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RESEARCH ARTICLE



Board Composition in National Sport Federations: An Examination of BRICS Countries

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ABSTRACT

This study examined board composition in national sport federations (NSF) in the BRICS group (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa). BRICS is a significant geopolitical group with a strong history and interest in sport, yet there has been relatively limited sport governance research in this context. Specifically, this study measured levels of board diversity (occupational and gender) and board size in the NSFs – factors that are widely considered to impact board effectiveness. Data were collected on 184 NSFs across the five countries from online sources. The results showed that across the BRICS countries NSF directors largely come from athletic backgrounds (45.1% of total), except for China where bureaucrats prevail (61.9%). Men dominate NSF board positions, from a high of 92.1% in India to 68.4% in South Africa. Board size ranged from 20.4 in India, to 14.2 in South Africa. This study brings sport governance research to new frontiers by generating insight into board composition in contexts that are under-researched and culturally diverse.

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1. Introduction

Research on sport governance has increased markedly in recent years (Dowling et al., 2018). The acceleration in academic interest has occurred in conjunction with macro trends driving the broader domain of sport management, including growing commercialisation, professionalism and the increasing involvement of governments and their funding (Shilbury & Ferkins, 2011). Such forces necessitate more formalised structures, processes and principles of governance, as the consequences of their omission have become more damaging (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021a). In an increasingly global and interconnected world, domestic responsibility for the key roles of strategy setting and oversight of sports falls to respective national sport federations (NSFs). As the body responsible for these functions, the board of

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directors holds a critical role in upholding good governance standards (Nagel et al., 2015).

While the structure and composition of boards of directors has been a prominent feature of the wider corporate governance literature for decades (Pugliese et al., 2015; Van den Berghe & Levrau, 2004), research in the context of sport organisations has been less common (McLeod, Star et al., 2021). Inglis (1997) was among the first to describe board roles in sporting organisations, and the literature has since expanded to consider topics from board behaviour and processes (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012) through to contemporary research regarding role theories, structures and composition (McLeod, 2020).

Two key aspects of board composition are board size and diversity (Star & McLeod, 2021). There is broad agreement in the (western dominated) corporate governance literature that boards perform optimally with between 5 and 12 members (Hartarska & Nadolnyak, 2012) and this proposition has been reaffirmed in the context of sport (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). Equally, there is consensus between the corporate and sport governance literatures that diversity is an important driver of board and organisational performance (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2014; Lee & Cunningham, 2019). In addition to the argument for diversity and by extension inclusion on the basis of organisational effectiveness, there also is growing appreciation of the ethical need for diversity on social justice grounds (Elling et al., 2018).

There is a general consensus as to what constitutes good governance in sport governing bodies (Chappelet, 2018), promulgated by the definition and assessment of specific governance principles to uphold (Geeraert et al., 2014). Detailed to varying degrees of specificity in respective Sport Governance Codes, many are underpinned by fundamental tenets such as democracy, transparency and accountability (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021a). Research to date has predominantly focused on sport organisations in Western systems that more naturally uphold liberal processes and structures (Parent et al., 2018), though recent studies have attempted to extend these to more diverse contexts such as India (e.g., McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021b). While governance standards are not limited in relevance to organisations in Western, politically democratic or economically developed systems, it is important to acknowledge that idiosyncrasies may mean that certain aspects are incongruous in certain countries (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021a). If, as Henry (2021) asserts, the assumption of a convergence toward homogenised governance practices across non-Western nations is a flawed premise, then it is necessary to uncover, and explain points of difference.

The aim of this research is to expand the sport governance literature by conducting a comparative analysis of board composition in NSFs in the relatively understudied context of the 'BRICS' countries; namely: Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. This is done by measuring board size and levels of key forms of diversity (occupational and gender) on the boards of NSFs in those countries. This paper represents an extension of the work of (McLeod, Star et al., 2021) who examined board composition in mostly Western countries, as well as the Play the Game reports, which have done the same. While those research efforts have made commendable contributions to the sport governance literature, the significance of this paper is in generating new insights into the topic in previously unexplored,

non-Western countries. In doing so, we seek to expand the boundaries of the literature, build a foundation on which to debate different approaches to sport governance across diverse cultural contexts, and identify salient directions for future research.

2. Board Composition in Sport

The concept of governance has been described as imprecise, with ongoing definitional ambiguity in the literature (Marie L'Huillier, 2014). In their scoping review of governance in sport, Dowling et al. (2018) adopt three general approaches or lenses through which to view sport governance: organisational, systemic and political. These are born from the formative work of Henry and Lee (2004) in defining the field. 'Organisational governance' considers normative, ethically-informed standards of managerial behaviour, or the accepted values and processes regarding the management and governance of sport organisations. 'Systematic governance' focuses on the relationships between organisations, such as the competition, cooperation and mutual adjustment between organisations within sport networks. Finally, 'political governance' refers to the growing recognition that the dynamic between state and society has shifted, and more specifically how governments or governing bodies 'steer' or influence the behaviour of organisations. The study of governance thus considers not only how organisations are structured and operate, but also their role in a wider network of interconnected parties and subject to the influence of the political systems in which they are nested. The present study is positioned within the organisational governance domain.

