Olympic Aspirations or Developmental Illusions? A Critical Analysis of India's 2036 Olympic Goals and Mega Sports Events

Gourav Kumar[1], Dr Malay Patel[2] and Dr Prashant Pareek[3]

Abstract

India's bid to host the 2036 Summer Olympics, with Ahmedabad as the proposed host city, reflects both national pride and a strategic attempt to project soft power. Anchored in the ambitious Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave, the initiative highlights India's aspirations to join the ranks of Olympic host nations. This remarkable ambition raises concerns about feasibility, equity, and sustainability. Through a qualitative, comparative case analysis of past hosts—Canada (1976), Greece (2004), Brazil (2016), and Japan (2020) the present study examines India's sports infrastructure, governance readiness, and socio-economic implications. Now the question is whether mega-events can drive inclusive development or whether they risk financial excess, urban inequality, and social displacement. The paper argues that while the Olympics could enhance India's global image, they also carry significant risks. For the bid to succeed, India must balance international ambition with grassroots sports development, sustainable planning, and long-term legacy creation.

Keywords: Olympic Games 2036; Mega-events; Sports Infrastructure; Soft Power; India's Development Strategy.

JEL Classification:
- Z28 – Sports Economics: Policy, Regulation, and Government
- L83 – Sports; Gambling; Recreation; Tourism
- H54 – Infrastructures: Public Investment and Capital Stock
- O53 – Asia including Middle East (Development, Economy)
- F50 – International Relations and International Political Economy: General

[1] PhD, Candidate, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, e-mail: gkofficial1481@gmail.com
[2] Associate Professor, Unitedworld Institute of Design, Karnavati University, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India, e-mail: malaypatel@karnavatiuniversity.edu.in
[3] Associate Professor, Shanti Business School – Ahmedabad.

INTRODUCTION

An official interest in hosting the 2036 Summer Olympics has been shown by India, and Ahmedabad, Gujarat, has been suggested as the possible host city. It was announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the October 2023 IOC Session in Mumbai. He said that India is eager to host the Olympics and that our goal is to realise the dreams of the country's 1.4 billion people. Ahmedabad was chosen mainly because of the huge sports infrastructure project, the Sardar Vallabhai Patel Sports Enclave, which is now under construction. To assist India's candidature, the Gujarat government has taken important steps to build first-rate infrastructure, demonstrating its dedication to this objective. A contemporary facility called the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave will be established as part of the project, which is expected to cost ₹6,000 crore. A variety of Olympic sports will be held at this sports facility. Planning and execution were supervised by the Gujarat Olympic Planning and Infrastructure Development Corporation Limited (G-Olympic) to support this goal. India is seen as having made a calculated decision to host the Olympics to demonstrate its leadership in the Global South and strengthen its soft power. Important events have taken place in India, such as the Asian Games in 1951 and 1982, which were both held in Delhi. Mumbai hosted the 2023 International Olympic Committee Session, and Delhi hosted the 2010 Commonwealth Games. In a nation working to develop its reputation internationally. An example of ambition and a hotly debated topic is India's audacious attempt to qualify for the 2036 Olympic Games. Inspiring tales of national pride and progress are fuelled by the temptation of international recognition, urban renewal, and economic expansion as the world's largest democracy gets ready for the Olympic stage. Global mega-events like the Olympic Games are no longer only athletic contests in the twenty-first century; they are now also demonstrations of national ambitions, tools of geopolitics, and vehicles of soft power. In his article, John Horne, a retired professor from Waseda University, clarified this idea by claiming that in the age of social media and international television, sports mega-events have the power to project and shape perceptions of the host city and country, which makes them a very alluring tool for the political and business elites. In this regard, governments, businesses, and civic activists around the world have made hosting major sporting events like the Olympic Games and the FIFA Men's Football World Cup a preferred tactic. The rising costs and declining profits in host cities over the past 15 years, in contrast to the previously dominant view, have encouraged much more critical research and have fuelled the growth of anti-mega-event sentiment and associated activity. Large-scale event planning presents significant opportunity costs, distorts several economic and social goals, and places an undue financial burden on the host city's residents, who provide funding for the global celebration. In this context, this study closely examines the important challenges, approaches, and debates surrounding sports mega-events that have surfaced during the past 20 years. In light of this, India has formally announced its ambition to bid for the 2036 Summer Olympics in an effort to become a world leader. This bid is being recognised as an indication of India's ascent, symbolising advancement, wealth, and global recognition. However, underlying this ambitious vision is a critical inquiry: Do these large-scale sports events truly serve as a driving force for inclusive development, or are they simply dazzling facades that conceal social displacement, financial excess, and unjust urban planning?

