

International Sports Federations Voting System: A Case Study of the Badminton World Federation

Sistema de votación en federaciones deportivas internacionales: estudio de caso de la Federación Mundial de Bádminton

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Abstract

This study examines the governance and voting power structures of International Sports Federations (IFs), with a specific focus on the Badminton World Federation (BWF) as a case study. For National Sports Associations (Members), democratic representation within IFs is fundamental to good governance, with voting systems serving as a key mechanism for equitable participation. This research critically evaluates the strengths and weaknesses of IF voting systems, proposing actionable reforms to enhance fairness and transparency. Benchmarking against governance models used by FIFA and the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the study explores the broader applicability of differential voting structures. Additionally, the Sport Governance Observer (SGO) Index is employed as an analytical framework to assess governance quality, including transparency, decision-making, financial management, representation, inclusivity, and accountability mechanisms. The BWF employs a differential voting system for both governance decisions and elections at its Annual General Meeting (AGM), where Members are allocated between one and five votes based on their active participation in badminton. This study examines the historical evolution, operational framework, and implications of this system. Findings confirm that differential voting remains a viable governance model for IFs but underscore the need for well-defined, transparent, and verifiable criteria. Specifically, the study recommends that voting rights be allocated based on measurable engagement in the sport, such as development initiatives and competitive participation, ensuring a governance system that is both equitable and resistant to manipulation.

Keywords: Sports Governance, Voting System Model, Differential Voting System, International Sports Federation.

Resumen

Este estudio examina las estructuras de gobernanza y de poder de voto en federaciones deportivas internacionales (FI) con un enfoque específico en la Federación Mundial de Bádminton (BWF) como estudio de caso. Para las asociaciones deportivas nacionales (miembros), la representación democrática dentro de las FI es fundamental para una buena gobernanza, siendo los sistemas de votación un mecanismo clave para la participación equitativa. Esta investigación evalúa críticamente las fortalezas y debilidades de los sistemas de votación en las FI y propone reformas prácticas para mejorar la equidad y la transparencia. A través de la comparación con modelos de gobernanza utilizados por la FIFA y el Comité Olímpico Internacional (COI), el estudio explora la aplicabilidad más amplia de los sistemas de votación diferenciada. Además, se emplea el índice de Observación de Gobernanza Deportiva (SGO) como marco analítico para evaluar la calidad de la gobernanza, incluyendo la transparencia, la toma de decisiones, la gestión financiera, la representación, la inclusión y los mecanismos de rendición de cuentas. La BWF utiliza un sistema de votación diferenciada tanto para decisiones de gobernanza como para elecciones durante su Asamblea General Anual, en la que a los miembros se les asigna entre uno y cinco votos según su participación activa en el bádminton. Este estudio examina la evolución histórica, el marco operativo y las implicaciones de este sistema. Los hallazgos confirman que la votación diferenciada sigue siendo un modelo de gobernanza viable para las FI, pero resaltan la necesidad de contar con criterios bien definidos, transparentes y verificables. En concreto, se recomienda que los derechos de voto se asignen con base en una participación medible

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en el deporte, como iniciativas de desarrollo y participación competitiva, asegurando así un sistema de gobernanza equitativo y resistente a la manipulación. El tenis está asociado con un mayor bienestar. Es necesario realizar estudios prospectivos a mayor escala para entender la direccionalidad de estos hallazgos.

Palabras clave: *gobernanza deportiva, modelo de sistema de votación, sistema de votación diferenciada, federación deportiva internacional.*

Introduction

The governance structures of International Sports Federations (IFs) play a critical role in shaping the trajectory of global sports. Among these structures, voting models hold particular significance, influencing decision-making processes that affect athletes, events, and the integrity of sports worldwide. These models not only determine the allocation of resources and the establishment of policies but also reflect the values of fairness, inclusivity, and efficiency that underpin the global sports community (Mills et al., 2024).

In recent years, the diversity of voting mechanisms employed by IFs has sparked increasing debate, particularly regarding their effectiveness in achieving equitable representation (Henry, 2013). Voting structures in IFs range from one-Member-one-vote systems, which promote absolute equality, to weighted voting models, where voting power is distributed based on factors such as population size, economic contribution, or sporting success (Forster, 2016). While one-Member-one-vote systems emphasise democratic equality, they can lead to disproportionate influence from smaller nations, which may not contribute equally to the sport's development (Schubert & Könecke, 2015). Conversely, weighted systems ensure that influential stakeholders have greater input, but they risk marginalising smaller National Sports Federations (Member) and creating governance imbalances (Geeraert, 2018).