Defining the role of the board of directors has been a primary consideration for sport governance scholars (Ferkins et al., 2005). Without clarity over the remit of what boards do, it is difficult to assess the extent to which they are effective (Huse, 2005). Madhani (2017) identified four primary roles for the corporate board including control, strategy, resource provision and to provide counsel. In the context of sport, researchers have for the past decade sought a deeper understanding of these roles (Hoye & Doherty, 2011), directors' behaviour and process (Shilbury et al., 2013), strategic capability (Ferkins & Shilbury, 2012) and board culture (Schoenberg et al., 2016). These have contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the sport board from a socio-behavioural perspective. Sport board structure and composition, on the other hand, has received less attention, though in the corporate governance context the reverse has traditionally been true (Minichilli et al., 2012).

Within the corporate governance literature, a number of structural and composition factors have received significant scholarly attention. This includes board member independence (Mcintyre et al., 2007) CEO/Chairperson duality (Krause & Semadeni, 2013) board size (Lawal, 2012) and board diversity (Adams et al., 2015). In sport, Geeraert et al. (2014) found in their study of 35 Olympic governing bodies that many were not implementing structures consistent with good governance. A similar study of UK NSFs found numerous shortfalls regarding board independence (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009). Indeed, a common focus of study regarding board structure and composition is that of federated versus unitary governance models, particularly in an Australian setting (O'Boyle & Shilbury, 2016). Regarding board

size, there is broad agreement in the corporate governance literature that boards should constitute between five and 12 directors, as at numbers greater than that processes become unwieldy (Goodstein et al., 1994). Studies focused on the sport context have reaffirmed this guidance (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009; Yeh & Taylor, 2008), but recent research demonstrates that outside of the West significant variations can occur, such as in India (McLeod, Star et al., 2021). Understanding the extent to which known standards of good sport governance are adopted across the world is an important research endeavour. This is because it can help establish a picture of governance standards throughout international sport and potentially act as a catalyst for policy reform. Further, establishing the extent of the variation in governance arrangements across global sport can act as a foundation on which to debate whether 'good governance' can indeed be understood universally in sport, as is implied by the IOC's approach to defining universal principles of good governance (Chappelet, 2018).

Board diversity refers to the mix of people on a board according to criteria such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational background and skills (Siciliano, 1996). Although the literature on board diversity is not entirely conclusive in affirming the business case (McLeod, 2020), there is nevertheless strong reason to assert that heterogeneity aids effectiveness through improving collective intelligence (Boder, 2006) or access to greater resources (Zahra & Pearce, 1989). Diversity is argued to be a means of overcoming 'group-think' (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007) and thus it is important to avoid diversity 'tokenism', meaning that boards should not merely include diverse parties but work actively to include them in decision-making processes. This has also been shown to be the case in the non-profit setting (Buse et al., 2016). Given the traditional lack of diversity on boards in Western NSFs, it is important to have a deeper understanding of the composition and effects of sports boards in non-Western and more monocultural societies.

3. BRICS

The acronym BRIC was first used in 2001 to describe the four largest emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India and China in a research report by the investment bank Goldman Sachs (Bell, 2011). Despite their status as developing nations at the time and being either geographic or population superpowers, there was little political or economic commonality between the set (Armijo, 2007). South Africa was formally invited as the first African nation to join the group in 2010, having already been considered a contemporary in terms of its economic development at the time (Vijayakumar et al., 2010). Despite their grouping, the BRICS countries display marked differences in their economic structure and size, political systems and international relations. Although meeting annually at BRICS summits since 2009, the designation does not signify any formal alliance, and there exist a number of economic, territorial and political disputes between the members. Their ascendant position on the world stage has been proposed to varying degrees as a challenge to the hegemony of (neo)liberal democracy as the predominant rules-based global order, as led by the United States in the 20th century (Nölke et al., 2015).

As a loose categorisation of nations with divergent economies, political systems and cultures, sport plays varying roles in the BRICS countries. That said, all have bid to host sporting mega-events in recognising their potential to further domestic and international interests (Mendez, 2016). This has included the BRICS Games held annually since 2016. As is typically seen elsewhere, sport governance systems within the BRICS reflect the political environment in which they are nested.

Brazil has a large and significant sport sector, estimated at the 5th largest globally (DeMelo & Feitosa, 2006). Many Brazilian sport clubs serve not only as a means of exercise or play, but also to reinforce the customs and identity of different ethnic groups (DaCosta, 2006). High performance sport has received significant support and funding not only from the Ministry of Sport but also from various public offices (Bravo, 2013). The Brazilian sport system is comprised of a complex network number of public, private and voluntary stakeholders who exert differing degrees of influence on sport governance (Bravo & Haas, 2020). Results from the National Sport Governance Observer (NSGO) project scored Brazil at 32 percent, which although low is comparable with many (mainly eastern) European countries (Geeraert, 2018). In the NSGO, Brazil received high scores for democratic participation regarding athletes but minimal for other sport stakeholder representation, and lagged on markers for social inclusion and gender equality (Geeraert, 2018).

Sport is of great importance in Russia too (Arnold, 2018). The organisations responsible for managing Russian sport operate in a highly centralized, integrated and increasingly democratic system, the task of which is to maximize mass physical fitness and high performance sports (Smolianov, 2013). The sustainable development of the Russian economy and Russian sports at the beginning of the 21st century led to an increase in the country's prestige in the international arena. The organisation of major events including the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi, the 2018 FIFA World Cup, the IAAF World Championships, FINA World Cup, IIHF World Championships and World Championships of Modern Pentathlon have created a new trend for youth and the development of mass sports in the country.