Now comes the bigger question: Can India's cities handle the huge demands that the Olympics will put on their infrastructure? Will it widen the gap between rich and poor in towns, or will it last and be open to everyone? How did these kinds of events change the economies and societies of Brazil, Greece, and Japan? Can history help us understand this? Does India really need the Olympics more than everything else? What about rural growth, schooling, public health, and social justice? India needs to make things better and have a clear plan for when it wants to host the Olympics in future years. All over the country, people need to spend more money on sports. It is an honour to host the Olympics. You can't just wish to host the Olympics. You need money and determination to hold the

Olympics. Being the host of the Olympics is good and bad for the business, and is further analysed in this paper.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

"Hosting the Olympics in India in 2036: comparison of Ambition v/s Merit?"

This statement highlights India's aspiration to become part of the selected group of Olympic host nations, reflecting national pride and the projection of soft power. This ambition raises a critical question regarding merit: Does India possess the capacity, preparedness, and credibility to effectively host an event of Olympic scale? India faces significant challenges in infrastructure, particularly within the transport sector, sports facilities, and public services, despite recent advancements. Organising an event of this scale necessitates detailed logistical planning, which includes security, transportation, accommodation, and event coordination. India requires substantial system upgrades to facilitate seamless management of the Olympics.

The fundamental problem here is Aspirational drive v/s Institutional readiness; to get an understanding of this research problem, we can draw lessons from such mega sporting events conducted across the world.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- This research aims to look at the reasons and long-term goals behind India's candidacy to host the 2036 Olympic Games. This means looking at the political, economic, and diplomatic variables that affect India's desire to host the Olympics.
  • To look at India's current sports infrastructure, governance, and policy readiness for hosting a big event.
  • To find the social and economic aspects. There are environmental and political dangers that come with staging big athletic events in poor nations.
  • To learn from the experiences of other countries that have hosted the Olympics and provide suggestions on how India might promote sports in a way that lasts.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the main political, economic, and social reasons why India wants to host the 2036 Olympic Games?
- How does India's present sports infrastructure, regulatory framework, and institutional preparation stack up against the requirements needed to host the Olympic Games?
- Based on what other countries that have hosted the Olympics have gone through, what dangers would India face if it tries to organise the 2036 Games?
- How can India make sure that its goal of hosting the Olympics is matched by a focus on grassroots sports development, inclusion, and a long-term legacy?

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative research, a comparative case analysis methodology is used. This analysis investigates the historical outcomes associated with Olympic host nations, specifically Canada in 1976, Greece in 2004, Brazil in 2016, and Japan in 2020. Official documents and statements concerning India's bid for 2036, Reports on urban development and evictions related to the Delhi Commonwealth Games 2010 and Ahmedabad projects, Literature on public policy and sports

governance, including the National Sports Policy and Khelo India, Academic literature concerning the economics of mega-events, issues of displacement, and narratives surrounding soft power.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

India's desire to host the 2036 Olympic Games shows a strong national goal. But this research is important because it looks at whether that goal is reasonable from a practical, economic, and social point of view. This research looks at the dangers and unexpected effects of holding mega-events in developing or emerging economies through the prism of examples from other countries and India's own history of hosting these events. The Olympics cost a lot of money. In the past, host nations have spent 100–300% more than their budgets, with little long-term benefit. Hosting the Olympics made people very proud of their country and gave them a chance to show it off to the world. (Flyvbjerg & Stewart, 2012; Waitt, 2003). A lot of nations would be keen to win the bid. But the world has changed, and hosting the Olympics is becoming less and less financially feasible and sustainable. Hosting the Olympics should be about finding a balance between expenses and income. But governments usually spend too much, sometimes by a lot, so the money they make isn't enough. Most host countries wind up with huge debts that taxpayers have to pay for. India should focus on establishing smaller sports facilities all around the nation instead of trying to host the Olympics, which most hosts have failed at. This will help create a strong sports culture at the grassroots level.

BENEFITS OF HOSTING OLYMPICS, 2036 BY INDIA: ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND DIPLOMATIC

Economic:
If India hosts the Olympics in 2036, these immediate economic advantages would probably be evident
- A lot of jobs by building stadiums and subways (Baade & Matheson, 2016)
  - Short-term GDP growth from tourism and demand for services (Preuss, 2004)
  - A better view of the world economy that brings in investments (Brückner & Pappa, 2015)
  - Making money from ticket sales, broadcasting, and merchandise (Zimbalist, 2015)

Social:
India hosting the Olympics in 2036, these are the social advantages which would probably be availed
- As witnessed in Sydney 2000, hosting the Olympics makes people feel more proud of their country and city (Waitt, 2003).
- The Games help cities grow by making enduring improvements to transport, housing, and public facilities in regions that have been neglected. This was shown in Barcelona in 1992 and London in 2012 (Gold & Gold, 2008).
- Olympic events encourage people to volunteer and bring communities together. Getting a lot of people involved in the community builds trust and civic engagement over time (Downward & Ralston, 2006).