Beyond these traditional models, recent governance reforms have sought to balance representational fairness with operational efficiency. The International Olympic Committee (IOC), for example, employs a mixed governance structure that incorporates both equal representation and strategic weighting based on sporting performance and financial contributions (Chappelet, 2021). Similarly, FIFA's council voting system grants different levels of representation to Continental Confederations (CC), ensuring that larger footballing Members have a proportionate voice while maintaining global inclusivity (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014). These examples highlight the ongoing evolution of IF governance structures in response to growing demands for transparency, inclusivity, and accountability (Geeraert, 2018; Henry, 2013).

This article critically examines the voting models adopted by IFs, focusing on their ability to balance the competing priorities of equity, representation, and efficiency. Specifically, it analyses the Badminton World Federation [BWF] as a case study, evaluating the impact of differential voting, a model where

voting power is assigned based on a Member's active participation in the sport. By applying theoretical governance frameworks, this study aims to provide insights into the strengths, weaknesses, and future evolution of IF governance models.

The experience of voters in elections is pivotal in shaping the democratic integrity of governance structures (James & Garnett, 2023). While extensive literature exists on governance principles, studies indicate that governance can be assessed through three primary lenses: organisational, systemic, and political (Dowling et al., 2018). The Sports Governance Observer (SGO) Index, developed as a benchmarking tool, offers measurable indicators for evaluating governance quality, including decision-making transparency, accountability mechanisms, and representational inclusivity (Geeraert, 2018). However, despite the emphasis on governance in IFs, voting systems and their direct impact on representational fairness remain underexplored in academic literature (Thompson et al., 2023; Parent et al., 2021). Addressing this gap, this study explores the implications of differential voting for decision-making and governance legitimacy in international sports.

Many IFs apply a one-Member-one-vote system for major decisions in their Annual General Meetings (AGMs) or equivalent governance forums. This model ensures formal equality among all Member nations, irrespective of population size or sporting success (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). However, the effectiveness of this approach is debated, particularly in Members where there are significant disparities in financial contributions, player participation, and competitive achievements (Forster, 2016).

At the BWF, however, a differential voting system is applied for decisions related to sporting matters and elections. Under this system, Members are allocated between one and five votes based on their level of active engagement in the sport. This model seeks to incentivise participation and recognise national contributions, while maintaining a governance structure that ensures inclusivity and fairness (Badminton World Federation [BWF], 2024).

This paper examines the historical evolution, strengths, and potential areas for reform in the BWF's differential voting system. By comparing this model to the one-Member-one-vote system and other IF governance structures, the study evaluates the impact of different voting frameworks on governance effectiveness and decision-making legitimacy.

Previous Differential Voting Systems in BWF

BWF was founded in 1934 as the IBF, by nine Members. Until 1958, the Founder Members held two votes while other Members had one vote each. From 1959 a system of five votes was based on (1) membership, (2) 10 years of membership of the Federation, (3) 20 years of membership of the Federation, (4) participation in the most recent Men's World Team Championship, the Thomas Cup, (5) participation in the most recent Women's World Team Championship, the Uber Cup. From 1981 a system of four votes was based on (1) membership, (2) 10.000 registered players, (3) 50.000 registered players, (4) participation in the most recent Thomas and Uber Cup. From 1990 a system of five votes based on size only was adopted; (1) membership, (2) more than 5.000 registered players, (3) more than 10.000 registered players, (4) more than 25.000 registered players, (5) more than 50.000 registered players. This system was applied until the current, activity-based system replaced it in 2012. In all these years, voting by proxy was allowed and commonly used.

The BWF Voting System Since 2012

The BWF differential voting system is defined in the BWF Constitution (2024), Clause 15.20 as follows:

15. 20. A Member in Good Standing shall be entitled to a minimum of one (1) vote and a maximum of five (5) votes as confirmed by Council in accordance with the following criteria applied over the Assessment Period.