Despite sustained success at the Summer and Winter Olympics, Russia has been criticized for doping scandals (Pound, 2020). These allegations were accompanied by the disqualification of Russian athletes and NSFs, which Altukhov and Nauright (2018) attributed to the new "Cold War" in sports between Russia and the United States, and a strengthening of the influence of American business interests in the IOC. Conversely, Harris et al. (2021) argued that the deep interrelationships and influence of the Russian state on NSFs was the key factor in this major crisis in international sports governance.

In India, sport has shown tremendous growth potential though mainly in the domestic forms of cricket, soccer and more recently kabaddi. Rapid commercialisation and professionalisation has put new pressures on Indian sport governance systems, which have been found to be deficient in many cases (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021b). A prevalent example is the high-profile wrangling between the Indian Supreme Court and the powerful Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), whereby the former has, since 2015, attempted to impose governance reform by

means of improved transparency, accountability and stakeholder engagement (McLeod & Star, 2020). Research suggests that, in India, sport governance practices are shaped by cultural norms relating to nepotism and an expectation to show deference to leaders (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021a). A high level of political involvement has also been suggested to be detrimental to good governance in Indian sport, and has been linked to rent-seeking behaviours (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021b). This has led to calls from sports activists for politicians to be banned from Indian NSFs as the next step in the evolution of the sector (Bhatia, 2019).

Sport has been an integral part of China's policy agenda since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and has risen in prominence over the past two decades (Zheng et al., 2018). An important feature of contemporary policy is the politicisation of the sport industry, embodying the dominant system of one-party rule (Hong & Huang, 2013). Elite sport success is a priority for the Chinese government, which has spent considerable effort to cultivate top-performing athletes. While China has demonstrated an ability to host and succeed at megaevents, the system of centralised power has led to a monopoly in dealing with public investment, which presents an obstacle for sport reformation and commercialisation (Hong & Huang, 2013). Given the principles upheld as exemplifying good governance such as democracy and transparency are incongruous with central planning, standards against which Western sport organisations are typically measured may prove unsuitable in such political systems.

South Africa derives much joy and pride from international sport, with a complex history intertwined with the legacies of colonial rule and apartheid. More recently sport has played an integral role in removing barriers and being a powerful driver for progress and development (Mbalula, 2011). This results in markedly different system to those found elsewhere. Sport governance and policies are premised on the foundation of 'sport for all', where cooperation between capital, labour and civil society aid the integration and unity of the nation (Bester, 2013). A prevalent feature of South African sport is the willingness to use racial quotas in the pursuit of affirmative 'equitable representation'. The extent to which this extends outside the bounds of race and across additional measures of diversity merits further investigation in the context of sport.

The BRICS nations can reasonably be considered the most significant geopolitical group outside of the West, with a combined population of 3.23 billion people (40% of world population) (O'Neill, 2021), and in sporting terms represents the five countries with the highest growth potential. To address the issue of Western hegemony in sport governance research, it is thus fitting to begin by exploring the BRICS context.

This study proposes to investigate the following three research questions, which will generate a deeper understanding of sport governance in diverse cultural contexts and foster a debate about what good governance means in the global sport industry:

1. What size are NSF boards in BRICS countries?
2. What are the occupational backgrounds of NSF board members in BRICS countries?
3. What is the extent of gender diversity on NSF boards in BRICS countries?

4. Method

This study adopts a positivist epistemological stance and seeks to discover knowledge through objective analysis (Fox, 2008). Mirroring the work of McLeod, Star et al. (2021), the present study adopts a cross-sectional design, whereby data are collected at a particular point in time. The research method involved the attainment of publicly available, web-based data regarding NSF board members in BRICS countries, before compiling statistics to generate new sport governance insights. Heydenrych and Case (2018) asserted that in response to the low-response rates common in survey-based research, web-based secondary data collection permits wider access to data, particularly when faced with resource or time constraints. This research leverages those advantages. The author group contained academics from institutions in Australia, China, India and Russia, and research assistants from Australia, Brazil and India helped the authors gather the data.

4.1. Sampling

The BRICS group was purposively selected for analysis due to the need to enhance understandings of sport governance in significant non-Western sport contexts. From a sampling perspective, all NSFs from each country in the BRICS group were to be included in the study if their data were available, which would provide as full a picture as possible of the board composition landscape. The research team compiled lists of NSFs in each country using the website of their country's central sport authority or similar organisations. This resulted in the identification of 67 Brazilian, 55 Russian, 51 Indian, 60 Chinese NSFs and 72 South African NSFs. A process of searching for the website of each of these NSFs to ascertain whether information on board composition was available was then followed. As this study was based on publicly available data, NSFs were excluded from the analysis if the websites were considered incomplete (e.g., no information on directors, or only showing information on certain positions such as Presidents). This resulted in a total of 52 Brazilian (78% of all Brazilian NSFs identified), 36 Russian (65% of all Russian NSFs identified), 39 Indian (76% of all Indian NSFs identified), 12 Chinese (20% of all Chinese NSFs identified) and 45 South African (63% of all South African NSFs identified) organisations being included in the study. Although the sample is not exhaustive (and particularly the Chinese sample) it contains sufficient data to infer illustrative differences and patterns regarding NSF board composition in each country (McLeod, Star et al., 2021).

