

Government policy responses to Covid-19 in sport: a comparative study of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK and the USA

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Abstract

The study examines governments' policy responses in sport during the pandemic caused by Covid-19. Applies Hood and Margetts' (2007) NATO approach to analysing national governments in China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK and USA use of policy instruments to affect the governance, access to and consumption of sport. Regardless of ideological persuasions, the five governments have framed exercise and sport as critical for citizens' wellbeing. The directions and limits of central government interventions in sport depend both on the system of government and the ways that governments choose to engage with sport.

Introduction

No disruptive event of the past compares to the current unprecedented abrupt stop of sport as a form of leisure and business activity for millions of people around the world caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This situation has urged policymakers, athletes, fans and researchers to re-examine the way we think, practice and organizesport.

The main concern of most studies including five special issues of sport journals has been on the impact of COVID-19 on athletes' training and mental wellbeing (di Fronso *et al.* 2020, McGuine *et al.* 2021), people's participation in sport (Mutz and Gerke 2021, McIntosh *et al.* 2021) on sport events and industry (Miles and Shipway 2020, Ziakas *et al.* 2021), and on the teaching of sport management (Rayner and Webb 2021). Rare exceptions include the governance and management of sport (Byers *et al.* 2021; Grix *et al.* 2021) and Pedersen *et al.* (2021) edited book on the subject includes six chapters on sport governance.

Nonetheless, no study so far has examined governments' policy responses in sport during the pandemic. Given the leading role of national governments in handling the health crisis, it is of critical importance to understand what policy actions have been implemented to sustain sport and its contribution to society. As Fukuyama (2020, p. 26) argues 'It is not a matter of regime type. Some democracies have performed well, but others have not, and the same is true for autocracies. The factors responsible for successful pandemic responses have been state capacity, social trust, and leadership'.

The aim of this study is to examine critically and compare the government responses to COVID-19

in sport across five countries including China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK and the USA. The main research question addressed by this research is how national governments use policy instruments to affect the governance, access to and consumption of sport during the pandemic. These countries have very different political, economic, and social systems and distinctive sport policies marked by a varying government capacity for intervening in the field.

The study of government's use of policy instruments presents one of the several approaches to understanding the role of government in sport policy making (Linder and Peters 1998). It offers a relatively simple approach to the analysis of the complex nature of policy making by focusing on the instruments or tools used by governments in tackling the impact of the pandemic on sport.

The study proceeds as follows: first, it briefly sketches the role of governments in national sport policy formulation and implementation to establish their capacity to intervene; second, the conceptual approach to the study is presented; third, the research method is explained; fourth, the findings across the five countries are presented and discussed, and finally some conclusions about the role of governments in sport policy making are drawn.

Understanding the national sport policy contexts: priorities and capacity

The national sport systems of the five countries have been analysed in sufficient detail elsewhere by others including Zheng *et al.* (2018) and Wei *et al.* (2010) for China, Smolianov *et al.* (2014) and Girginov (2016) for Russia, Sulayem *et al.* (2013) for Saudi Arabia, Houlihan and Lindsey (2013), UK and Sparaveto *et al.* (2008) for USA.

Governments' deployment of policy instruments in sport is contingent on their capacity to regulate the field as well as to provide resources and services. Policy capacity is a key concept in policy analysis, which Wu *et al.* (2015) define as 'the set of skills and resources – or competences and capabilities – necessary to perform policy functions' (p. 166). Wu *et al.* (2015) categorise the key skills or competences into three types including analytical, operational and political. Related to each of these three competences are resources or capabilities at three different levels including individual, organisational, and systemic. In combination, the three types of competencies and levels generate nine basic types of policy-relevant capacity.

Table 1 shows the capacity of the five governments to either directly or through quasi-non-governmental agencies deal with well-established informational infrastructures and to collect and analyse physical activity and sport participation data. Policy capacity is indicative of these agencies' ability to align policy actions (i.e. national lockdown), with informational (i.e. sermons) and financial resources (i.e. funding packages) in keeping both National Governing Bodies of sport (NGB) and community sport organisations alive by sustaining their capacity to provide services. The governments of China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and the UK, have demonstrated high analytical, operational and policy capacity at individual, organisational and systemic levels that has been established over a long period of state involvement in sport. The USA represents a different case with a fairly high level of analytical capacity but a low level of operational and virtually non-existent level of political capacity.

Covid-19 as a sport policy issue

Covid-19 is a health emergency crisis, which, in addition to the search of medical solutions, has also evoked a sustained policy response from national governments. As Capano *et al.* (2020) note 'There are many aspects of the COVID-19 crisis which make it a thorny policy problem' (p. 288). Governments' policy responses to COVID-19 have been the subject of multiple investigations (Imtyaz *et al.* 2020, Toshkov *et al.* 2020). The Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker is the most comprehensive tool for collecting information on governments common policy responses to the pandemic using data from more than 180 countries (Hale *et al.* 2021).

Table 1. Sport Policy Capacity of Five Countries.

Country	Levels of resources and capabilities	Skills and competencies		
		Analytical	Operational	Political
China	<i>Individual</i>	Presence of qualified experts	Presence of qualified experts.	Presence of party cadres.
	<i>Organisational</i>	Offering in-house senior sports club managers training; promotion campaign launched by GAS was designed by sports experts	Strong interdepartmental coordination at central and local governments levels	Learning relationships between government partners and the public (for COVID matters) barely exists Dominantly one-way communication
	<i>Systemic</i>	High: based on access to diverse information systems and big data technology	Minimum of coordination of sports governmental and non-sports-governmental efforts.	High steering level capacity (through which all other aspects of policy capacity are shaped)
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	<i>Individual</i>	Finding professional practices sensitive to risk Sensing the importance of physical activity	Qualified national cadres and experts.	Presence of qualified experts Competencies and the fluidity of procedures for making and assessing policy decisions at all levels
	<i>Organisational</i>	Use of research for studying issues related to sport and increasing productivity	Recruiting and directing resources with governance actions in all aspect.	Defining sports policies and building clubs and federations' capacity for independent decisions
	<i>Systemic</i>	Importance of information systems and data bases and it in artificial intelligence. High	Importance of networks and linking system between MOS, local authorities, NSF, sport clubs and National Health System.	The ability to promote initiatives and to obtain political support for sports
Russia	<i>Individual</i>	Presence of officials with analytical capacity	Leadership and ability of individual managers to perform key functions	Understanding of and loyalty to key state strategies and ideologies
	<i>Organisational</i>	Limited existence of processes for collecting and analysing data Low organisational commitment to evidence-based policy	Low operational coordination between actors and agencies.	Minimum learning relationships between government, organisations and the public Predominantly one-way communication
	<i>Systemic</i>	High: State of technology, data systems and scientific facilities do not always allow policy makers to access information to perform analytical and managerial functions	Moderate degree of systemic coordination of governmental and non-governmental efforts.	High level of public trust and high 'steering' capacity, through which legitimization capacity is shaped
UK	<i>Individual</i>	Presence of qualified experts.	Presence of qualified experts.	Presence of qualified experts; Ability to make policy decisions.
	<i>Organisational</i>	Commissioning of Covid-19-physical activity/impact on sport studies.	Good alignment of resources with policy actions (e.g. provision of finances, guidance and support).	Defining policy priorities in sport during COVID-19 Ability to make policy decisions.
	<i>Systemic</i>	High: based on access to diverse information systems and data bases (e.g. Active Lives Survey)	High: using a wide network of local authorities, NGB, sport clubs and National Health System.	Ability to obtain political support for sport in general and selected sports in particular. High level of trust from government.