- 1 vote - Membership to the Federation (membership in good standing).
- 1 additional vote - More than 10,000 registered players in each of the four years of the Assessment Period.
- 1 additional vote - Participation in 6 out of these 10 events during the Assessment Period: Individual Continental Championships (a maximum of 2 events), World Championships (3 events), Olympic Games (1 event), World Junior Team Championships (4 events)
- 1 additional vote - Having one player or more in the top 40 world ranking in any of the five (5) disciplines as per the world ranking list for the qualification for the most recent Olympic Games held.
- 1 additional vote - Hosting at least one (1) of these events in three (3) out of the four (4) years of the Assessment Period: Super Series, Grand Prix, International Challenge or the equivalent World Tour events.

The number of votes a Member is entitled to is fixed for a four (4) year period starting after the end of the Assessment Period. The Assessment period is defined in the Constitution, Clause 7.3, as follows:

7.3. Assessment Period – means a four (4) year period over which the criteria in Clause 15.20 are applied to determine voting strength and extends from 1 October in the year of the Summer Olympic Games to 30 September of the year of the subsequent Summer Olympic Games (BWF, 2024).

This voting system applies to all decisions of the AGM with a few exceptions as described in the Constitution, Clause 15.21, where a one Member - one vote system is used:

15.21 The voting strength of a Member in Good Standing as described in Clause 15.20 shall apply to any proposal to the AGM under the Constitution of the Federation except for Clauses 12 (Admission to Membership), Clause 13.11 (Expulsion), and Clause 36 (Dissolution). For a proposal under Clauses 12, 13.11 or 36, each Member in Good Standing shall be entitled to one vote only (BWF, 2024).

A further clause of relevance covers proxy voting, which is not allowed under Clause 15.22:

15.22. No delegate shall be permitted to cast a vote on behalf of more than one Member (BWF, 2024).

The annual subscription fee is linked to the number of votes. The subscriptions are now a marginal source of income for BWF, but for many years they were the major and originally the only income of the federation.

Unlike earlier models, the 2012 system prioritises measurable contributions, reducing reliance on self-reported data and promoting fairness and competitive engagement (BWF, 2024). This paper examines the effectiveness, transparency, and sustainability of this model in comparison to alternative IF governance structures.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, utilising document analysis as the primary method to evaluate the historical and operational aspects of the BWF differential voting system. Document analysis is a widely accepted qualitative research method for examining institutional governance structures, policy evolution, and organisational decision-making processes (Bowen, 2009; Yin, 2018). The research focuses on systematically reviewing primary documents, such as constitutions, AGM minutes, and voting records, to trace the evolution of the BWF voting system and assess its impact on governance outcomes.

Document analysis is particularly suited for examining the legislative and procedural evolution of governance systems in IFs, as it allows for a structured

assessment of key documents to identify patterns, consistencies, and areas for reform (Corbetta, 2003). Given that sports governance research often relies on archival data due to the structured nature of IF constitutions and policies, this method provides a reliable framework for evaluating BWF's governance model (Geeraert, 2018; Chappelet, 2021).

Data Collection

This study relies on archival document analysis, which is a method frequently employed in sports governance research to track policy changes, structural adjustments, and voting mechanisms (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007). The primary sources for this study include:

- BWF Constitutions (1934–2024) to analyse historical changes in the voting system.
- Annual General Meeting (AGM) minutes from pivotal years (1959, 1981, 1990, 2008, and 2009), detailing voting system changes and their contexts.
- Governance reports and benchmark studies, such as those outlined in the Sports Governance Observer Index (Geeraert, 2018), which assess governance structures across IFs.
- Development, operational mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks of the BWF voting systems.

The selection criteria were based on the availability, completeness, and importance of the documents in reflecting governance shifts (Bryman, 2012) (see Table 1).

Table 1
Analysed sources that provide information for this research.

Entity	Source Name	Year(s)
IBF	Inaugural General Meeting minutes	(5 July) 1934
IBF	Rules (<i>i.e. Constitution</i>) of 1934	(Amended) 1959, 1981, and 1990
IBF	Annual General Meeting minutes	1959, 1981 and 1990
BWF	Constitution	2006
BWF	Annual General Meeting minutes	2008, and 2009
BWF	zConstitution	2012
BWF	Constitution, Annex 1, Council Geographical and Gender Rep.	(Added) 2020
BWF	Annual General Meeting minutes	2012, and 2020

This dataset enables a comprehensive historical analysis of BWF's voting system and governance reforms, ensuring that the findings are grounded in empirical evidence and historical context (Bowen, 2009).