4.2. Variables

Data were collected for each of the selected NSF boards regarding (1) board size, (2) the occupational background of directors and (3) their gender. Board size was treated as a quantitative variable given a numeric value to describe the number of directors on a given NSF board. Occupational background was treated as a qualitative variable that required the research team to assign directors to one of 11

occupational categories. The categories chosen for this study were defined as 'Academic', 'Accountant', 'Athlete/Coach', 'Bureaucrat', 'Business Administrator', 'Engineer', 'Politician', 'Lawyer', 'Medical Professional' and 'Military' and 'Other'. To determine these categories, the research team consulted O*Net, which is a dictionary of common occupational categories used in organisational psychology research (Smith & Campbell, 2006). The research team then used their knowledge of sport governance to adjust these categories to fit the idiosyncrasies of this study's context. For example, while 'Athlete/Coach' is not a core occupational category listed on O*Net, it was a relevant category to include in this study given its positioning in the sport context. Gender diversity was the final qualitative variable analysed, which required the research team to assign NSF board members a binary 'male' or 'female' categorisation. The team acknowledge the limitations of such an approach, whereby subjective judgements were made based on listed title, name and photo and without allowing the full spectrum of gender-based identity designations.

4.3. Data Collection

A two-stage process was followed to collect secondary data on the composition of NSF boards in the BRICS countries. First, publicly available websites, constitutions and other governance documents were sourced and analysed to find information relating to board size, and where available details regarding the gender and occupational backgrounds of directors. Following this, in the instances where occupational backgrounds were unavailable directly from NSF websites, the research team investigated social media platforms (e.g., LinkedIn, Twitter or alternative website sources in countries where those platforms are not widely used) and additional professional websites to which board members were affiliated. Overall, LinkedIn was the most used and helpful resource for acquiring occupational background data.

Data were collected for 2459 board positions from 184 NSFs across the five BRICS countries sampled between July and November 2021. With the added complexities involving translation from non-English sources, this was a considerable task. Data were available in English for both Indian and South African NSFs, while in the remaining contexts data were collected in local languages and translated into English. Members of the research team were assigned responsibility for compiling data from NSFs in the country where they were from and/or spoke the language. The lead researcher constructed a data entry spreadsheet template in Microsoft Excel which contained instructions on where to source the data, how to input into the spreadsheet, how to code the data and what to do in the event that data were unavailable. Once the data collection phase was finished, the individual Excel files were collated.

To ensure inter-rater reliability (Miles & Huberman, 1994), the research team then conducted a thorough validation of the data through verifying each other's work (where language issues allowed) and following up on any data points that appeared missing or erroneous. This involved two leading members of the research team reviewing the Excel spreadsheet and conducting a randomised check of 50 data entries each to ensure accuracy. The only discrepancies found were in cases where directors had multiple possible occupational categories. Of the 2459 directors identified across the 184 NSFs, occupational data were compiled for 1658 positions

(67.4%). An issue that arose was that in some instances directors were multi-disciplinary, for example an active athlete representative who held notable business positions. Following the approach of McLeod, Star et al. (2021), in these cases, the research team used their best judgement to categorise the board member according to their primary position, before flagging the decision for review and discussion with the research team to ensure consistency in categorisation.

While 'Other' was included as an occupational category, this was only used three times during data collection (for three identified journalists). The research team therefore decided to exclude these data from the analysis as it offered minimal insights regarding occupational patterns, and to include this category in our tables and figures would have unnecessarily impacted the visualisation of the data. That 'Other' was used so sparingly as category highlighted the strong fit of the occupational categories, and also the wide scope of 'Business Administration'.

4.4. Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics were adopted as an appropriate means of analysing the data to achieve the objective of the research team, which was to compare the composition of NSF boards in BRICS countries across three dimensions. From the raw data which had been compiled and cleaned in Excel, the research team were able to use the software's in-built statistical functions to describe the results. For the board size variable, the mean average was calculated along with the corresponding standard deviation for board sizes across BRICS NSFs. Similar formulae were adopted to calculate the proportions of occupational background and gender diversity in each country. Three charts were used to visualise the data; with a box plot, pie chart and bar chart used to accompany the raw figures. The following section presents the study's results, which are presented in line with the three research questions.