Diplomatic
- Hosting the Olympics shows the world a country's culture and progress, which increases its soft power (Masters, 2012). [Jonathan Masters (2012) in his article "The Olympics and Soft Power" published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR),]

- Let's rising nations like India take charge, especially in the Global South (Yigit, 2023). [Sureyya Yigit's 2023 book chapter titled "Soft Power and the Olympics", in which Yigit analyses how the Olympic Games function as instruments of soft power and global influence]
- India's "India House" for the 2024 Olympics shows how it uses Olympic diplomacy to improve its standing in the world (Le Monde, 2024). [Le Monde - French newspaper]

INDIA'S CURRENT SPORTS INFRASTRUCTURE, GOVERNANCE, AND POLICY READINESS FOR HOSTING A BIG EVENT:

India's sports scene has changed a lot since the country became independent in 1947. What used to be a source of national pride is now a way to promote international diplomacy and development. The All-India Council of Sports (AICS) was set up in 1954, and the Sports Authority of India (SAI) was set up in 1984 to improve the institutional structure and promote grassroots development and elite athletic training (Mandal & Biswas, 2020). The National Sports Policy (1984, amended in 2001) and other important policies stressed the need for modern facilities and the necessity to connect physical education with national development (GOI, 2001). Even if there were some problems with the first steps of implementation, these rules set the stage for India's long-term involvement in international sports.

In the last few decades, a lot of money has been put into improving infrastructure. Over 300 competitive venues have been built or improved since 2018 as part of India's Sports Infrastructure Vision 2030. This includes the ambitious Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave in Ahmedabad, which is meant to be India's largest integrated sports complex (Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2023). The national budget for 2025–26 set forth ₹3,794 crores for sports. Of that, ₹1,000 crores went to the Khelo India Programme and ₹830 crores went to SAI to improve facilities and help with training (MYAS, 2023). [Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports].

The private sector has become a powerful force for change, together with state efforts. The Indian Premier League (2008), the Pro Kabaddi League (2014), and the Indian Badminton League (2013) are all examples of commercial leagues that have made sports more professional and reached more people. Organisations like Olympic Gold Quest (OGQ) and JSW Sports have stepped in to fill the voids created by public agencies in Olympic sports (Majumdar & Mehta, 2012, pp. 162–164). This change from a state-centred to a mixed public-private sports development paradigm is in line with best practices around the world and makes India more ready for big events.

Khelo India and the Target Olympic Podium Scheme (TOPS) are two programs that have helped India's athlete development pipeline grow. Khelo India encourages a lot of people to get involved and find young talent, while TOPS focuses on training for high-level athletes and getting them to the top of the podium. There are more than 1,000 Khelo India Centres and annual scholarships for promising athletes, which shows a structured investment in people (MYAS,2022).

But there are still problems. Sports governance is commonly affected by politics, with more than 60% of National Sports Federations (NSFs) led by political personalities, which hurts professionalism and long-term planning (Indian Express, 2022). The National Sports Development Code (2011) and the proposed Good Governance Code (2017) were meant to make things more open; however, enforcement has not always been consistent (Majumdar & Mehta, 2012, pp. 166–170). Also, hardly any people in India play sports; just about 6% of Indians play sports regularly, compared to 20–60% of people in affluent countries like the USA or Japan. This makes it harder to find new talent (Institutional Convergence Report, 2021).

Some researchers, like Ronojoy Sen (2015), say that events like the 1982 Asian Games and the rise of broadcast sports got people interested, but Olympic sports still have problems with visibility and coaching infrastructure. Corporate investment from companies like Reliance, Adani, and Tata has also made things more professional, but it is still focused on a few cities and high-return sports (Sen, 2015, pp. 264–270).

In conclusion, India's existing sports infrastructure and policy environment show a lot of drive and desire, but readiness is comparatively weak in India to make the most of this chance. However, governance changes, grassroots involvement, and the growth of scientific coaching must be given top priority to guarantee long-term athletic performance and fair national representation.

BRIEF REVIEW OF THE OLYMPICS HOSTED IN CANADA, GREECE, BRAZIL, AND JAPAN

Brazil (Rio de Janeiro 2016): The Rio Olympics aroused dreams for global renown and urban rebirth, but after the Games, things got much worse. Venues were left underused or dismantled because of bad planning and financial control. During a recession, more than $12 billion was spent, which left healthcare and education underfunded (Zimbalist, 2017). More than 77,000 people were kicked out of their homes, mostly from favelas like Vila Autódromo, which led to protests. Brazil's Olympic legacy was hurt by corruption allegations, such as bribery linked to Odebrecht and broken promises about public infrastructure (Gaffney, 2016).