Analytical Framework

The study adopts an institutional governance analysis framework, focusing on key governance dimensions, including democracy, transparency, and accountability (Dowling et al., 2018). Sports governance research suggests that IFs should be evaluated using structured indices such as the SGO Index, which assesses decision-making efficiency, inclusivity, and regulatory compliance (Geeraert, 2018).

The analytical approach includes evaluating the clarity and verifiability of voting criteria, ensuring that the differential voting system meets governance standards of transparency and fairness (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023). Assessing the alignment of BWF's voting system with established principles of good governance, as identified in sports governance literature (Chappelet, 2021). Identifying the practical challenges and benefits associated with differential voting models in IFs (Parent et al., 2021).

A thematic coding approach was employed to identify recurring patterns, governance trends, and policy inconsistencies within BWF's constitutional documents and AGM minutes. Thematic analysis is widely used in sports management research to evaluate decision-making structures and power dynamics (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014).

Comparative Analysis

To enhance the robustness of the study, a comparative analysis was conducted by benchmarking BWF's differential voting system against governance models in other IFs such as FIFA, Federation Equestre International (FEI), and the IOC. Comparative governance research in IFs emphasises the need for contextual benchmarking to identify best practices and governance inefficiencies (Forster, 2016; Geeraert, 2018).

This comparative approach assesses voting power allocation in BWF vs. other IFs to determine whether differential voting enhances democratic legitimacy. Governance transparency in weighted vs. equal representation systems, and decision-making efficiency under different voting models, considering the need for equitable vs. merit-based representation in IF governance (Chappelet, 2021).

By analysing these aspects, the study provides a broader perspective on the implications of differential voting systems, ensuring that the findings contribute to ongoing debates in global sports governance (Henry, 2013).

Limitations

While document analysis provides a rich source of qualitative data, this study acknowledges certain limitations inherent in archival research potential

gaps in historical records: Some AGM minutes and governance documents may not have been publicly accessible, limiting the completeness of the dataset (Bryman, 2012). The subjectivity of interpretation: Although document analysis allows for a structured review, researcher bias in interpreting governance changes remains a concern (Yin, 2018). Absence of direct stakeholder perspectives: While constitutional analysis provides insights into governance rules, qualitative interviews with stakeholders (e.g., BWF Council Members) could enhance understanding of governance dynamics (Hoye & Cuskelly, 2007).

To mitigate these limitations, findings are cross-referenced with secondary literature on sports governance reforms, ensuring that the conclusions are substantiated by multiple sources (Chappelet, 2021; Geeraert, 2018).

Results

The governance structure of IFs has evolved significantly over the past decades, influenced by the increasing commercialisation and global expansion of sports. The inclusion of badminton as an Olympic sport by the IOC on June 5, 1985, with its official debut in the 1992 Barcelona Olympic Games, marked a pivotal shift for the BWF (Chappelet, 2021). This transition coincided with the introduction of Open Badminton, which allowed professional players to compete internationally, leading to a surge in membership from approximately 60 Members in 1980 to 110 by 1992 (Forster, 2016).

As financial inflows increased from broadcasting rights, sponsorships, and Olympic funding, governance mechanisms required restructuring to accommodate new power dynamics within the federation (Geeraert, 2018). Traditionally, IFs have relied on membership subscriptions as a primary revenue source, but with increased financial stability, membership fees became a marginal contributor. Consequently, questions arose regarding equitable representation and voting rights, necessitating governance reforms (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023).

The 1990 BWF voting system was primarily based on registered player numbers within a Member. However, a lack of verifiable data led to governance concerns. Many Members inflated registration figures to obtain additional votes, a governance loophole that compromised fairness and transparency (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

Additionally, proxy voting, which had been permitted since BWF's inception, further exacerbated governance vulnerabilities. Members unable to attend Annual General Meetings (AGMs) often delegated their votes through proxy arrangements, leading to the possible manipulation of elections (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014). This became particularly contentious

around, and after BWF headquarters moved from Cheltenham, England, to Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia in 2005, leading to a period of internal instability and power struggles among leadership factions.

A critical turning point occurred in the 2008 AGM, where a vote of no confidence was passed against the Deputy President, exposing deep governance fractures (Kang, 2011). This prompted a complete overhaul of BWF's governance framework, culminating in the 2012 adoption of a new voting system, which introduced differential voting based on measurable participation in BWF-sanctioned events. This reform sought to reduce manipulation, enhance fairness, and ensure a more meritocratic allocation of voting power (Chappelet, 2021).