(Continued)

Table 1. (Continued).

Country	Levels of resources and capabilities	Skills and competencies		
		Analytical	Operational	Political
USA	<i>Individual</i>	Presence of qualified experts	Presence of qualified experts	No authority to make policy decisions
	<i>Organisational</i>	Commissioning of COVID-19 studies that may include or be relevant to physical activity.	Minimal alignment of resources with policy actions (e.g. no provision of finances but some guidance and support).	Suggesting policy priorities in sport during Covid-19, but no ability to make policy decisions.
	<i>Systemic</i>	Moderates: based on access to diverse information systems and data bases, particularly through university studies and existing government data.	Low.	Null

China – based on GAS (gov dep), 23 Sport Management Centres (gov dep), all sports governing bodies and national sports association (quasi-gov agencies).

Russia – based on Russian legislation, Russian Ministry of Sport, regional ministries/department of sport, national and regional governing bodies of sports..

KSA – based on MOS, SAOC, NSF.

UK – based on DCMS (gov dep), UK Sport and Sport England (quasi-government agencies).

This study follows Weible *et al.* (2020) who have made a convincing argument for using a policy perspective for understanding government responses to Covid-19. Weible *et al.* (2020) summarise the contribution of ten policy perspectives one of which is crisis response and management policy perspective, which forms the focus of the current analysis. The authors note that

Crisis response and management share an immediate interdependence with (1) public policies, including the content of previously and newly adopted public policies, (2) the interactions of individuals, groups, coalitions, and networks, and (3) contextual conditions, including income levels, local interactions, and global-level decisions. (p. 228).

Capano *et al.* (2020) study of 190 national policy responses to COVID-19 developed a ranked list of 18 common policy tools used by governments including tax payment deferral; tax regulation relaxation; leave & underemployment; business loan; social distancing; travel advisory & restriction; health facilities; monetary policy; social security; medical supplies; patient care; immunisation & treatment; support for the vulnerable; information & advice; school & university closure; financing relief; health-care spending and COVID-19 epidemiology. Many of these tools have also been used in sport, but there is a lack of knowledge about their contextual implementation and intended effects.

A policy instruments approach to Covid-19 in sport: conceptual framework

Vedung (1998) writes that ‘Public policy instruments are sets of techniques by which government authorities wield their power in attempting to ensure support and effect social change’ (p.21). He argues that there are two fundamental approaches to taxonomy of policy instruments including ‘choice versus resource’ and ‘maximalist versus minimalist’ approach. By combining these two approaches he arrives at a tripartite configuration of policy instruments that might be used in any organisation including regulations (i.e. stick), economic means (i.e. carrot) and information (i.e. sermon). It is generally accepted that the ‘carrots, sticks, and sermons’ classification is the most parsimonious approach, which provides the greatest simplicity. However, this approach is not best suited to deal with more complex issues and for explaining differences between countries.

Hood (1983) developed an institution-free tools approach specifically for government, which Hood and Margetts (2007) extended it for the digital age. As they elucidate

for any policy problem government has four basic tools at its disposal: nodality, the property of being at the center of social and information networks; authority, the legitimate legal or official power to command or prohibit; treasure, the possession of money or fungible chattels which may be exchanged; and organizational capacity, the possession of a stock of people, skills, land, buildings, and technology (p.136).

This approach to analysing governments' use of policy instruments has gained popularity in the policy analysis field as the NATO acronym (nodality, authority, treasure, organisation). Hood and Margetts (2007) also make the important point that 'each of the four basic resources gives governments different capability, can be "spent" in a different way, and is subject to a different limit' (p.6). Hood and Margetts demonstrate that any policy solution will be composed of some combination of these tools, where each combination will have its advantages and disadvantages.

Margetts and Hood (2016) have addressed the complex issue of government use of policy instruments and further refined their approach by breaking down each of the four NATO tools into 'detecting' tools designed to help governments take in information (detectors) and 'effecting' tools used to make an impact (i.e. modifying or shaping behaviour) on a particular policy area (effectors). The detectors are distinguished based on whether governments are actively or passively seeking information on a policy issue. Effectors, on their part, are split into *particular*, that is, those that are applied to particular individuals, organisations or sports, and *general*, or those applied to all concerned with sport. It ought to be noted that each of the government four basic resources can be used both for detecting and effecting.

A major challenge for all comparative approaches to public policy making concerns the trade-offs between simplicity and comprehensiveness. Nonetheless, Hood and Margetts (2007) argue that 'the four NATO tools can be used for comparative analysis in at least two ways: to assess policy change over time, and to compare the way that the tools are used across different governments, levels of government, or government agencies' (pp. 126–143).

The present study follows Vedung (1998) and Hood and Margetts (2007) and examines how the five governments have used the policy instruments of nodality (the sermon), authority (the sticks), treasure (the carrots) and organisation to respond to the health crisis in sport. The NATO approach has been used successfully for analysing the English physical education and sport policy, where only a narrow range of the policy instruments available to governments were used in pursuit of their policy goals (Lindsey *et al.* 2020).

Policy analysis stresses the importance of context as a key factor determining the use of specific policy instruments. As Freeman (1985, cited in Vedung 1998, p. 13) elaborates 'policy sector approach implies that there should be cross national similarities in the way issues are treated, whatever the styles particular nations adopt'. By focusing on the sport policy sector, we accept that 'the nature of the problem is fundamentally connected to the kind of politics that emerges as well as the policy outcomes and results' (p.14).