Greece (Athens 2004): Greece exploited the Olympics to speed up the building of infrastructure, but it didn't keep up with the maintenance of many of the 22 venues after the Games. Only 14 are still in operation presently (Gold, 2011). The Games momentarily increased employment and GDP growth (around 0.6–0.8% a year from 2000 to 2004), but the lack of long-term planning meant that venues were not used and the public was unhappy. Kissoudi said that the deterioration of Olympic sites became a clear sign of bad economic management and national debt, which was made worse by the global financial crisis.

Japan (Tokyo 1964 & 2020): The 1964 Olympics were a big deal for Japan after World War II. They spent more than $9 billion on infrastructure, but they also had to move 2,00,000 people and harm the environment a lot, especially in river ecosystems (Schwenkel, 2013; Kietlinski, 2011). The Tokyo Games in 2020 were pushed back because of COVID-19 and were tainted by corruption issues, such as the arrest of Olympic officials for taking bribes. Damage to the environment, such as significant deforestation, generated condemnation from both inside and beyond the country, which hurt claims of sustainability (Horne & Whannel, 2012).

Canada (Montreal 1976): The Montreal Games are known for leaving a C$1 billion debt, mostly because of cost overruns and problems with governance. In 2006, special taxes and lotteries ultimately wiped off the debt (Howell, 2009). The Olympics are a prime illustration of how poor financial management and political disagreement can harm host towns for decades, despite being the first to employ innovative project management techniques. Lessons learnt from Montreal's legacy include budget preparation, stakeholder collaboration, and long-term infrastructure development.

FORECAST ON HOSTING THE OLYMPICS IN INDIA: A CRITICAL EVALUATION

India may grow its sporting environment, improve its international standing, and spark urban transformation by hosting the Olympic Games. But the global evidence from Montreal (1976), Rio de Janeiro (2016), Athens (2004), and Tokyo (2020) provides sobering insights into post-event infrastructure neglect, cost overruns, social displacement, and democratic deficits that need to be carefully considered in India's context (Flyvbjerg & Stewart, 2012; Zimbalist, 2015).

Financial Viability and Budget Risks

Given that the Oxford Olympic Study found an average cost overrun of 172% for all Games since 1960, historical trends from Olympic host cities point to a persistent pattern of overspending (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016). Paris 2024 estimates now surpass €9 billion, a 115% increase from earlier budgets, while Tokyo 2020 expenditures have risen to over US$15 billion. Given India's event-led infrastructure model rather than a use-led infrastructure model, this pattern indicates that potential spending might increase from the predicted ₹35,000–64,000 crore (US$4.5–8 billion) to more than ₹1 lakh crore (Sen, 2015, pp. 274–275).

Centralised cost-control measures, independent audits, and Olympic-calibre contingency reserves are absent from India's current public financial institutions. If fundamental changes are not made to financial control and procurement openness, India may see severe fiscal lapses akin to the "blank cheque syndrome" that was observed in Athens or Rio (Chakraborty, 2017; Government of India, Economic Survey 2007-04).

Infrastructure Expansion: Urban Gain vs Rural Loss

Typically, Olympic preparations concentrate on hotel capacity, beautification, and metro improvements, which mostly benefit urban centres (Gaffney, 2016; Gold & Gold, 2011). Cities in India like Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Chennai might undergo revolutionary changes, but doing so runs the danger of diverting funds from rural infrastructure (such as MGNREGA and rural healthcare), which would worsen spatial inequality (Sivaramakrishnan, 2020; MoSPI, 2021). Rural constituencies were left unaffected while vital welfare funds were diverted due to the 2010 Commonwealth Games' (CWG) largely metrocentric infrastructure projects and evictions of slums (Kothari and Chaudahary 2015). India may have to repeat this "crowding out" impact unless it creates ring-fenced funding for social development in tandem with Olympic planning.

Social Displacement and Democratic Legitimacy

Significant rights breaches, particularly against the urban poor, have historically resulted from evictions that occur before Olympic construction projects. Examples of forced relocations without appropriate consultation or compensation can be found in Seoul (1988), Beijing (2008), and Rio (2016) (COHRE, 2007; Gaffney, 2016). [Centre on Evictions and Housing Rights]. Given that it forced out more than 300,000 people during the CWG Delhi 2010 (Haq Centre, 2011), India needs to prepare for the possibility that this displacement will occur again during the Olympics. [HAQ: Child Rights Centre].