As part of its governance modernisation, BWF also eliminated proxy voting, replacing it with travel grants to ensure broader participation in AGMs. Additionally, real-time translation services in multiple languages (French, Spanish, Mandarin, Arabic, and Russian) were introduced to reduce linguistic barriers and foster inclusivity (BWF, 2024).

These reforms preserved the balance of power between Continental Confederations (CCs), ensuring that most Members either retained their existing votes or gained additional representation under the new framework.

The Current Voting System

The 2012 BWF voting system is designed to allocate votes based on objective and verifiable participation metrics, in alignment with principles of good governance, accountability, and inclusivity (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023). Unlike the previous system, where voting rights were determined solely by self-reported membership figures, the current differential voting system assigns one to five votes per Member based on their active participation in badminton.

The criteria for additional votes include:

1. Participation in major international team events, such as the World Championships and Olympic Games.
2. Elite player development, assessed through the presence of top-ranked athletes in global competitions.
3. Hosting major BWF-sanctioned tournaments, which contribute to the international competitive calendar.
4. A minimum of 10,000 registered players, a criterion that remains contentious due to verification challenges.

While this system promotes merit-based voting power, it has not been without criticism. Researchers argue that alternative differential voting systems could further enhance governance integrity by integrating additional developmental, financial, and grassroots participation metrics (PlayTheGame, 2022).

Alternate Voting Systems in International Sports Federations

To contextualise BWF's differential voting system, it is useful to compare it to alternative voting models employed by other IFs.

(i) One Member, One Vote System

This model, used by the IOC and many IFs, grants each Member equal voting rights, regardless of size, population, or sporting contributions (Chappelet, 2021).

Advantages:

- Ensures absolute equality in governance representation.
- Simplifies decision-making processes.
- Prevents dominance by wealthier Members

Disadvantages:

- Susceptible to lobbying influence, and manipulation.
- Does not account for sporting development or contribution.
- Can lead to resource misallocation, as voting power does not reflect active engagement in the sport (Geeraert, 2018).

(ii) Weighted Voting Systems

FIFA and some other IFs employ weighted voting, where representation is based on factors such as financial contributions, competitive success, or membership size (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

Advantages:

- Recognises Members contributing significantly to the sport's development.
- Enhances financial sustainability by rewarding Members that generate revenue.

Disadvantages:

- Risks entrenching power imbalances, favouring wealthier Members.
- Administratively complex to verify and adjust voting weights.

(iii) Activity-Based Differential Voting Systems

The BWF model aligns closely with this approach, wherein voting rights are allocated based on measurable participation metrics (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023).

Advantages:

- Incentivises active engagement in the sport.
- Provides verifiable data to determine voting power, enhancing transparency.

Disadvantages:

- Some metrics, such as player registrations, remain difficult to verify.
- Smaller Members may struggle to meet participation thresholds, perpetuating disparities.

Each model presents unique advantages and governance trade-offs, underscoring the complexity of achieving fair and transparent representation in IF governance.

Strengths and Weaknesses of the BWF Voting System

Strengths:

- Fairness and transparency: Voting rights are linked to measurable contributions.
- Meritocratic structure: Encourages Members to actively engage in the sport.
- Reduced opportunities for manipulation: Unlike earlier models, votes are not allocated based on unverifiable membership figures.

Weaknesses:

- Equity concerns: Smaller Members may find it harder to meet certain participation criteria.
- Adaptability challenges: The model must remain flexible to accommodate emerging governance challenges, such as disruptions from global crises (e.g., COVID-19).

The BWF tournament programme was disrupted by the COVID 19 pandemic causing cancellations of several major events that were included in the calculation of criterion based on participation in the major world championship events. This was however easily managed by changing the number of tournaments required by an *ad hoc* decision in the AGM.

Further Development of the Voting and Election Systems since 2012

Governance reforms remain an ongoing process. Since 2020, BWF has introduced:

- Continental Confederation quotas, ensuring geographic balance.
- Gender representation quotas, mandating 30% minimum representation of each gender.

As governance trends evolve, BWF must continue adapting its voting system to maintain democratic legitimacy, fairness, and efficiency in international badminton governance.