Method

The research design was guided by Hood and Margetts (2007) suggestion that the four NATO tools can be used both to assess policy change over time, and to compare the way the tools are used across different governments. The investigation was concerned with the role of the central government in China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK, and the USA in addressing the pandemic in the sport sector. We interpret the sport sector as made up of public, private and non-for-profit actors and three key domains including access (i.e. how recreational participants and athletes get access to sport in terms of information, mobility, cost, risk), consumption (i.e. attending live and mediated events, purchase of equipment), and governance (i.e. planning, advocacy and material support offered to sport governing bodies).

The study covered the period from January 2020, when COVID-19 was declared as a global pandemic, to June 2021. This 18-month period allowed for examining changes in the use of the four main policy instruments across the five countries. Given the restrictions imposed on empirical

Table 2. Types of Documents Consulted in the Study of Government Use of Policy Tools.

Document type	Documents selected	Data analysed
Official	National governments National/sectors surveys Policy/Business strategies	Measures affecting people's participation in and consumption of sport
Implementation	Safe return to sport guidelines Interactive online request for funding Governance manuals for NGB Financial analyses	How use of four policy tools affects access, consumption and governance of sport
Working	Government and governing bodies of sport websites – Covid-19 sections Organisational reports	Use of policy tools for regulating access, consumption and governance of sport
Scholarly work	Publications on COVID-19 and government responses in general and in the field of physical activity and sport; Interactive online platforms (Coronavirus government response tracker)	Policy tools use justification, monitoring and evaluation

research, this investigation employs document analysis as the principal method of inquiry. Document analysis provides a specialised form of qualitative research, which in this study is defined as a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating documents that entails finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesising data contained within them (Bowen 2009, p. 28).

More specifically, we followed Prior (2008) who criticised the available approaches to documentation as being concerned with documents as ‘things’ created and enacted by humans and proposed that documents are not static entities rather they possess vitality and interact with humans. Prior (2008) outlines two main approaches to the study of documents including (i) those focusing on the content and (ii) on their use and function as well as whether the document is used as a resource or as a topic. A focus on the functioning rather than the content of documents leads us to ask questions about what documents do rather than with what they say. As Prior (2008) puts it “the emphasis here is on how documents as ‘things’ function in schemes of social activity, and with how such things can drive, rather than be driven by, human actors – i.e. the spotlight is on the *vita activa* of documentation (p. 826).

Data collection

Data were collected independently by a member of the research team in each country who was fluent in English and Chinese, Russian, or Arabic, which allowed for identifying, classifying and analysing documents without translation. We followed the READ protocol (Ready your materials, Extract data, Analyse data and Distil your findings, Hina Khalid *et al.* 2020), which specifies the type of documents to be examined in policy research and the main questions posed in the process. Documents were selected based on three main criteria including (i) issued by national governments; (ii) type (i.e. official, implementation, working and scholarly) and (iii) explicitly concerned with COVID-19 in any of the three domains of access, consumption and governance of physical activity and sport. Overall, 120 documents were collected (excluding c50 scholarly work and government trackers) as follows, China –25, Russia-23, Saudi Arabia-32, UK-26 and USA-14. Table 2 shows the types of documents consulted by the study.

Data analysis

Multiple methods for document analysis exist and their application depends mainly on the objectives of the study. The current analysis was structured according to the theoretical approach adopted by the study focusing on the use of government policy instruments. We were explicitly interested in understanding what did the documents reveal about the four main types of policy instruments and the variations found within documents and across the five countries. For example, when analysing a document, noted were the authority issuing it,

Table 3. Relationship between Covid-19 cases and government policy response January 2020-December 2021.

Country/timeline	Government stringency index	Cancellation of public events and gathering	Stay at home restrictions	Public information campaigns	
China	Jan 2020	44.91	No measures	No measures	Coordinated
	July 2020	78.24	Required	Required	Coordinated
	Dec 2020	78.24	Required	Required	Coordinated
	Jan 2021	78.24	Required	Required	Coordinated
	July 2021	70.83	Required	Required	Coordinated
	Dec 2021	70.83	Required	Required	Coordinated
Russia	Jan 2020	0.00	No measures	No measures	None
	July 2020	62.50	Required	No measures	Coordinated
	Dec 2020	47.69	Required	Recommended	Coordinated
	Jan 2021	50.46	Required	Recommended	Coordinated
	July 2021	30.09	Recommended	Recommended	Coordinated
	Dec 2021	54.17	Recommended	Required (except essentials)	Coordinated
Saudi Arabia	Jan 2020	0.00	No measures	No measures	None
	July 2020	71.30	Required	Recommended	Coordinated
	Dec 2020	56.48	Required	No measures	Coordinated
	Jan 2021	53.70	Required	No measures	Coordinated
	July 2021	53.70	Required	No measures	Coordinated
	Dec 2021	51.85	Recommended	No measures	None
UK	Jan 2020	5.56	No measures	No measures	Public officials urging caution
	July 2020	64.35	Required	Recommended	Coordinated
	Dec 2020	76.85	Required	Required (except essentials)	Coordinated
	Jan 2021	87.96	Required	Required (except essentials)	Coordinated
	July 2021	43.98	Recommended	No measures	Coordinated
	Dec 2021	48.61	Required	No measures	Coordinated
USA	Jan 2020	0.00	No measures	No measures	None
	July 2020	67.13	Required	Recommended	Coordinated
	Dec 2020	71.76	Required	Required (except essentials)	Coordinated
	Jan 2021	71.76	Required	Required (except essentials)	Coordinated
	July 2021	49.54	Recommended	Recommended	Coordinated
	Dec 2021	53.24	Recommended	Recommended	Coordinated

Source: Dada compiled from the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker, 2022

how it was communicated, what was subjected to exchange and how it was organised, and what was the capacity of the state actor to affect the sector. The 'detecting' and 'effective' function of the policy tool as well as whether they were 'generic' or 'specific' were also analysed. Attention to the above properties of the documents allowed for determining their use and function. Country data was systematically arranged in tables and their relevance and meaning was discussed by the researchers.