Democratic consent is limited because Olympic bids frequently avoid using participatory methods like public referenda or citizen meetings. A 30,000-signature petition calling for a local vote was rejected by Paris 2024, demonstrating the lack of governmental involvement in Olympic

governance (Boykoff, 2020). Without proactive, inclusive frameworks, India's rural sports groups, informal workers, and urban poor would be marginalised in a similar elite-driven show.

Infrastructure Use and Maintenance Post-Games

Chronic underuse of Olympic infrastructure is supported by evidence from around the world. Some examples are the abandoned stadiums in Athens, the abandoned aquatic centres in Rio, and the "Big Owe" in Montreal (Gold & Gold, 2011; Zimbalist, 2015). Similar inefficiencies may be found in India's own CWG legacy, where buildings like Talkatora Stadium and the Yamuna Sports Complex are still underutilised, poorly maintained, and expensive (Comptroller and Auditor General of India, 2013).

Furthermore, just 10.4% of India's 15,800 sports assets fulfil Olympic criteria (MYAS, 2023). If long-term usage is not incorporated into planning, the desire to quickly construct elite infrastructure for Olympic visibility rather than community utility could result in "white elephants" (Sen, 2015).

Employment, Economic Activity, and Tourism

Olympics do have a short-term positive economic impact, particularly in the transportation, hospitality, and construction industries (Preuss, 2007). Similar to London (2012) or Barcelona (1992), India might profit from a brief surge in employment and tourists. The majority of jobs, however, are low-paying, transient, and informal; there are no long-term career paths (Misener, 2016). Rio and Delhi CWG both experienced post-game economic slowdowns, despite large pre-event rises in tourism (OECD, 2018). [Association for Development and Economic Cooperation]

To achieve long-term benefits, India needs to upgrade visa processing, last-mile transportation, and digital ticketing—a logistical challenge given current bureaucratic constraints—while integrating Games-related tourism with broader initiatives like Incredible India.

Governance and Institutional Capacity

The central and state levels of India's sports governance are still disjointed. Due to the constitutional placement of "sports" in the State List (Article 246, Constitution of India), policy implementation is mostly state-driven, even if the Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS) and SAI define policy guidelines. The need for a single Olympic delivery authority with legally binding responsibilities, open financing streams, and political accountability is highlighted by the coordination breakdowns during CWG 2010 (Bose & Majumdar, 2012).
Despite laying a strong foundation, initiatives such as Khelo India and the National Sports Development Code (2011/17) struggle with underutilisation and cash absorption; in FY 2019–20, only ₹318 crore of ₹500 crore was used (CAG Reports, 2021).

Ethical Allocation of Public Funds

Ethically, putting a mega-event led by the elite ahead of the general well-being of the populace runs the risk of societal backlash. To achieve greater marginal returns for inclusive development, public funds could be more fairly distributed to health, irrigation, rural education, and grassroots sports (UNDP India, 2022). Mega-events frequently turn into vehicles for the upward transfer of public resources, as Boykoff (2016) observes.

CONCLUSION AND DECISION MATRIX

To assess whether India should submit a proposal to host the 2036 Olympic Games, this matrix is designed to serve as a qualitative decision-support tool. Drawing on empirical research, historical case studies, and India's internal socio-political and economic context, it arranges important dimensions and determinants determining readiness.

I. Economic Viability

Factor	Assessment Criteria	Status in India	Global Precedent	Notes
GDP Size & Maturation	Economic size, Progress trend	Strong	China 2008, Brazil 2016	With its anticipated development, India, which is the fifth-largest economy, allows for fiscal flexibility.
Cost Risk / Overruns	Past patterns, Fiscal prudence	Concerning	Sochi, Tokyo, Rio	Significant cost overruns worldwide; India's CWG was also affected
private sector involvement	PPP potential, CSR interest	Moderate	Barcelona, London	India is shaping up well via JSW, Reliance, and Tata Trusts

II. Infrastructure Readiness

Factor	Assessment Criteria	Status in India	Global Precedent	Notes
standing venues	Accessibility of Olympic-calibre facilities	Weak	London, Tokyo	Roughly ten per cent of Indian arenas are Olympic-calibre.
Transport & Logistics	Metro, roads, hotels, airport capacity	Moderate	Beijing, Barcelona	Modifications are needed in major cities.
Setting Up a Legacy for the Venue	Post-event utilisation plans	Weak	Rio, Athens	Inadequate usage of CWG venues; no long-term reuse strategy in place

III. Governance & Administrative Capacity

Factor	Assessment Criteria	Status in India	Global Precedent	Notes
Political Will	Central/state alignment	Strong	China, Russia	Firm backing if Gujarat or Ahmedabad is chosen
Lucidity & Malversation Risk	Track record, institutional oversight	Weak	CWG Delhi 2010	History of murky spending and exaggerated contracts
Methods of Monitoring and Adherence	Existence of legal aid and scrutiny	Moderate	UK, Australia	There is a National Sports Code, although it is not strictly enforced.