5. Results

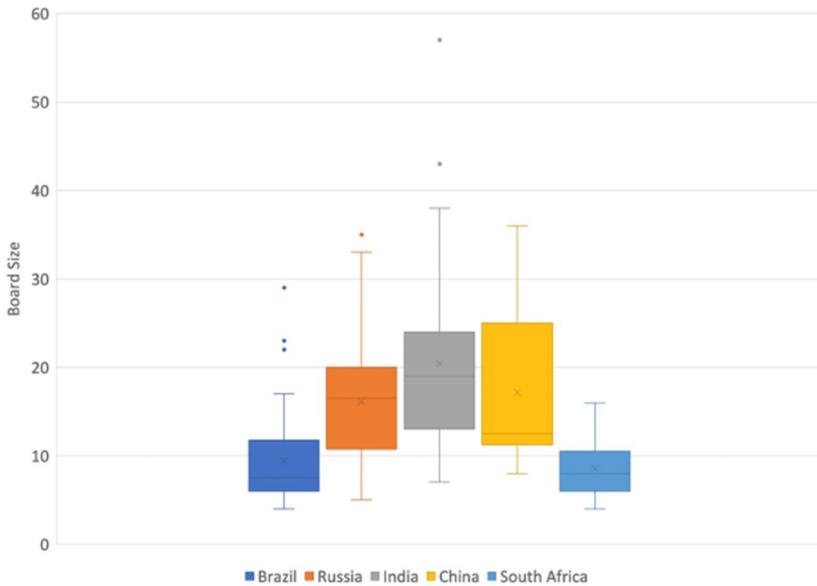
5.1. Board Size

The average number of directors on NSF boards at the time of data collection is shown in Table 1, derived from the individual member totals and number of federations examined for each of the BRICS countries. Table 1 also contains the standard deviation, a measure of variance, for the average board size in each country. Following on from the earlier work of McLeod, Star et al. (2021), the results show that India remains the country with the largest average board size (20.4), an increase of 0.9 from their previous study (and likely reflects changes due to recent elections). China (17.2) and Russia (16.1) also have a relatively large average board size, markedly ahead of Brazil (9.4) and South Africa (8.6).

Figure 1 displays box plots which present graphically the distribution of data regarding board size in each country. The plots for each BRICS country consist of a box highlighting the first quartile, median and third quartile, along with the minimum and maximum values for average board size. Figure 1 illustrates the variance of a nation's average board size, with India (SD = 10.2) the greatest. China

Table 1. Board size.

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa
Board members (count)	491	580	796	206	386
Federations	52	36	39	12	45
Average board size	9.4	16.1	20.4	17.2	8.6
Standard deviation	5.2	7.4	10.2	9.9	3.1

**Figure 1.** Board size box plots.

(9.9) and Russia (7.4) are similarly positioned in-line with their average board size, followed by Brazil (5.2) and South Africa (3.1). These results show that there is significant variance within the BRICS countries regarding board size, which may be due to a limited policy guidance on this issue for NSF in these contexts.

5.2. Occupational Background

Table 2 presents data regarding the occupational backgrounds of NSF board members in BRICS countries, both in terms of a numeric count and percentage of the nation's total. As previously mentioned, a limitation of this study is that the research team were unable to collect data regarding occupational background for all board members concerned. Occupational data were available for 1658 of 2459 (67.4%) of the total board positions across the five countries. By individual country, occupational data were available for 61% of board members in Brazil, 91.7% in Russia, 50.4% in India, 95.6% in China and 59.6% in South Africa. Consequently, the results regarding occupational background should be read with the caveat that they are not indicative of all board members within the respective countries.

Figure 2 illustrates five pie charts that display the composition of occupational background by each BRICS country. The results show that Athletes/Coaches

Table 2. Occupational Background.

	Brazil		Russia		India		China		South Africa		Total Count	Total %
Academic	20	6.7%	2	0.4%	17	4.2%	7	3.6%	10	4.3%	56	3.4%
Accountant	4	1.3%			1	0.2%			9	3.9%	14	0.8%
Athlete/Coach	105	35.2%	327	61.5%	165	41.1%	49	24.9%	101	43.9%	747	45.1%
Bureaucrat	11	3.7%	140	26.3%	26	6.5%	122	61.9%	3	1.3%	302	18.2%
Business Admin	75	25.2%	39	7.3%	72	18.0%	18	9.1%	89	38.7%	293	17.7%
Engineer	17	5.7%	3	0.6%	4	1.0%			4	1.7%	28	1.7%
Politician	3	1.0%	8	1.5%	64	16%					75	4.5%
Lawyer	47	15.8%	3	0.6%	8	2.0%			10	4.3%	68	4.1%
Medical Professional	12	4.0%	4	0.8%	11	2.7%			3	1.3%	30	1.8%
Military	4	1.3%	6	1.1%	33	8.2%	1	0.5%	1	0.4%	45	2.7%
Total	298		532		401		197		230		1658	

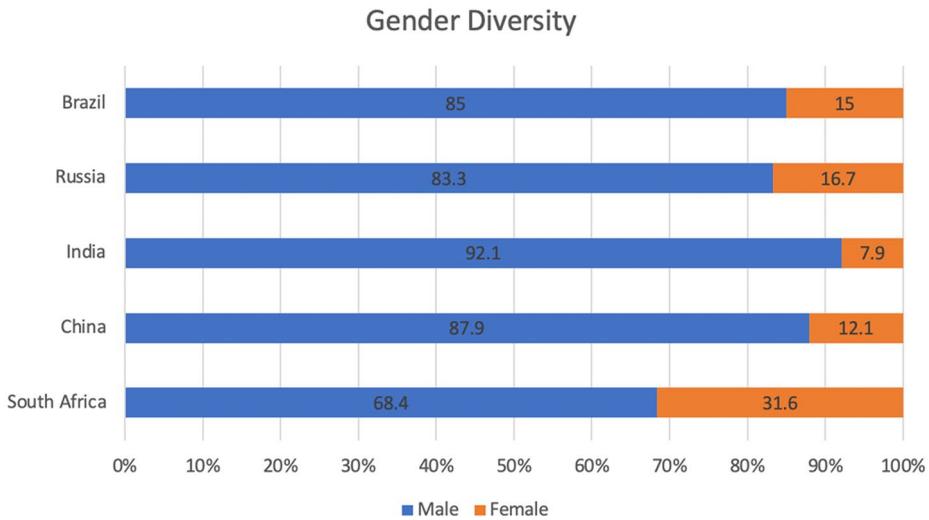


Figure 2. Gender Diversity.

constitute the largest group in every country except China, where they are second behind Bureaucrats. Business administrators are well represented in Brazil, India and South Africa, while being comparatively rare in Russia and China. Political involvement is high in India (16%) but also by extension in China where one-party rule determines that bureaucrats (61.9%) are in effect representatives of the State.

