

# Good governance and international relations in Iranian sports organizations

## Buena gobernanza y relaciones internacionales en las organizaciones deportivas iraníes

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to analyze good governance (GG) and international relations in Iranian sports organizations. The sample was composed of 150 sport managers from Iran. The instrument used was an ad hoc questionnaire based on the basic universal principles of GG of the Olympic and Sports Movement. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed. After data collection, the data were analyzed with IBM SPSS Amos 23, using descriptive and inferential statistical methods. According to the Iranian sports managers that participated in this study, the most important factors of GG and international relations in Iranian sports organizations were, in order of importance: Internal integrity and independency, transparency, responsibility, discipline, accountability, rule of law, participation and democracy.

**Keywords:** Governance; Sport; International Relations; Iran.

**Resumen:** Este estudio tuvo como objetivo analizar la buena gobernanza y las relaciones internacionales en las organizaciones deportivas iraníes. La muestra estaba compuesta por 150 gestores deportivos de Irán. El instrumento utilizado fue un cuestionario ad hoc basado en los principios universales básicos de buena gobernanza del Movimiento Olímpico y Deportivo. Se confirmó la validez y fiabilidad del cuestionario. Después de la recopilación de datos, los datos se analizaron con IBM SPSS Amos 23, utilizando métodos estadísticos descriptivos e inferenciales. Según los gestores deportivos iraníes que participaron en este estudio, los factores más importantes de buena gobernanza y de relaciones internacionales en las organizaciones deportivas iraníes fueron, en orden de importancia: integridad interna e independencia, transparencia, responsabilidad, disciplina, rendición de cuentas, estado de derecho, participación y democracia.

**Palabras clave:** Gobernanza; Deporte; Relaciones Internacionales; Irán.

### 1. Introduction

Achievement, preservation and promotion of international prestige or credibility are among the key components of the national interest of every country. Governments try to obtain a high status in the international community and to make their countries respectable. Therefore, the more a government can succeed in various fields such as gaining respect of other countries, having a good level of development, having good and equal relations with other countries etc., the more credibility it can build. The international prestige is based on the respect and dignity that a country can have internationally. The prestige, honor and reputation strongly depend on the level of governance of a country (Sadr Nabavi, 1997).

Since the development of international relations is one of the most important issues in different organizations, the role of sports organizations in developing international relations and communicating effectively with countries and international institutions is potentially of a great importance (Karimifard, 2013). The link between sport and politics shows that sport is not a marginal tool in international relations, but it can play a constructive role in this field (Goudarzi & Asadi, 2012; López et al., 2019). Governance refers to the system

through which organizations are managed and organized, being sport management one of the areas directly affected by good governance (GG) practices. Also, it is widely accepted that governance structures have a significant impact on the performance of sports organizations.

The impact of sports and sports organizations on international relations development has become more apparent after the United Nations Millennium Declaration (Karimifard, 2013). International organizations, such as international sports organizations, have become the most important actors in the field of international relations, which have a great impact on national and international level in all matters pertaining to the international community (Karimifard, 2013). The International Olympic Committee, one of the main international governing bodies of sport, officially announced the global Basic Principles of GG in the Olympic movement and Sports during the 2008 Seminar on Autonomy of Olympic and Sport Movement (Chappelet & Mrkonjic, 2013).

The adherence to GG standards has a positive impact on organizational performance and development (Geeraert, Groll, & Alm 2013). GG is a means to ensure that sports organizations are able to carry out their work in a highly complex sporting world (Geeraert, Groll, & Alm 2013). On the other hand, the lack of GG in sports organizations has many

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negative consequences for the society, being necessary that sports organization are responsible and transparent (Chappelet & Kübler-Mabbott, 2008; Chappelet, 2018). Ineffective governance not only has a negative impact on sport, but it also weakens the whole sports industry (Australian Sports Commission, 2012). Nowadays, for many socio-cultural, economic and political reasons, the understanding of the governance systems, its related organizations and policies is essential.

In Iran, GG in the field of sports depends on the Ministry of Sports and Youth (MSY), National Olympic Committee (NOC), sports organizations and Federations (Sajadi, 2013). In line with the Olympic Charter, it is important that the different sports organizations maintain harmonious and cooperative relations, at the same time that they preserve their autonomy. Therefore, cooperation between governments and sport organizations should be based on a strategy that emphasizes collaboration. With this purpose, the GG model can be considered as a valid instrument to assess and evaluate the status of international relations in sport interactions of national sports governing bodies as MSY and NOC. It is important to note that most international, continental and national sports organizations have incorporated GG practices, adopting GG policies, strategies, rules and guidelines.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze GG and international relations in Iranian sports organizations, trying to identify and explain the different factors that contribute to GG and international relations in Iranian sports organizations.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Design

The design of this study was cross-sectional. The research method was mixed, using Delphi technique and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

### 2.2. Participants

The sample was composed of 150 people working in the MSY and the NOC of Iran. The participants were sports managers, consultants and experts in international relations.