IV. Social & Ethical Impact

Factor	Assessment Criteria	Status in India	Global Precedent	Notes
Impartiality and Evacuation	Urban evictions, slum clearance	High Risk	Rio, Beijing	History of civic unrest and slum demolition
Diversity & Community-Based Sports	Rural inclusion, sports culture	Moderate	UK, Canada	Programs like Khelo India help, but are city-oriented
Environmental Durability	Green venues and environmental preservation	Low	Tokyo, Paris	India's urban structures lack robust eco-regulatory capabilities.

V. Strategic & Long-Term Vision

Factor	Assessment Criteria	Status in India	Global Precedent	Notes
Global Image & Soft Power	Diplomatic and cultural impact	Strong	China, Japan	The Olympics might help India's geopolitical goals.
Participation of Youth	Employment, participation, and national pride	Strong	London, LA	50% or more of the population is under 30; widespread mobilisation might occur
Long-Term Progression in Sports	Performance in global events	Moderate	Korea, Australia	Following the Games, investment in top performance must continue.

Hosting the Olympics is a big deal for any country. The Olympics appeal to India because of its expanding economic might, young population, and global goals. But success doesn't only rely on desire; it also relies on merit, which means being ready in many ways. We look at India's standing in relation to the five major areas of our Olympic Readiness Matrix: Economic Capacity, Infrastructure, Governance, Social Inclusion, and Strategic Benefits.

I. Economic Viability

India is one of the biggest economies in the world. It is now sixth in the world and is expected to have a GDP of more than $5 trillion by 2030 (IMF, 2024). India's strong macro-economy makes it possible for the country to pay for big international events like the Olympics.

But merit—real financial wisdom—is still missing. The Oxford Olympics Study concluded that the average cost overrun for all Games since 1960 was 172% (Flyvbjerg et al., 2016). The cost of Tokyo 2020 went up from $7.3 billion to more than $15 billion. India's own CWG 2010 followed the same trend, with budget projections going up eight times (Choudhury, 2010). It is still hard to predict these overruns, but India is at risk of having the same thing happen again if it doesn't have additional financial protections like multi-year planning, independent audits, and contingency money.

India also has to make sure that the Olympic budget doesn't take money away from social welfare and rural development. When social services go down, people are less likely to support big events, as shown in Rio 2016, Rio's economic downturn, and public reaction (Zimbalist,2015).

II. Getting the infrastructure and venues ready

Olympic standards call for hotels, sporting stadiums, transit systems, and ICT infrastructure that are all world-class. India offers several promising new facilities, such as Gujarat's TransStadia, Odisha's Kalinga Stadium, and metropolitan metro networks.

India doesn't have the resources right now to host the Olympics, however. Only 10.4% of India's ~15,800 sporting facilities fulfil Olympic standards (MYAS, 2023). Another problem is maintenance. Most facilities aren't used enough after the CWG, thus they become "white elephants" instead of legacy sites (Sen, 2015). At the same time, the transport infrastructure in both host and satellite cities has to be expanded.

A smart strategy may include clustered hosting, where Ahmedabad, Delhi, and Odisha share venues, to keep people from concentrating too much in one city and ease the strain on its infrastructure. Legacy planning has to be included from the start, in line with Smart Cities and urban mobility aims, to make sure that the community can utilise it for many things and profit from it throughout time.

III. The ability to govern and run things

India has strong political backing, particularly if Ahmedabad, a politically affiliated city, is chosen. A unified position between the national and state governments makes it easier to carry out plans.

However, merit depends on open government. The CWG controversy, the late delivery of venues, and corruption in procurement showed that the system had problems. There are tools like PFMS [Public Financial Management System] and the National Sports Code, but they aren't very good at enforcing them. The Indian model still relies a lot on political support and doesn't have any official control. There is empirical evidence that an Olympic Governance.

Authority is needed, with statutory independence and representation from a wide range of sectors, including civil society, independent auditors, and athletes. This kind of organisation could handle buying property, building infrastructure, getting input from the public, and keeping an eye on the money.

IV. Social and Moral Aspects

Mega-events are good for society because they promote pride, stimulate young athletes, and provide "soft power." This fits perfectly with India's goal of getting its huge youthful population involved in organised sports via programs like Khelo India and TOPS.

India has to deal with displacement and inequality, however. In India and across the world, forced slum clearances have happened before big events. For example, Rio 2016 kicked out more than 77,000 residents (Gaffney, 2016). India might make the same errors again if it doesn't have strong social safety nets and rehabilitation programs. Events that are not open to the public and put the needs of the elite above those of society as a whole lose their validity.