5.3. Gender Diversity

Figure 3 denotes gender representation amongst NSF boards in the BRICS countries. The results show that males predominate across all nations studied, with South Africa (68.4%) the most diverse and India (92.1%) the least. Compared with the Western countries surveyed by McLeod, Star et al. (2021), all of the BRICS nations compare unfavourably, likely due to a range of cultural and institutional factors, which we debate in the following discussion section.

6. Discussion

This research has presented new insights into the composition of NSF boards in the BRICS group. To date, this context has largely been neglected in the sport governance literature (Dowling et al., 2018). Specifically, this research has measured board size and the extent of diversity (occupational and gender) on the boards of NSFs in the BRICS countries. Analysing these factors is important because a narrative has developed over several years in the sport governance literature that they facilitate board performance and are (in the case of gender diversity) ethically imperative (McLeod, Star et al., 2021). This study's results highlight, with regards to board size (see [Table 1](#)), that NSFs in Russia, India and China do not generally conform to the 5-12 range, while those in South Africa and Brazil do. Regarding

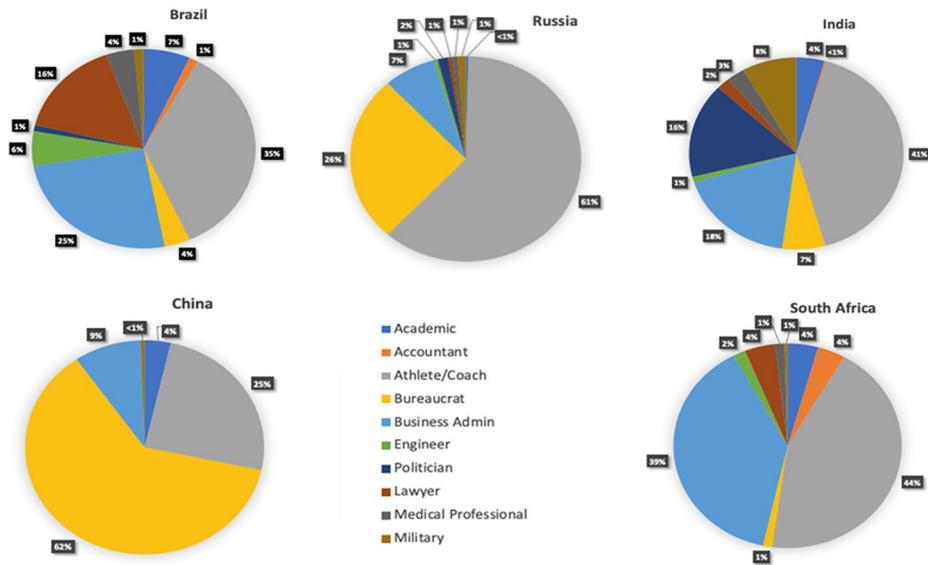


Figure 3. Occupational background pie charts.

gender diversity, only South Africa (where 31.6% of board positions analysed were occupied by women) can be considered to emulate the threshold of adequate diversity commonly espoused in Western countries (Wicker et al., 2020). In terms of occupational background, athletic backgrounds are the dominant profession for NSF directors in the BRICS context except for China, where it is mainly bureaucrats that take up board positions in NSFs. Political involvement (either bureaucrats or politicians, as Figure 3 shows, is a general a feature of sport governance in BRICS.

The results have demonstrated the extent of divergence between the realities of board composition in NSFs in the BRICS context and understandings of good sport governance regarding the three variables that have emerged in the Western-dominated academic literature (Geeraert et al., 2014; Taylor & O’Sullivan, 2009). Further, the results demonstrate general divergence from the actual realities of board composition in Western NSFs previously studied. McLeod, Star et al.’s (2021) research provides a means of benchmarking this divergence. Their data on Australian, UK and USA NSF boards showed, for example, that average board size in those nations is 7.4, 10 and 14.2 respectively. Gender diversity was 40%, 35% and 34% respectively. Number of politicians involved was 2.3%, 0% and 0% respectively, and the percentage of directors coming from business backgrounds was 61%, 67% and 42% respectively. It is also pertinent to acknowledge the divergence within BRICS. The countries are by no means homogenous (as our series of tables and figures illustrate), although they are more broadly similar when compared and contrasted with the Western countries noted.

A crucial discussion point that emanates from these results is whether we should consider NSF board composition in the BRICS countries to reflect bad practice (and thus require improvement), or whether contextual and cultural factors mean that we need to understand what good governance looks like differently in these contexts.