Results and discussion

Table 3 depicts the five governments' policy responses to the pandemic across four dimensions including stringency, access to public events, restrictions on people movement and public information campaigns. The relationship between COVID-19 cases and government response was fluid across all five countries. China's response has been the stingiest with an index of over 70% (out of 100%) while the rest of governments' reaction has been rather mild and cautious. Both governments' initial and subsequent responses to COVID-19 have been driven by a combination of factors, and as Fukuyama (2020) noted, included state capacity, social trust, and leadership. For example, the first goal of the new White House's (2021) National Strategy for the COVID-19 Response and Pandemic Preparedness is to 'restore trust with the American people'. The UK has been struggling with the

same issue around the 'partygate' scandal where government officials persistently violated their own rules by staging parties during lockdown (Maidment 2022). Science was also a major contributing factor, as was the nature of national sport systems and governments' involvement in its regulation. The chief approach to COVID-19 in sport has been the control of movement of people including indoor and outdoor exercise, attendance of live events, and type and duration of activities permitted. This approach has been determined not only by capacity, trust and leadership, but also by the prevailing national sport model. In China, Russia, Saudi Arabia and UK, sport is closely integrated with health and is considered as public good, and thus enjoys the support of governments. The economic value of sport across the five countries varies significantly, which also plays a critical role in determining governments' response. In the two established market economies of the UK and USA, sport contributes some 2.1% to the GDP in the former (European Commission 2018) and 3% in the latter (Burton 2017). To put government's response in perspective, a study by Ecorys (2021) estimated that in 2020 the UK experienced a fall in sport income of USD11.7 bn and job losses totalling 250,000. The next five sections analyse the use of the NATO tools in each country.

China

Each of the NATO tools have been used in China's crisis management of sport including promoting and offering guidance on home fitness ('nodality'); command-and-control regulation of access and consumption of sport ('authority'); providing central subsidies and tax incentive to help sport return to work and production ('treasure'); and mobilising organisational resources and capabilities in the provision of sport ('organisation').

Policy tools' deployment has been determined by the development of the pandemic and different stages' priorities. Authority tools were employed at the beginning of the pandemics; nodality and treasure tools were applied more during the ongoing prevention and control stage; the use of organisation tools remained stable during the whole epidemic.

Authority tools were used to impose power through rules and legislation where due to the mass nature of consumption and access to sport, relevant plans for returning to work were carried out in an orderly and gradual manner. Compared to other aspects of people's life, the resumption of sport was much slower, which seems to suggest its marginal role. Notably, elite sports and preparing for the Tokyo Olympics did not seem to be affected, which suggests its long-standing prioritising over mass sport.

Effectors have been heavily employed to produce an impact by building upon a relatively developed robust system of government detectors that China has put in place over the last decades. For example, to access information about health and fitness levels of the population, the implementation of the Fifth National Physical Fitness Monitoring work in 2020, enabled the government to systematically analyse the nation's physical condition and change patterns during stage 5 of the pandemic. In addition, a new high technology tracking system (e.g. a smartphone app with health codes based on individual health status and travel history) and the street camera system, were also part of the control system that contributed indirectly to information intake.

Active detectors have also been employed for information gathering. For example, regional governmental sports bureaus have taken a leading role in examining residents' fitness status to understand the challenges associated with home exercise during the pandemic (GAS 2020c). Similarly, an investigation into the impact of the epidemic on China's winter sports industry was carried out (Beijing Olympic Development Association, China Winter Sports Economic Research Centre, Yangtze Delta Region Institute of Tsinghua University 2020).

China used both passive and active nodality tools for promoting home exercise and its contribution to the health agenda. Slightly different though was the use of sport by government to build a sense of national unity in time of crisis. Most notably, a media promoted narrative showing coronavirus-recovery-patients practised square dancing and Qi Gong at an emergency treatment

centre built specifically for COVID-19 in Wuhan dove the message that Chinese people shall never give up.

Covid-19 policy documents at national and sub-national levels reveal two important points. First, policy plans for supporting sports-related businesses issued by regional and city sports administrators in fact preceded the general guidance on 'Return to Work for Sport' published by the GAS. This, to some extent, reflects the current fluidity of central-local relations (He *et al.* 2020), where, although China's strategic decisions are made by political principles at the top, local agents are permitted to adapt policies, or even generate innovative solutions to policy problems (Heilmann 2008). Whilst a central authority control remains, local governments have a high level of political autonomy in managing socio-economic affairs (Lin and Liu 2000).

Second, both the authority and nodality tools were employed frequently at national level by GAS with little evidence of the use of treasure where responsibilities were delegated to local level.

At a sub-national level, detailed supporting mechanisms and funding packages for sports businesses were offered. For example, Jiangsu province offered USD28 million for the development of provincial sports industry and fitness clubs; Fushan Sports Administration offered 20% subsidy (capped at USD30,000 per case) for sports events; Shannxi Provincial Sports Bureau together with China Construction Bank set up sports industry development fund, etc. Generic treasure tools (e.g. waiver, reduction, mitigation) were employed by the state to all sectors and small-medium-enterprises. Particular tools for the consumption of sport were used by local governments. China responded to the COVID-19 crisis in sport by using central authority in agreement with decentralised local governments to steer behaviours.

As noted by Weible *et al.* (2020), an effective command chain is critical when managing government responses to large-scale catastrophic crises. China exemplifies a clear command chain with the Central Steering Group for COVID Prevention and Control at the top for decision-making, and a Joint Mechanism for COVID Prevention and Control at local level to facilitate interdepartmental coordination. It is important to note that the Central Steering Group's directives were non-negotiable political tasks (He *et al.* 2020, p.246).

Both authority and treasure have been adopted extensively to steer sports cadres' action and GAS (2020b) outlined the government's attitude to 'strictly reward the best and punish the worst' performance. It included various disciplinary measures against poorly performing sports cadres such as public reprimand, suspension of service, and dismissal as well as reward packages, subsidies, and fast-track promotions.

China's sport policy competencies and capabilities are strong allowing for effective mobilisation of the bureaucracy and careful aligning of government personnel and agencies towards crisis management. These are based on 'who is in charge' principle and accountability (GAS 2020a).

This is a crucial principle because senior party cadres are appointed based on various merits including political loyalty and a track record (Chan and Li 2007). It is therefore, unsurprising to see blame-aversion behaviour where local cadres have been reluctant to approve the resumption of sports activities to avoid complications and incidents.

Russia

The broader context of government's response to the pandemic in Russia suggests that communication (i.e. nodality) was predominantly decentralised. There was only one national address by the President dedicated entirely to the pandemic (President of Russia 2020a). From the very beginning, the message from the top was that the economy could not be stalled, and local governments should respond according to their specific threat levels (President of Russia 2020b). In contrast to most European countries, Russia only had one brief initial nationwide restriction, which was not even called 'lockdown', but obligatory 'holidays' covered by employers and the government, after which action powers were delegated to the 83 regional governments.