Participation by citizens is a crucial merit component. Bids for the Olympics must include public consultations, independent SIAs (Social Impact Assessments), and democratic supervision systems to make sure that communities are not left out.

V. Long-Term and Strategic Goals

The Olympics are both a statement and a smart business move. Hosting the Games is important for India because it will help the country gain soft power, lead the G20, and have more influence in the area.

But the strategic value of anything relies on its long-lasting effects, such as urban cohesiveness, sports culture, athlete development, and public involvement. After the Games, London (2012) and Sydney (2000) were able to effectively combine community sports initiatives (Misener et al., 2015). On the other hand, Athens and Rio left venues empty and people angry (Gold & Gold, 2011; Zimbalist, 2015).

India's Olympic ambition has to do more than just raise its visibility throughout the world. It needs to improve grassroots sports academies, keep top coaching going, help women and rural athletes, and make public spaces in cities better—all of which should be supported by well-funded legacy initiatives.

FINDING A BALANCE BETWEEN WANT AND MERIT

India's desire to host the Olympics is clear; they have the money, the people, and the worldwide standing to do it. But desire alone is not enough. Merit, which includes the actual processes, rules, ethics, and ability to perform, is not yet at the same level.

Without merit, aspiration might lead to Roman spectacles, which are flashy and expensive but not long-lasting. Overextending social contracts, making things less fair, and leaving people with debt might be worse than short-term profits. People should not consider the candidacy for the 2036 Olympics as a short-term goal, but as a national purpose over the next ten years to raise India's merit to the level of its dream.

A staged strategy makes sense: keeping up success in youth and regional events, showing that you can govern your finances, testing out legacy infrastructure, making sure everyone can participate, and establishing that you can execute at a China-level. An Olympic bid would only go from a fantasy to a real possibility if this happened.

Final Take: A Conditional "Yes" India should want to host the Olympics in 2036, but only if it also makes changes to its Olympic system that will improve the quality of the games.

Oversight of the economy: Set up independent audits of the budget, put money in escrow, and make plans for investments over many years.

Infrastructure Planning: Use venues that are already there, don't build too much capacity, plan for future use, and make sure your plans fit with national urban frameworks.

Reforms to Governance: Establish an Olympic Oversight Commission with decision-making authority, accountability, and transparency.

Social safeguarding: Consult with the public, prevent expulsions without assistance, and encourage the growth of local sports.

Strategic Legacy: The post-Games budget should include a quarter for sports education, rural infrastructure, and venue maintenance.

CONCLUSION

The world is sent a strong message by India's desire to host the 2036 Olympic Games, emphasising the country's desire to showcase its cultural diversity, economic development, and athletic aspirations. This vision, however, is at a critical juncture of caution and promise, igniting important debates about national development priorities, sustainability, and tolerance. From one perspective, hosting the Olympics could encourage vital investments in tourism, urban development, and sports facilities. It has the power to inspire millions of young Indians to play sports, which would encourage a population that is healthier and more active. India could gain significant economic benefits from international exposure, strengthen its soft power, and improve its reputation on a global basis. The situation in India, on the other hand, poses unique challenges. One of the main worries is that scarce public funds might be diverted from important sectors like rural development, healthcare, and education. Historical instances from countries like Greece (Athens 2004) and Brazil (Rio 2016) show how poorly planned mega-events can result in community displacement, underutilised infrastructure, and economic instability. Given India's persistent problems with urban poverty, environmental degradation, and unequal regional development, the country's pursuit of Olympic success could end up being a developmental fantasy—an ostentatious event that serves a small number of people at the expense of the actual needs of the majority. Although India's sports scene is steadily improving, issues like inadequate support for athletes outside of cricket, limited grassroots participation, and bad governance still exist. In the absence of comprehensive changes to sports regulations, transparent administration, and active community engagement, the advantages of hosting the Olympics may be short-lived and negligible. It is extremely unethical to spend billions of dollars to host an Olympic event in a country where many people still lack access to basic services like clean water, sanitary facilities, healthcare, and education. The benefits are at best uncertain, as evidenced in other developing nations, and the social opportunity cost is unreasonably high. To sum up, India's pursuit of Olympic glory may prove to be a grave mistake that wastes public resources, increases inequality, and yields little more than token recognition. Careful thought, openness, and an emphasis on inclusivity are required for this endeavour.