Discussion

A well-structured differential voting system must be based on objective, measurable, and transparent criteria to ensure equitable representation and avoid governance manipulation (Geeraert, 2018). IFs can apply differential voting as an incentive for MAs to actively engage in the sport by participating in various programmes or emphasise performance-based rewards to encourage Members to foster the growth of their sport (Forster, 2016; Chappelet, 2021).

The following factors are critical in designing a differential voting system that enhances both representation and governance integrity.

Verifiability

Governance literature emphasises that transparency and standardised metrics are fundamental to decision-making in IFs (Dowling et al., 2018). Therefore, a criterion must be objectively verifiable, allowing stakeholders to audit and validate membership data, tournament participation, and player rankings. The use of centralised registration portals, external third-party data verification, and digital record-keeping (e.g., blockchain-based voting systems) can enhance data integrity and reduce subjectivity in voting power allocation (Geeraert, 2018).

For example, FIFA's player registration system requires Members to report verified club memberships through FIFA's Transfer Matching System (TMS), ensuring accountability in player data management (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

Potential for Manipulation

One of the primary risks associated with metrics-based voting systems is the potential for data manipulation. Previous studies highlight that self-reported statistics from Members can be exaggerated

or falsified to gain additional influence (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023). This has been a recurring issue in IFs where voting power is tied to registered membership numbers.

To mitigate this risk, IFs should:

- Require independent audits of player registration figures.
- Establish penalties for false reporting to deter manipulation.
- Cross-reference tournament participation data with publicly available competition records.

The International Tennis Federation (ITF), for example, relies on tournament entry lists and world rankings rather than self-reported data to determine voting power, ensuring greater transparency and fairness (Chappelet, 2021).

Avoiding Disproportionate Advantage to Larger Nations

A well-designed voting system must prevent overrepresentation of larger Members while ensuring that smaller Members are not marginalised. Some IFs, such as World Athletics, employ geographically balanced voting systems to ensure that less populous regions maintain fair representation (Henry, 2013).

Potential solutions to mitigate imbalance include:

- Implementing a weighted tier system, where smaller Members receive a minimum guaranteed baseline of votes to ensure they retain influence.
- Assigning votes based on competition participation, and interaction with the sport, rather than sheer population size.

Active Participation Considerations

Governance frameworks must distinguish between active competitive participation and social/recreational engagement (Geeraert, 2018). Many IFs struggle to categorise player engagement levels, which impacts how votes are allocated.

For example, FIFA differentiates between elite players, semi-professional players, and grassroots development when structuring development funding allocation (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

Equity Concerns

Equity is a core principle of good sports governance (Chappelet, 2021). If voting power is solely linked to financial or competitive success, developing Members may be disadvantaged. This issue is particularly prevalent in African and Caribbean Members, where

resource limitations prevent consistent tournament participation (Henry, 2013).

An IF voting system could enhance equity by allocating development-focused votes for Members that invest in youth programmes or gender equity initiatives and ensuring that developing Members have a clear pathway to increase their influence over time.

Similar models have been proposed in Olympic governance, where smaller National Olympic Committees (NOCs) receive guaranteed baseline representation to prevent geopolitical marginalisation (Chappelet, 2021).

Impact on Democratic Decision-Making

The structure of a voting system directly affects democratic legitimacy within an international federation (Geeraert, 2018). If a small group of large Members dominates decision-making, governance risks becoming elitist and unrepresentative. Research highlights that decision-making diversity improves the long-term stability of IFs, as it ensures broad stakeholder representation (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014).

To ensure that differential voting does not undermine democratic principles, IFs must periodically review voting structures and adjust criteria to reflect evolving governance needs (Forster, 2016).

Adaptation to Global Trends

The nature of sports participation is changing, with shifts towards social, recreational, and digital engagement (Dowling et al., 2018). Many Members are moving away from traditional club-based models and adopting flexible engagement structures.

For example, Esports federations now include digital participation metrics, measuring online gaming and streaming engagement alongside in-person tournament participation (Geeraert, 2018).

For IFs to remain adaptable, its voting system must recognise non-traditional forms of sport participation (e.g., social), evaluate how technology is influencing sport development (e.g., virtual coaching platforms, esports), and ensure that governance structures accommodate emerging participation models while maintaining integrity and transparency.

By integrating governance flexibility, IFs can future proof its voting system, ensuring that it remains equitable, transparent, and aligned with global sports trends (Chappelet, 2021).