In terms of nodality, there is limited evidence of any significant detectors or effectors employed by the government in relation to sport and exercise. The only notable initiative was an online campaign 'Train at home; sport is the norm of life' launched by the Russian Ministry of Sport (RMS 2020d) shortly after the start of pandemic. It was an attempt to create a narrative that exercise is a necessity, but the campaign was not particularly popular, presumably due to the lack of credibility and experience in online campaigning. There was also little evidence for information gathering (i.e. detectors) related to COVID-19 and sport. In May 2020, the RMS (2020b) published recommendations for regional governments on staged removal of restrictions in sport, but the only source of information that this 5-stage plan referred to was the general guidance of the Russian health and safety regulator, Rospotrebnadzor. In terms of communication, it was also very indicative that one of the first restriction easing announcements by Moscow's mayor highlighted the return of elite sport, while recreational facilities would remain closed until further notice (Sobyenin 2020b).

The application of the authority tool (i.e. stick) to sport and fitness activities in Russia did not differ substantially from other sectors. Surprisingly, individual outdoor exercise, (e.g. jogging and walking), was not exempt from local movement restrictions and was effectively banned in the areas most affected by pandemic's first wave. For example, in Moscow where the 'hard' lockdown was in place for the longest period, only essential work, shopping for necessities, and dog walking were deemed legitimate reasons for being outside (Sobyenin 2020a). The most significant dispensation for sport found was with regard to elite sport consumption. Whilst in most European countries elite football returned to empty stadia for the entire 2020/21 season, the Russian Premier League restarted with 10% stadium capacity as early as June 2020, increasing to 25–70% capacity later. Arguably, the experience of quick return of fans to football served as a model and was used to help fans return to other sporting events in Russia.

Since Russia had one of the softest lockdowns and, arguably, less disruptive to economy compared to other countries, the treasure tool employed by the government were rather limited and focussed on tax holidays and additional loans for small and medium businesses (Deloitte 2021). However, the key 'battle' for the sport sector was to gain government's recognition as one of the sectors heaviest affected by the pandemic, thus making non-profit sport organisations eligible for tax relief, loans and direct funding. Initially, sport was not on the pandemic support list, but after the leaders of several non-profit sport organisations petitioned the Prime Minister and the Minister of Sport (Orlov 2020), 87 non-commercial sport organisations were made eligible for extra support from the federal budget (RMS 2020a). In 2020, the RMS also provided subsidies worth RUB 232 million (USD 3.1 million) to 36 federal sport organisations (Russian Accounts Chamber 2021).

There was limited direct intervention from the Russian government and the RMS, and the overall response remained decentralised. The lack of government coordination transpired for example, when no outdoor exercise was allowed by local governments whilst the RMS continued to promote it. Furthermore, after the lockdown was eased, RMS (2020c) released new regulations on staging sport events, which required event organisers to seek approval from local authorities at least 35 days in advance. Whilst a cautious approach to return of sport events is understandable, this requirement created an extra level of bureaucracy, and uncertainty for sport organisers. To summarise, evidently, whilst the organisation tool was used by the Russian government in combination with the other three NATO tools, to influence access to and consumption of sport, local bureaucracies played a key role in responding to COVID-19 where elite sport was prioritised over mass sport.

United Kingdom

The UK government's use of the nodality tool in sport needs to be seen in the context of its specific application, where there were some notable differences between England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The government spent more than \$245 m on communications relating to COVID-19 in 2020, which turned it into the leading advertiser in the UK with Public Health England

advertising spend of \$105m alone represents an almost 800% increase from previous year (Cabinet Office, 2021).

Both active and passive detectors were employed for information gathering related to COVID-19 and sport. In addition to the bi-annual (i.e. passive) nation-wide Active Lives and Taking Part surveys, Macintosh et al (2021) report six active surveys conducted mainly by the Office of National Statistics and designed to collect information on various impacts of COVID-19 on sport. The UK government has also sought the views of the sport sector, and in consultation with Olympic and Paralympic organisations, in May 2020 produced a detailed guidance for athletes and coaches for a phased five-stages return of elite sport.

The sport sector has shown unity and urged the government to act decisively to ensure the survival of community sport, facilities and jobs (i.e. access to sport). In September 2020, the leaders of more than 100 sport organisations signed a letter to the UK Prime Minister urging him to provide emergency funding to support the sector. This was followed by a petition to the Parliament entitled *Save Community Sports Clubs and Leisure Facilities with a Sports Recovery Fund*, which gathered over 47,000 signatures and was acted upon by the government. A notable outcome of the government's use of the nodality tool has been the development of a narrative about exercise as a necessity rather than a matter of personal choice.

The use of authority by the government concerns its legal and official power to shape personal and organisational behaviours. The UK government demanded people to stay home during different stages of the lockdown and that elite sport returns in five stages. It also forbade the practice and passive consumption (i.e. spectating) of sport and offered guarantees for sport organisations and facilities. Nonetheless, some commentators questioned the government adjudicating role regarding access to and consumption of grassroots and elite sport. Grix et al (2020) argue the government clearly favoured elite sport and allowed it to continue during the second lockdown in November 2020 whilst halting altogether grassroots and community sport. The application of the authority tool can be seen as a general effector because it concerns whole sectors.

Hood and Margetts (2007) suggest that the treasure tool is not only about cash and bank transactions but anything with money-like properties, which can be freely exchanged. The UK government has made several funding decisions effecting the sport sector totalling over USD850m, but additional money-like properties such as tax relief or in-kind support were also provided. The application of the treasure tool has been both general and specific. Examples of general tools facilitating the access to, and consumption of sport include Sport England's USD 260 million package for grassroots sport and government USD 130 million support for leisure and sport facilities as well as releasing businesses in the retail, hospitality and leisure including sport clubs, gyms and spas from paying business rates for the 2020–21 tax year. The Department for Work and Pensions' funded project was designed to bolster sport clubs' workforce for a period of six months by essentially paying the salaries of some staff, as well as encouraging young people to enhance their CV by gaining employment in the sport sector.