### 2.3. Instruments

The instrument used was an ad hoc questionnaire based on the basic universal principles of GG of the Olympic and Sports Movement (2008). In order to validate the questionnaire, 18 experts were interviewed through a semi-structured interview. Delphi method was used to extract the opinions of the experts, and the consensus of experts was reached. First, the experts were asked what were the GG factors for them,

and they had to list the factors by priority and importance according to their opinion. After this, the experts were asked to describe the attributes and nature of the elements in each factor, on the basis of their individual opinions. Subsequently, the components listed in the basic universal principles of GG of the Olympic and Sports Movement (2008) were presented to the experts and, then, their views about it were summarized. Finally, their responses were used to prepare a questionnaire with 69 items in categorized components of GG. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed. To assess the content validity, the experts were asked to comment on the questions. Then, Lawshe's (1975) method was used to quantify the judgement of the experts on content validity. The Content Validity Ratio (CVR) was above 0.70, confirming the content validity of the questionnaire. The Content Validity Index (CVI) of the questions was 0.85 (> 0.70), being the content validity of all questions confirmed.

### 2.4. Data analysis

After data collection, the data were analyzed with IBM SPSS Amos 23, using descriptive and inferential statistical methods.

## 3. Findings

Table 1 shows sample characteristics. The gender distribution indicates that 37.3% of the sample were female and 62.7% were male. According to age, the age group with the highest number of participants was the group of people aged 41-50 years (44%). Regarding level of education, 60.7% of the sample had a Bachelor degree.

Table 1. Sample characteristics.

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	56	37.3
	Male	94	62.7
Age Group	≤ 30	8	5.3
	31-40	24	16
	41-50	66	44
	51-60	39	26
	> 60	13	8.7
Level of Education	Diploma	17	11.3
	Bachelor	91	60.7
	Master	34	22.7
	PhD	8	5.3

Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to investigate the distribution of the research variables and the results showed that all distributions (variables and components) were statistically normal. With the data analysis, seven factors of GG were identified and, considering these factors, a model of factors

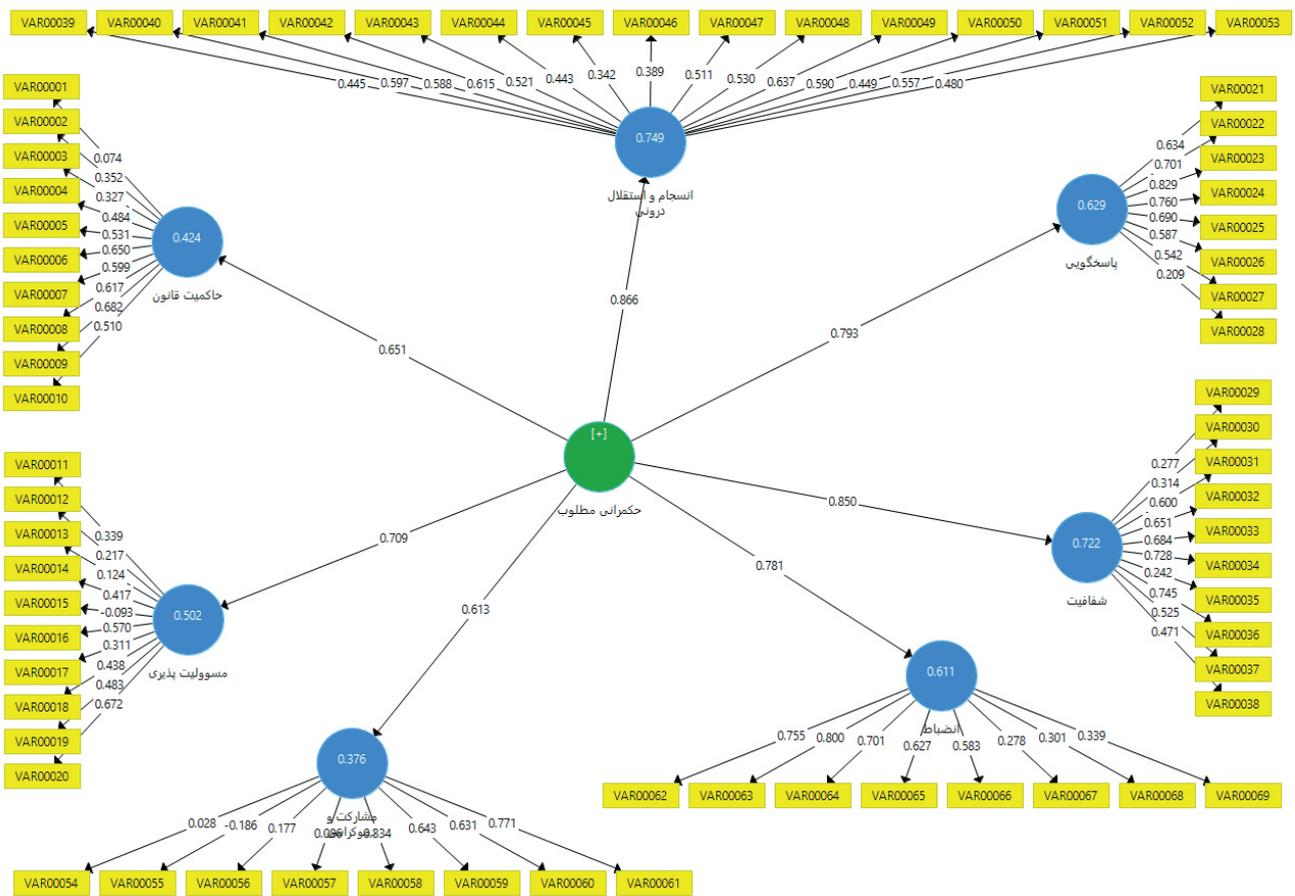
of GG and international relations in the MSY and the NOC of Iran was designed. Our results showed that all GG factors had acceptable and positive T values and factor loadings. All details of the designed model are presented in Tables 2 and 3 and in Figures 1 and 2.