Henry (2021) recently questioned whether good governance practices developed in Western sport contexts and institutions are transferrable to the non-West and argued for greater analysis of the issue. Corporate governance scholars have long asserted that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' to governance and that what represents good practice can depend on contextual factors, such as the stage of an organisation's life-cycle (Davies & Schlitzer, 2008; Thomsen, 2006). This point has also been acknowledged by sport governance researchers exploring organisational governance (De Bosscher et al., 2016), but the impact of cultural context specifically has not received the level of attention it warrants, especially when one considers the globalised nature of the contemporary sport industry (Gammelsaeter, 2021). These results help to further pave the way for this ongoing research topic by presenting pertinent data on the extent sport governance divergence across cultural contexts.

As noted, the sport governance literature generally purports that between 5-12 directors is an optimal size (Taylor & O'Sullivan, 2009). However, it is unclear the extent to which cultural factors influence this proposition. One of the reasons the 5-12 range is promoted is that it ensures there is not an overly cumbersome amount of debate (Yeh & Taylor, 2008). In collectivist cultures such as in Asia, however, debate and disagreement are not as common a feature of group dynamics compared to in Western settings (Miyahara et al., 1998). It is possible that larger boards in these cultural contexts may not suffer from the same inefficiencies from large board sizes. If this point is accepted, the empirical data produced in this research on board size would not reflect bad practice. This point requires further research from sport governance academics. Generating deeper insight into how cultural context influences the impact of varying board sizes (and other similar governance principles and guidelines) will help us form a more holistic understanding of good governance in global sport. This can have direct policy implications in that it would, for example, be useful for developing global sport governance guidelines at the level of international governing bodies.

Regarding occupational background, cultural context may be a factor in determining what skills and backgrounds are required for optimal board performance and by extension NSF performance. Having high levels of political bureaucracy in countries such as China may potentially facilitate performance as it is these individuals who are likely to have useful networks and connections to resources (either financial or infrastructure). Previous research has debated the role of political involvement in Indian NSFs (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021b; McLeod & Star, 2020), where a view has emerged that it is detrimental to the growth and propensity of Indian sport, partly due to such individuals having conflicts of interests. The level of corporate involvement compared to people from athletic backgrounds may be influenced by levels of professionalisation and commercialisation in a national sport system (McLeod, Star et al., 2021), and perhaps is not as closely linked to cultural context, although this requires further investigation. Again, this study's results help to create a more informed and objective basis on which to consider these issues. Such research will enhance our understanding of optimal board performance in NSFs across the world.

Gender diversity on boards is now widely considered a good governance practice in Western sport contexts, and this has been supported by empirical research (Adriaanse & Schofield, 2013). For example, Wicker et al. (2020) found that board gender diversity in German sport organisations significantly reduces human resource and financial

problems, which supports the tenets of collective intelligence theory (Boder, 2006). In the BRICS context, where traditional patriarchist gender roles are more entrenched (McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021b), there is a lack of evidence to show whether these findings would hold. While this is another worthwhile area of inquiry, it is important to caveat this by again emphasising that gender diversity is not just appropriate for is potential performance benefits, but also because of an ethical imperative that women are represented in decision-making roles. For this reason, gender diversity can be argued to be a universal good governance principle, with performance benefits being a bonus (Adriaanse, 2016; Post & Byron, 2015). It is unrealistic to expect non-Western sport contexts to immediately match Western levels of gender diversity in sport governance, but this should be aspired to as soon as reasonable and practical if this ethical standpoint is accepted. It is also important to acknowledge that Western sport nations have achieved gender diversity following the introduction of quota systems, and the process has not always been organic (McLeod, Star et al., 2021). To achieve similar levels of gender diversity (i.e., between 30-40%) in BRICS countries, a policy approach of implementing quotas may need to be employed too.

In 2008, the IOC released its guidelines on 'Basic Universal Principles of Good Governance of the Olympic Movement', which implied (at least from the perspective of the IOC) that a common good governance standard does and should exist for global sport. The seven principles in that document are: (1) vision, mission, and strategy; (2) structures regulations and democratic process; (3) highest level of competence, integrity and ethical standards; (4) accountability, transparency and control; (5) solidarity and development; (6) athletes' involvement, participation and care; (7) harmonious relations with government while preserving autonomy. Meanwhile, McLeod, Shilbury et al. (2021a) asserted that "transparency, democracy, accountability, and societal responsibility are now widely considered to be important sport governance principles to uphold" (p. 144). However, these principles (which are broad concepts that encapsulate practices relating to board composition) have primarily been established in Western contexts and their applicability globally has not sufficiently analysed (Parent & Hoye, 2018).

Perhaps it is the case that some governance principles are more universal and less culturally sensitive than others. For instance, one could theorise that transparency as a governance principle is widely appropriate and useful to implement, given that it logically reduces opportunities to engage in corruption, which NSFs in all countries would claim they want to root out (Geeraert, 2019). In the broader political context, the case for transparency being a universally good governance principle to adopt was strengthened during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even if it was not adequately practiced, it was acknowledged by governments worldwide, including those in China and the USA, that transparency is essential to manage such crises effectively (Ran & Jian, 2021). Although transparency has not been widely measured, existing literature (e.g., Geeraert, 2018; Harris et al., 2021) indicates that sport governance in BRICS is typically less transparent than in Western countries. If organisational outcomes are aligned with high standards of integrity (particularly regarding notions of fairness), the case for transparency in NSFs globally and across cultural contexts appears strong. However, it should be acknowledged that, in the absence of certain integrity standards (e.g., notions of fairness), reaching

NSF organisational outcomes (e.g., to succeed in medal tables or by hosting major tournaments) could well be enhanced by a lack of transparency. This is because it would lead to less scrutiny over organisational behaviours that may be effective for those goals but inconsistent with integrity standards.

