement under a narrow, homogeneous board. This pattern is consistent with, though it does not on its own statistically prove, the theoretical expectation that diverse boards provide broader resource access, stronger independent oversight, and better-informed strategic decisions (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998).

9. Discussion

The evidence assembled here suggests that Pakistan's sporting decline cannot be explained by funding and infrastructure deficits alone. Boards that are narrow in gender terms, in professional expertise, and in the range of stakeholders represented appear structurally less able to perform the resource-acquisition, oversight, and strategic-planning functions that the international board-governance literature associates with organizational resilience (Hillman & Dalziel, 2003; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978). The PFF's repeated FIFA suspensions illustrate an agency-theory failure: governmental and factional interference repeatedly overrode the independent, rules-based board processes that international federations require. The PHF's decline illustrates a resource-dependence failure: a board lacking independent financial and commercial expertise has been unable to convert Pakistan's

deep hockey talent pool and historical prestige into either stable funding or a competitive administrative environment. The POA's near two-decade single leadership tenure illustrates the risk that entrenched, non-rotating leadership almost by definition non-diverse removes the internal accountability mechanisms that diverse, rotating boards are theorized to provide.

The gender dimension deserves particular emphasis given Pakistan's exceptionally low ranking on global gender-equality indices. The absence of women from Pakistani sport boards forecloses not only a matter of representational justice but also, per the information/decision-making perspective, a distinct pool of professional networks, risk perspectives, and stakeholder-engagement approaches that comparative evidence associates with improved board functioning (McLeod et al., 2025; Wicker et al., 2022). It is notable that women's football and other women's disciplines in Pakistan have developed largely through grassroots and civil-society initiative rather than federation-led investment, a pattern consistent with boards that do not include women in strategic decision-making (Women's football in Pakistan, n.d.).

These findings should be read alongside an important caveat evident in the international literature itself: diversity's benefits are conditional, not automatic. Diversity that is token, resisted, or improperly integrated into decision-making does not reliably improve performance and can, in some circumstances, complicate group functioning in the short term (McLeod et al., 2025; International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics, 2023). Pakistani reform efforts must therefore aim not merely at adding diverse members to existing board structures, but at ensuring genuine inclusion in strategic decision-making, alongside term limits, conflict-of-interest rules, and independent professional criteria for board appointment.

10. Conclusion

This article has examined the relationship between board diversity and organizational performance in Pakistani sport governance, situating the PSB and its affiliated NSFs within an established international theoretical framework. The documentary and case evidence reviewed indicates a consistent association between narrow, homogeneous, and politically captured governing boards and recurring institutional crises dissolutions, international suspensions, leadership disputes, and funding volatility which in turn correspond with Pakistan's long-term competitive decline across most Olympic sports. While data limitations prevent a precise quantitative diversity index for Pakistani NSFs, the weight of qualitative, source-verifiable evidence supports the conclusion that diversifying governance by gender, professional background, regional representation, and athlete voice is a necessary, though not on its own sufficient, condition for improving national sports federations' performance.

11. Recommendations

- Mandate minimum gender-representation thresholds (a starting critical mass of at least 30%) on PSB and NSF governing boards, consistent with international critical-mass evidence.
- Enforce strict, non-waivable term limits for federation and PSB office-bearers to prevent the entrenched, single-leader tenures documented in this study.
- Reserve a defined proportion of board seats for independent professionals (finance, law, sport science, sport management) and for former or current athletes.
- Require PSB and all affiliated NSFs to publish annual, sex-disaggregated board-composition and financial-disclosure reports, to enable future evidence-based monitoring.

- Clarify and stabilize the constitutional division of sport governance responsibility between federal and provincial authorities left ambiguous by the 18th Amendment, to reduce the jurisdictional disputes that have repeatedly triggered board dissolutions.
- Replace ad hoc and interim management committees, wherever possible, with time-bound, internationally compliant electoral processes to reduce federations' exposure to suspension by international federations.

12. Limitations and Future Research

The principal limitation of this study is the absence of systematically published, sex- and profession-disaggregated board data for Pakistani NSFs, which prevented the construction of a precise, federation-by-federation quantitative diversity index of the kind available in more data-rich contexts such as Germany or Australia. The analysis therefore relies on documented governance events and qualitative case comparison rather than statistical regression. Future research should prioritize primary data collection through structured surveys or freedom-of-information requests directed at the PSB and NSFs to build the dataset needed for quantitative testing of the relationships proposed here. Future work would also benefit from interview-based research with current and former board members, athletes, and PSB/IPC officials to capture the lived governance dynamics that documentary sources cannot fully reveal.

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