**Table 2.** Model of factors of good governance and international relations in Iranian sports organizations.

Factors	SRC	T value	P value
1) Internal Integrity & Independency	0.866	11.231	0.001
2) Rule of Law	0.651	7.919	0.001
3) Accountability	0.709	8.306	0.001
4) Transparency	0.850	10.735	0.001
5) Responsibility	0.793	10.293	0.001
6) Participation & Democracy	0.613	7.521	0.001
7) Discipline	0.781	9.890	0.001

**Table 3.** Fit indicators and acceptable values for the model

Chi-Square/Degrees of Freedom	1-3
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation	< 0.08
Comparative Fit Index	> 0.9
Normalized Fit Index	> 0.9
Incremental Fit Index	> 0.9



**Figure 1.** Model of factors of good governance and international relations in Iranian sports organizations.



Figure 2. Radar chart of the factors of good governance and international relations in Iranian sports organizations.

#### 4. Discussion

*Internal integrity and independence* were identified as the most important factors of GG in Iranian sport organizations, which may help to achieve optimal interactions with sports organizations in international relations ( $\lambda = 0.866$ ). Therefore, preserving the independence of national sports organizations is essential.

Other important factor was *transparency* ( $\lambda = 0.850$ ). Transparency in eligibility, selection, nomination and candidacy processes especially in international forums and posts is essential. Regarding *accountability* ( $\lambda = 0.793$ ), it was revealed that national authorities only considered themselves to be obliged to comply with national rules and to be accountable to national authorities, being this incompatible to the adaptation to the global trends recommended by international sports systems.

*Discipline* ( $\lambda = 0.781$ ) was also considered an important GG factor by the sports managers who participated in this study. The members of each organization should follow the code of conduct developed by the management of the organization and thereby adapt to the organizational goals. In this regard, it is necessary to develop disciplinary codes and guidelines in accordance with international laws and regulations. The least loaded content was on confirming the existence of competent judicial authorities and the possibility of appealing the disciplinary decisions of the sport.

Regarding the factor *responsibility* ( $\lambda = 0.709$ ), there was a lack of responsibility due to hiring staff with individual abilities that were incompatible with the assignments, existing the

need of replacing some staff, especially in the field of international relations. It was also highlighted a lack of the necessary control and monitoring systems that have weakened accountability, and a lack of adaptability to international standards.

Another important factor was the factor of *rule of law* ( $\lambda = 0.651$ ). According to the finding of this research, the availability of public information, in particular instructions from those responsible for regulation, was of paramount importance. In addition, a lack of compatibility with the international sphere was acknowledged. *Participation and democracy* ( $\lambda = 0.613$ ) received the lowest scores, indicating that this factor was less important for the respondents.

According to our results, it is recommendable to apply the principles of democracy and involving more people and groups of stakeholders, avoiding organizational monopolies. It is also important the principle of meritocracy in the functional positions and the training of individuals for specialized tasks. This can remove obstacles to participation and democracy. Furthermore, it is necessary to modify internal procedures in order to observe general international recommendations, such as the right of participation of athletes, specific stakeholder groups, women, disabled people, etc. Neglecting compliance with international law will slow down the international interactions and will disrupt international sport interactions.

#### 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, according to the Iranian sports managers that participated in this study, the most important factors of GG

and international relations in Iranian sports organizations were, in order of importance: internal integrity and independence, transparency, responsibility, discipline, accountability, rule of law, participation and democracy.

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