Other governance principles and practices may be more challenging to argue as universally 'good'. Democratic processes (which includes elections and term limits), which is frequently purported to be a good governance principle in sport (Geeraert, 2018; McLeod, Shilbury, et al., 2021a), is an obvious product of Western values. In countries that do not employ democratic political systems, it seems unrealistic to expect their sport systems to implement democratic processes. These processes will be less familiar in their cultural context, and it is highly plausible that adopting them will therefore be inefficient and will not assist NSFs in achieving their ultimate aims, which are typically linked to achieving high performance and participation goals. The universality of governance principles is, in addition to board composition factors, a rich area for debate in the global sport governance academic literature.

7. Limitations

This study has limitations that warrant acknowledgement. The method involved the use of secondary, web-based sources such as NSF websites and social media profiles to find information on board composition. While there are advantages to this approach, namely the compiling of a large sample, the trustworthiness of the data cannot be fully guaranteed and therefore the results likely contain a margin of error. Further, even by utilising such an approach, there were a significant number of directors for who no occupational background could be found. The results therefore give a high-level indication of the differences between countries, but not the complete picture.

A methodological limitation worth highlighting is the subjectivity and variation that may exist in classification, for example regarding the 'business' category (as was also noted by McLeod, Star et al., 2021). A board member classified in this category may also hold multi-faceted skills or exposure relevant to other occupations, while working across a broad spectrum of industries (e.g., a CEO of a business may also be a qualified lawyer). The research team acknowledged and accepted this compromise to permit comparisons across broad occupational groups and national contexts. An additional limitation of the current approach is that individuals may change occupations over time. Given the sample size at hand, this research offers a snapshot at a point in time and could form the basis of longitudinal comparison in the future.

Another limitation concerns the self-reported nature of data from social media profiles and other biographies. The reliability of such data is potentially at risk if the details are not updated. As such, a margin of error may exist in the results, but sufficient data has been collected to infer broad patterns, which is the aim of this study.

8. Future Research

As was touched on throughout the discussion section, several future research avenues emanate from this study. There is a need for more a thorough analysis of the transferability of various governance principles and practices (including board composition

but also beyond this) in the global sport environment. This will help to further extend our understanding of good governance in sport, which can then inform behaviour. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research could be useful. This could involve measuring the impact of cultural context directly on organisational outcomes, as well conducting interviews and field research to unravel and tease out how cultural factors are related to governance practices. NSF board members, policy makers, athletes, sports lawyers and executives would be salient stakeholders to interview to generate deeper insight on the connection between culture and good governance in sport (Girginov, 2019, 2021).

Sampling a wider range of countries in future research would allow for analysis across several different characteristics, as it is apparent that Western and non-Western are not sufficient criteria to capture the nuanced differences between countries. Indeed, within each of these categories, there are significant differences which may drive different perceptions on what constitutes good governance in sport. With a comprehensive panel of countries studied, characteristics such as economic, political and sociocultural criteria could be examined as points of divergence.

Since the BRICS acronym was first coined, each country has changed significantly. Scholars should seek to track board composition and other governance data from the past and into the future, which would provide a basis for longitudinal analysis of convergences or developments within sport governance. If western notions of governance, with roots in concepts such as liberal democracy and equal representation are to be challenged by one-party authoritarian politics in the coming century, then disparity in what constitutes 'good' governance in sport at the national level looks set to increase.

Further characteristics of directors such as age, tenure or ethnicity would be equally appropriate to analyse and would provide valuable insights into NSF board composition. Data on such aspects was typically unavailable from publicly available sources and consequentially could not be gathered with acceptable accuracy. The scope of this study was delimited to board size, occupational background and gender diversity, as these three variables represented characteristics that were available, relevant and able to be captured with sufficient precision from secondary web-based sources. However, future research could use survey methods to analyse other factors that are also perceived to impact board performance and good governance.

9. Conclusion

The aim of this research was to analyse board composition in NSFs across the BRICS countries. This involved measuring board size, occupational backgrounds, and gender diversity of NSF board members in the five countries. This research extends the sport governance literature by providing new insights into contemporary sport governance arrangements in lesser-studied, non-Western countries. That is, a more holistic understanding of global sport governance is generated through providing a quantified, evidence-based picture of who is governing sport in cultural contexts that have received relatively limited research attention. In doing so, this research helps to create a foundation on which to have a more informed debate regarding what good governance in sport looks like at a global level, and the extent to which we can strive for universality, which has been identified as an important research topic (Henry, 2021). The

practical implications of this study are in providing stakeholders in the BRICS context and beyond with a more objective insight into the composition of NSF boards in key sporting countries. In particular, the results will be relevant to stakeholders who are attempting to lobby for and decide on policy relating to board composition within national and international sport federations.

Declaration of Interest Statement

No potential conflict of interest has to be reported.

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