The government has also used several effectors aimed at particular sports and types of participants. The USD400m winter survival package announced in November 2020 was designed to help nine spectator sports in England including rugby (USD176 million), horseracing (USD52 million), football (USD 37 million), rugby league (USD16 million), motor sport (USD 8 million), tennis (USD5.3 million), netball (USD5.3 million), basketball (USD5.3 million), ice hockey (USD5.3 million), badminton (USD2.7 million) and greyhound racing (USD1.4 million). Women's football super league and championship was targeted specifically and received \$4m from the general allocation to the game. Women's elite sport was also prioritised for receiving 250,000 free COVID-19 testing kits worth USD2 million.

Sport England's 'Return to Play' package was aimed at enhancing sport and activity groups' ability to respond to the challenges of Covid-19. It offers grants ranging from £300 (USD410) to £50,000 (USD68,000) to cover expenditures related to rent, facility and equipment hire, insurance and staff

cost. Funds were allocated in an inclusive and transparent manner and by early March 2021, 68% of 11,043 applications worth nearly £28m (USD38 million) were approved (Sport England 2021).

The UK government also demonstrated its ability to act directly in the field, which reflects a long tradition of political regulation of sport (Houlihan and Lindsey 2013). The UK political and administrative system provides the central government with the organisation needed to act directly and to affect sport. It includes not only the resources but both the central and local bureaucracy, a wide network of public leisure and sport facilities, and the information-gathering capabilities in the form of various surveys and consultations. The government has used the organisation tool in combination with nodality, authority and treasure to affect access to and consumption of sport and specifically the governance of organisations in the sector. The two main quasi-governmental agencies, Sport England and UK Sport, have developed dedicated online portals providing advice and support for clubs and NGBs. Sport England also offered unprecedented flexibilities to organisations receiving funding including the ability to change key targets and performance indicators, timings, and to reallocate funds to new activities in response to the pandemic. This represents a significant departure from Sport England's much rigid approach to public funding of sport organisations based on strategic plans, deliverable targets, evidenced results, and adherence to high governance standards. In sum, the nodality tool was evidenced in all 26 documents reviewed and its main function was three-fold. First, it served to frame exercise and sport as a necessity for the health and wellbeing of people. This represents a much stronger and committal interpretation of sport demanding urgent actions than just declaring it as a human right. Second, it reasserted the 'evidence-based' approach to sport policy that has dominated the sector for the past 20 years. Information about the impact of Covid has been gathered on a regular basis and used to inform decision-making. Third, the nodality tool regulated the behavior of recreational participants, athletes and sport organisations and reinforced existing prioritisation of certain sports and groups (i.e. women) over other sports.

The use of the authority tool has allowed the government to impose its power in determining, in consultation with the sport sector, the rules and the legal basis for practicing sport and its consumption. The treasure tool's main function was to ensure the survival of both community and elite sport as well as its entertainment value. Although furloughs and job cuts were common, the monetary and non-monetary exchanges ensured the employability of sport organisations' core staff as well as the functioning of facilities and essential services at all levels. Finally, owing to the government's capacity to intervene in sport, the application of the organisation instrument has made it possible to mobilise various material and non-material resources and to provide them directly where it had determined the policy priorities lied.

Saudi Arabia

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (SA) has never witnessed confinement, or suspension of work for political, social or health reasons. The government's policy responses were built around the social responsibility paradigm (Garriga and Mele' 2004) where policy tools were gradually geared towards a social change to adjust to the COVID-19 pandemic. The country's official response varied between using newly devised rules and regulations (i.e. stick) for all sectors including mitigating initiatives and support for the economy (i.e. carrot), while concurrently providing regular updates and information to the public (i.e. sermon).

The NATO model was clearly applied in the Saudi's policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic within the sport sector. The nodality tool was extensively used by promoting the Islamic perspective on dealing with such events. This was conducted through the jurisprudential texts on dealing with a pandemic, the obligation to confine oneself at home, limiting social contacts, the need to protect health, as well as to strengthen the body through physical activity at home. Authority was channelled mainly via sports federations to control access to and participation in sport. The Saudi government introduced an emergency budget (i.e. treasure) in the form of subsidies, funding and other financial packages for the benefit of all sectors including sport. Additionally, authorities greatly

facilitated access to material and human resources to allow sports organisations a safe return to managing sports facilities and activities.

The nodality of SA's public policy in sport can be seen as part of the wider and longstanding youth welfare policy of 'education and leisure in free time to protect youth from social ills and delinquency' (Alhakami 2014, p. 163). This policy has been widely used as an effective tool to clarify Islamic perspective in dealing with health pandemics where entry into pandemic areas is (strongly) advised against and this has been supported through centuries-old jurisprudence religious texts, fatwas, and scholarly opinions.

One of the key initiatives was towards increasing sport participation in Saudi society, as well as the implementation of far-reaching social and lifestyle changes. This approach was further reinforced during the pandemic to promote physical activity at home. Various initiatives were launched in the early period of complete lockdown, starting with awareness campaigns encouraging physical activity, exercise, and fun sports for both individuals and families through indoor activities and with affordable equipment. The overall aim of these awareness campaigns was to limit the spread of Covid-19. They started with 'Sports and Prevention' followed by the 'Your Home Calls You' and 'Stay at Home', in which more than 170 sports clubs and federations took part. Additionally, several other initiatives were launched by sports federations including 'Exercise at Home', 'Remote Exercise', 'Start Now', 'Together We Move', 'Home Race' Fit Link and EGym.

The sports sector, represented chiefly by the Ministry of Sports (MS), actively promoted physical activity as major national and international sporting events such as the Saudi Games had already been in the pipeline, pre-pandemic and this required timely delivery. Like China and Russia, the policy approach was to delegate authority directly to individual sports federations in terms of setting up the required rules for the safe return of sporting activity.

The authority tool was largely and directly influenced by the principles of the national strategy 'Saudi Vision 2030', where sport policy has become much more independent and part of the wider 'Quality of Life programme' aimed at enhancing the well-being and quality of life of Saudi society. This tool has been deployed through mobilising and empowering sports federations to control and organise access to and participation in sport, physical activity and fitness.

The Saudi government launched an emergency budget 'Corona impacts' (i.e. treasure) to support various sectors. This budget totalled more than SAR 70 billion (USD 18.7 billion). It was in addition to SAR 50 billion (USD 13.3 billion) of loans with favourable terms for small and medium-sized companies to protect them from bankruptcy and mitigate the significant economic impact of the pandemic. There was also a support package subsidising between 40% and 70% of Saudi citizens' salaries. Besides providing direct financial support and liquidity, all sectors benefited from the postponement of VAT as well as tax and interest payments holidays. As a result, 40% of government subsidies were transferred to the Ministries of Health and Labour to support participation in national and international sport, entertainment and tourism activities.