For a differential voting system to be effective, it must balance transparency, equity, and representational fairness. Governance research suggests that verifiable metrics, safeguards against manipulation, and provisions for equitable participation are essential in maintaining democratic legitimacy in IFs (Geeraert, 2018; Forster, 2016).

Recommendations for Criterion

To enhance the integrity, transparency, and fairness of the BWF differential voting system, it is essential to establish robust and verifiable criteria that align with best practices in sports governance (Chappelet, 2021; Geeraert, 2018). The following recommendations are aimed at improving data accuracy, inclusivity, and accountability while ensuring that voting allocations reflect genuine contributions to the sport.

Implement a Robust Verification Mechanism

One of the most significant governance challenges in differential voting systems is ensuring that self-reported data from Members is accurate and verifiable (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023). To address this, independent auditing procedures should be introduced to validate the data used in voting criteria allocation.

Many IFs have already adopted technology-driven verification solutions. For example, the International Squash Federation (ISF) implemented ClubLocker in 2019, a Member registration system that integrates player data, event participation records, and membership tracking at the national and international levels (InsideTheGames, 2018). By leveraging centralised data management platforms, IFs can ensure that voting power is assigned based on verifiable contributions rather than self-reported statistics.

Additionally, data protection laws and Member consent must be considered. IFs must develop clear data policies, ensuring that:

- Data is stored securely in compliance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) standards.
- Retention policies limit long-term storage of Member records to avoid privacy concerns.
- Independent audits are conducted regularly to ensure compliance and data integrity (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

Proposed Best Practice:

- Mandate annual verification reports for Members claiming multiple votes.
- Establish a third-party compliance team to oversee data audits.
- Encourage MAs to adopt standardised digital reporting systems, reducing the risk of manipulation (Geeraert, 2018).

Develop Measurable and Transparent Metrics

The criteria for additional voting rights should be based on activity-based and performance-driven

benchmarks that are recorded by third-party entities and publicly verifiable (Chappelet, 2021). This will enhance transparency and reduce opportunities for manipulation.

Examples of robust and measurable criteria include:

- **International Tournament Participation:** Members should earn additional voting rights based on the number of athletes competing in sanctioned events, ensuring that active engagement in the sport is rewarded (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014).
- **Tournament Hosting Contributions:** Members that organise major international events should receive recognition for their infrastructural and logistical investments.
- **World Ranking Achievements:** The presence of national players in the top 50 rankings across singles and doubles disciplines should contribute to voting weight (Geeraert, 2018).

By ensuring that all voting criteria are recorded, or verified by independent organisations, IFs can eliminate disputes over data accuracy and establish trust in the voting system (Forster, 2016).

Promote Inclusivity in Voting Power Allocation

To prevent dominance by wealthier IFs and ensure balanced global representation, voting systems should consider both size and contribution levels in its voting allocations (Henry, 2013). One method to balance voting power is through minimum representation thresholds for smaller Members.

An inclusivity model includes:

- Establishing baseline votes for all Members to prevent underrepresentation of smaller Members
- Implementing gender equity thresholds, requiring Members to achieve minimum female athlete participation in international competitions to qualify for additional votes (Chappelet, 2021).

The IOC's gender representation quotas have been instrumental in increasing female participation in sports governance, with IFs encouraged to meet a minimum 30% female representation at the executive level (Forster, 2016).

While gender quotas are a valuable step toward improving representation in sport governance, they are not sufficient on their own. Quotas are an outcome of poor governance, and address numerical imbalance, they do not improve the underlying poor governance culture which created the imbalance. Without broader

governance reforms, such as term limits, inclusive leadership practices, and cultural change, quotas risk being symbolic (Claringboul & Knoppers, 2012, Geeraert, 2016).

Incorporate Developmental Goals in Voting Criteria

Voting rights should not be allocated solely based on elite-level performance but should also reward Members investing in long-term grassroots development (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

IFs can enhance strategic alignment by incorporating:

- **Youth Engagement Metrics:** Members with structured national junior programmes should receive additional voting weight, reflecting their investment in badminton's long-term sustainability (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014).
- **Para-Badminton Integration:** Members that actively develop para-badminton programmes should receive greater governance influence, ensuring inclusivity in adaptive sports.
- **Infrastructure and Capacity-Building Initiatives:** Members investing in coach education, regional tournaments, and club development should be recognised as contributors to the sport's global growth (Geeraert, 2018).