This major challenge facing the government during the early periods of the pandemic was maintaining existing funding for sports events. The Minister of Finance cut the budgets of the Ministries of Sports, Entertainment and Tourism and relocated funding to support the health sector (Al-Jadaan 2020). In contrast, the budgets for strategic and infrastructure projects were not affected. Interestingly, the contribution of the sports sector to the GDP between 2019 and 2021 grew from SAR 2.4 billion (USD 640 million) to SAR 6.5 billion (USD 1.73 billion), an increase of 170% in two years despite the adverse effects of the pandemic (Government Communication Conference, 28 June 2021).

The MS throughout the pandemic implemented the central instructions through its local offices and led efforts to safely return to sports activity through three main documents including: 'The stopping instructions', 'The return of sports competitions for sports federations and clubs' and 'The return of private club activity' (Saudi Ministry of Sports, 2020). The Olympic Committee also took over the construction of protocols 'Commitment to the return of safe sports activity' by issuing around 26 documents affecting sports federations. MS helped sport organisations to return safely by facilitating

access to human resources by paying citizens' wages in full at the beginning of the pandemic. The strategy of supporting sports clubs entitles them to obtain additional support of up to USD 534,000 a year in monthly instalments released by the Saudi Press Agency. The introduction of the new policy of attending gyms and fitness centres during Covid-19 has resulted in behaviour and attitude changes in Saudi Arabia (Almasri *et al.* 2020).

USA

The analysis of the USA federal government's response to the pandemic poses some analytical challenges for two main reasons. First, the U.S. system is federalist, so authority is assigned downward to states and/or municipalities and counties. Therefore, specific responses concerning sport were formulated at lower levels, which is like Russia. Second, the federal government has no sports agency, ministry, or authority. The only agency at this level is the President's Council on Fitness, Sports, and Nutrition, which has neither regulatory authority nor resources, because it was created by Executive Order, so does not exist in law. Thus, there was no coordinated US response regarding COVID and sport. Nonetheless, The US government endeavored to intervene heavily and put in place a range of general measures to mitigate the negative effects of the pandemic, which by extension also covered sport organisations and businesses. The most significant interventions included passing six Covid-related federal laws between March 2020 and November 2021; introducing the American Rescue Plan providing USD350 billion in emergency funding for eligible state, local, territorial, and tribal governments to respond to the COVID-19 emergency and bring back jobs; launching 59 public education campaigns in 11 languages, under the banner 'We can do this', aimed at eight different target audiences (HHS.gov, n.d.). At federal level, the 'nodality' instrument was used mainly for providing some general guidance on health and staying safe and fit. A rare example is the Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's (covering the governance and operations of youth sport. National non-governmental bodies also used the nodality tool, as in the case of the US Olympic and Paralympic Committee 'Covid guidelines' for national sport federations and athletes (no financial assistance was offered

Since professional sport in the US is a multibillion-dollar industry (Andrews 2018) the government used the 'authority' tool to regulate the access to and consumption of sport. In addition to general instructions for access to sport facilities, the CDC was also involved in approving the anti-Covid plans of professional and collegiate leagues. The 'treasure' instrument was not used specifically to target sport, as in China or the UK, but as part of the Treasury Department's overall recovery package. It included providing central grants and tax incentive to help sport businesses return to work. There was virtually no evidence for the employment of the 'organisation' tool for mobilising and deploying organisational resources and capabilities in the provision of sport. As the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion (2021) notes, the pandemic has pushed youth sport to adapt through advocacy, but even this limited role was disjointed and inconsistent due to the decentralised approach to youth sport in the United States. There were some successful examples of coordination at local level such as the 'Fields 4 NYC Youth' coalition in New York City involving over 120 organisations serving more than 60,000 youth. Like Russia and the UK, the coalition successfully advocated for access to outdoor spaces for youth during the pandemic.

The evidence collected suggests that the federal government has been using the four NATO tools less for taking in information (i.e. detectors) and more as particular effectors to make an impact, for example, by modifying youth sport administrators and participants' behaviour. There were also political tensions within different branches of the government, where the Trump administration wanted sport to continue for morale reasons, but health authorities often disagreed. Some federal

agencies (especially the CDC) did suggest some actions to be taken in keeping with their specific mandate, but these were also recommendations not requirements (Kettl, 2020). Federal actions were therefore exhortations, not regulations or requirements. As a result, there was substantial variation in requirements, restrictions, and recommendations across different states, counties, and municipalities throughout the country.

Government interventions in regulating access to and consumption of sport and its governance

As established in the previous section, governments' ability to regulate sport is contingent not only on their policy capacity but on their relationship with national sport policy systems. The governments of China, SA, Russia, and the UK possess high level of systemic capacity as well as significant analytical, operational and political skills. In combination, these attributes allow public authorities to exercise much greater regulation of sport as opposed to the USA, where the federal government has a very limited role. Systemic capacity concerns the level of support and trust the government enjoys from the sport sector as well as the security systems within which sport policy makers operate. Wu *et al.* (2015) framework suggests that policy capacity results 'from the combination of skills and resources at each level' (p.167). Across the five governments, analytical-level capacity was relatively high, thus ensuring that policy actions are technically sound (Table 1). Except for the US, operational level capacity in the rest of the countries was also high, which allowed to align resources with policy actions and to facilitate their implementation across sport organisations. Similarly, the high political level capacity in China, SA, Russia and the UK ensured both obtaining and sustaining political support during the course of the pandemic. Nonetheless, political support in Russia and UK had to be earned through mobilisation of the sport movement. This is an important point, because government's Covid restrictions on sport clubs' activities can exercise disruptive power as in Sweden (Armbrecht *et al.* 2021).

It is important to note that policy capacity may be exercised in different combinations and time periods as no public authority can possess all capacities all the time. Nonetheless, Howlett *et al.* (2015) identified the critical policy capacity elements according to a country's prevailing model of governance. These 'Achilles' hill' or governance failures which need to be considered to ensure long-term policy success. The sport policy system in China, SA and Russia can be described as state-led (legal), as corporatist in the UK and market in USA. Following Howlett *et al.* (2015), and the study findings, the critical policy capacity for the state-led sport systems then becomes accountability and responsibility system capacity, whereas for the corporatist system it is organisational and political resource capacity, and policy analytical capacity for the market-driven sport system.