However, any voting system inevitably privileges certain stakeholder groups over others, as no model can fully balance the competing interests of all members (Geeraert, 2016).

Proposed Best Practice:

- Implement a tiered points system, awarding Members with a vote for more holistic achievements, for example in junior development, para-sports, and grassroots engagement.
- Establish strategic funding rewards tied to governance participation, ensuring that Members investing in non-elite sport receive representation.

By adopting these recommended reforms, the IF voting system can:

- Enhance fairness, transparency, and credibility through data verification.
- Ensure equitable governance representation, balancing large and small Members.
- Align voting allocations with long-term strategic development, ensuring that grassroots, youth, and para-sport engagement are incentivised.

As IFs evolve, adapting governance models to align with modern sports participation trends is essential. By adopting technology-driven verification, promoting gender equity, and incorporating strategic development criteria (Chappelet, 2021).

Conclusion

A well-structured voting system is fundamental to the governance of IFs ensuring fairness, transparency, and equity in decision-making processes (Geeraert, 2018). The criteria used in voting allocation significantly impact the legitimacy, inclusivity, and democratic integrity of an IF. When designed effectively, differential voting systems can incentivise Members to contribute meaningfully to the sport's development, aligning governance with strategic objectives (Chappelet, 2021). However, poorly designed criteria, such as reliance on unverifiable data or easily manipulated metrics, can compromise the credibility and effectiveness of an IF's governance framework (Cabello-Manrique & Puga-González, 2023).

The Importance of Robust, Verifiable Metrics

To maintain integrity, IFs should ensure that the voting system is:

1. Aligned with IF Strategic Goals: Governance structures must reflect the long-term development of the sport, ensuring that grassroots engagement, competitive excellence, and inclusivity are rewarded (Forster, 2016).
2. Verifiable and Transparent: IFs must prioritise objectively measurable criteria to prevent data manipulation and enhance accountability. For instance, ranking data, tournament participation, and national Member development programs could provide a stronger basis for awarding votes than self-reported membership figures (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).
3. Flexible and Adaptive: As participation models evolve, including digital engagement, para-sport inclusion, and emerging forms of play, voting criteria must be reassessed periodically to ensure continued relevance (Henry, 2013).

A data-driven approach to voting allocation, as seen in FIFA's ranking-based funding model and World Athletics' participation-weighted voting system, can enhance decision-making equity while preventing dominance by wealthier or more politically influential Members (Geeraert, 2018).

However, implementing uniform governance solutions remains challenging, as IFs must manage a diverse membership with varying cultural contexts,

technological access, and administrative capacity (Forster, 2006).

Comparing Differential and One-Member-One-Vote Systems

The differential voting system provides IFs with a dynamic mechanism to encourage Members to engage in the sport, rewarding them for active contributions rather than merely granting equal voting rights (Chappelet, 2021). In contrast, the one-Member-one-vote system, while symbolically democratic, fails to account for disparities in engagement, competition, and financial investment, potentially leading to decision-making inefficiencies (Forster, 2016).

A hybrid model, combining baseline voting rights with additional merit-based votes, could serve as a compromise between pure democratic representation and performance-based governance (Schubert & Könecke, 2015).

The Role of IFs in Defining Contribution Standards

One of the key governance functions of an IF is to establish clear criteria that define what it means for a MAs to contribute most to the sport (Hassan & McCarthy, 2014). This involves:

- Establishing transparent governance benchmarks for Members.
- Ensuring that smaller Members have pathways to increased representation based on developmental efforts.
- Balancing competitive, financial, and grassroots development metrics in determining voting power (Chappelet, 2021).

Continuous Review and Governance Evolution

Given the evolving nature of international sport, it is crucial that IFs periodically review and refine their voting systems. By implementing regular governance audits, IFs can:

- Ensure that voting structures remain relevant, equitable, and free from undue influence.
- Identify new participation trends that should be reflected in governance frameworks (e.g., gender equity requirements, youth development programmes).
- Reinforce commitments to integrity, inclusivity, and democratic governance (Geeraert, 2018).

By maintaining a commitment to transparent and fair voting criteria, IFs can enhance democratic legitimacy, promote equitable representation, and encourage sustained development across their sports. As governance challenges evolve, it is imperative that

IFs continuously refine their voting models, ensuring that representation aligns with contribution, and that decision-making remains inclusive, ethical, and future-proofed (Chappelet, 2021).

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