Table 4 shows the use of the four types of policy instruments (NATO) in each country. The detectors tool concerns whether governments are actively or passively seeking information on a policy issue. Except for nodality and authority, detectors were not used actively to collect information about Covid's effects on sport. China and the UK employed detectors more systematically and comprehensively. In contrast, general effectors concerning all sports were widely used across all five countries. The use of effectors targeting particular organisations and sports was more pronounced in the UK than in any other country.

Table 4. Functional Use of Policy Instruments for Tackling Covid-19 in Sport in China, Russia, Saudi Arabia, UK and USA.

Tool type		China	Russia	Saudi Arabia	UK	USA
Nodality	detector	*			*	
	effector	*			*	*
Authority	detector		*	*		
	effector	*	*	*	*	*
Treasure	detector				*	
	effector	*	*	*	*	*
Organisation	detector					
	effector	*	*	*	*	*

The use of policy instruments variously affected the three main domains of sport governance and people's access to and consumption of it. Despite promoting a public discourse about exercise as a necessity, all governments prioritised elite sport and its passive consumption as a spectacle. The media have played an active role in establishing the elite-mass dichotomy, and as argued by Giulianotti and Collison (2020) for the UK, the pandemic was framed as four binary opposite themes including sport as absence/presence, selfish/altruistic, crisis/escape, and threat/solution. Nonetheless, sport was not immediately recognised as a priority sector and it was afforded greater benefits after putting pressure on governments by mobilising public support. Regardless of the political regime, policy making was delegated to regional and local levels. This was not the case in the UK where nation-wide consultations with the sport sector were conducted to determine the main course of action.

Governments' Covid policy tended to change over time in line with the perceived severity of the pandemic. However, China is the only country which demonstrated the greatest consistency and did not change its approach to public gatherings and information campaigns. The rest of the countries tended to reverse their policy responses. Like the health sector, with the exception of patient care and health-care spending, the rest of the 16 policy tools identified by Capano *et al.* (2020) have been used by all governments. Some interesting national differences transpired including for example, China and Russia allocation of funding to provincial level whereas most of the UK sport-related funding was made explicitly and directly to NGB.

Without exception, the five governments regulated the governance of sport in terms of controlling sport organisations and athletes' behaviour. In contrast to Russia and USA, China, SA and UK have put in place measures to support the functioning of all sport structures by allowing greater flexibility in delivering planned targets, and by providing funding for staff salaries, facilities maintenance and service provision.

Access to sport has been regulated both at national (i.e. UK, SA) and regional/local level (i.e. China, Russia, USA). The main alternative to outdoor exercise and sport during lockdowns was the provision of online home exercises, guidelines and competitions, but this option was pursued differently across the five countries. For example, China was much more active in encouraging online engagement for keeping fit, whereas sport organisations elsewhere offered optional online activities.

Governments' use of policy tools affected the consumption of sport in its two main forms of recreational physical activity and spectator sport. The nodality and authority tools were critical here as demonstrated by Kiplianidu *et al.* (2021), where consumers' optimism supported by regular supply of information was critical for their engagement with sport. Community sport was regulated mainly through general effector tools concerning all sport participants and organisations. In contrast, spectator sport had benefited from the deployment of particular effectors targeting specific organisations, sports and events according to their priority in national sports systems. As a result, the use of policy tools by governments contributed to deepening the inequalities between sport and participants (Grix *et al.* 2021, Sport England 2021).

Conclusions

This paper set out to answer the question how the Chinese, Saudi Arabian, Russian, British and United States governments use policy instruments to affect the governance, access to, and consumption of sport during the pandemic. The general response of the five governments over the 18 months covered by the study varied in terms of its stringency, timing and policy capacity. Naturally, the two main measures imposed by governments concerning community and spectators' sport including restriction of people's movement and public gatherings, respectively, have also been contingent on the epidemiological situation in each country.

Regardless of their ideological persuasions, the five governments have framed exercise and sport as critical for personal and social wellbeing and presented it as an antidote to the pandemic albeit with varying emphasis. This recognition of the role of sport was not matched with the same level of policy

capacity to support the sector. Since the contribution of sport to people and community's health and wellbeing is well established in all national sport policies, the pandemic is unlikely to raise the profile of sport by any significant measure. What has transpired though, was that further neglecting inequality in sport by policymakers will only exacerbate the lack of access to sport.

Governments spent some NATO policy resources more often than others. The most utilised resources were coin in the form of message, moneys and treatment corresponding to nodality, treasure and organisation, respectively, as well as activity as communication (i.e. nodality). There were clear limits to the use of different tools both in terms of financial support for sport organisations and the number of beneficiaries. Generally, all policy tools were deployed mostly as effectors to affect organisations and individuals and to a limited extent as detectors for collecting and utilising information. Governments in all five countries have favoured elite over community sport by allowing professional leagues to operate, thus promoting passive consumption. Nonetheless, evidence from England suggests that there has been an increase in the number of physically active people between 2020 and 2021 from 43% to 61% (Sport England, 2022). This finding does not necessarily contradict the policy neglect of community sport rather it is indicative of the resilience of sport participation strategy and structures.

Taken together, findings here demonstrate that the directions and limits of central government interventions in sport depend on both the system of government and the ways that governments choose to engage with sport systems. It is not merely a matter of the overall degree of government centralisation, as we see by the delegation of local sport authority in both an uncentralised system, such as the United States, and a comparatively centralised system, such as Russia. The ways that governments can and do respond in a sport emergency are consequently dependent on the systems in place prior to the emergency. Although each government acted, those actions varied, and new systems were not forthcoming.

It is particularly useful to consider the ways that dependency on market forces played a role in government actions. As the USA has chosen to leave sport provision strictly to market forces, it was highly constrained, so resorted to expert recommendations and exhortations. On the other hand, central governments that had financial, regulatory, and/or administrative controls in place were able to engage more directly.

This is not to say that the lack of federal controls made governments ineffectual. Each government acted, even the United States. The more federalist the system, the more the actions taken depended on pressures transmitted to lower levels of government to act. Given the number of lower government levels, those actions were not consistent, giving the impression that responses were chaotic. They were not. Rather, responses were simply dependent on policies and politics at lower levels of government.

The differences and similarities found here have important implications for the comparative study of sport policy and politics. Typically, the approach has been to look directly at sport systems and/or sport organisations, and then compare them. This study demonstrates clearly that what may look similar or different across instances depends very much on the underlying social and political context. Before comparisons are made, the contexts require deeper scrutiny than has typically been undertaken.

Disclosure statement

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