REFERENCES

1. Badde, R. A., & Matheson, V. A. (2016). Going for the gold: The economics of the Olympics. *Journal of Economic Perspectives, 30*(2), 201–218.
2. Boykoff, J. (2016). *Power games: A political history of the Olympics*. Verso.
3. Boykoff, J., & Gaffney, C. (2020). The Tokyo 2020 Games and the end of Olympic history. *Capitalism, Nature Socialism, 31*(3), 1–19.
4. Brückner, M., & Pappa, E. (2015). News shocks in the data: Olympic Games and their macroeconomic effects. *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking, 47*(7), 1339–1367.
5. Bose, M., & Majumdar, B. (2012). *Olympics: The India story*. HarperCollins.
6. Brunet, F. (2005). *The economic impact of the Barcelona Olympic Games*. Barcelona Olympic Foundation.
7. Choudhury, A. (2010). *CWG corruption report*. Transparency International India.
8. Donos, M. (2012). *Communication, sport mega-events and the soft power dimensions of public diplomacy* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Ottawa, Canada.
9. Downward, P. M., & Ralston, R. (2006). The sports development potential of sports event volunteering: Insights from XVII Manchester Commonwealth Games. *European Sport Management Quarterly, 6*(4), 333–351.
10. Flyvbjerg, B., & Stewart, A. (2012). Olympic proportions: Cost and cost overrun at the Olympics 1960–2012. *Said Business School Working Papers*, 1–40.
11. Flyvbjerg, B., Budzier, A., & Stewart, A. (2016). *The Oxford Olympics study 2016: Cost and cost overrun at the Games*. University of Oxford.
12. Gaffney, C. (2016). Gentrification in pre-Olympic Rio de Janeiro. *Urban Geography, 37*(8), 1132–1153.
13. Gold, J. R., & Gold, M. M. (2011). *Olympic cities: City agendas, planning and the world's Games*. Routledge.
14. Gold, J. R., & Gold, M. M. (2008). Olympic cities: Regeneration, city rebranding and changing urban agendas. *Geography Compass, 2*(1), 300–318.
15. Government of India. (2001). *National sports policy*. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports.
16. Horne, J., & Whannel, G. (2012). *Understanding the Olympics*. Routledge.
17. Howell, P. (2009). *Inside the Montreal Olympics*. McGill-Queen's University Press.
18. Indian Express. (2022, July 15). Political powerplay in sports federations. *The Indian Express*.
19. Kietlinski, R. (2011). *Japanese sports: A history*. Routledge.
20. Kissoudi, P. (2010). The Athens Olympics: Optimism and disillusionment. *International Journal of the History of Sport, 27*(16–18), 2780–2797.
21. Kobierecki, M. M. (2025). Paris 2024 Olympic hospitality houses as a means of promoting the national image. *French Politics*, 1–21. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41253-025-00301-3
22. Kothari, M., & Chaudhry, S. (2015). *Taking the "right to the city" forward: Obstacles and promises*. Housing and Land Rights Network.
23. Mandal, D., & Biswas, A. K. (2020). Compression of the elbow angle between tribal and non-tribal schoolboys in the acceleration phase during 100-metre sprinting. *International Journal of Sports Science and Engineering, 14*(2), 45–53.
24. Misener, L., & Wassers, K. (2016). International sport development. In L. Misener (Ed.), *Sport for development: Theory and practice* (pp. 31–44). Routledge.
25. Majumdar, B., & Mehta, N. (2012). *Olympics: The India story*. HarperCollins.
26. Mandal, S., & Biswas, A. K. (2020). *Case study on NSNIS*. National Institute of Sports.
27. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2022). *Annual report on Khelo India and TOPS*. Government of India.

28. Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports. (2023). *Sports infrastructure vision 2030*. Government of India.
29. Misener, L., Darcy, S., Legg, D., & Gilbert, K. (2015). Legacy of London 2012. *Leisure Studies, 34*(6), 652–669.
30. Misener, L. (2016). Leveraging parasport events for a sustainable community. *Journal of Sport Management, 30*(4), 397–410.
31. Ozten, Y. M. (2023). A South Asian identity constructed by the Indo-Pacific discourse: India. *Third World Quarterly, 44*(5), 989–1007.
32. Preuss, H. (2004). *The economics of staging the Olympics: A comparison of the Games, 1972–2008*. Edward Elgar Publishing.
33. Preuss, H. (2007). The conceptualisation and measurement of mega sport event legacies. *Journal of Sport and Tourism, 12*(3–4), 207–228.
34. Rehal, S. (2022). The sportification and internationalisation of Kabaddi: A sociological understanding. *International Journal of Sport and Society, 13*(2), 49–61.
35. Schwenkel, C. (2013). Spectacular infrastructure: Neoliberalism and urban change in postwar Tokyo. *American Ethnologist, 40*(1), 37–50.
36. Sen, R. (2015). *Nation at play: A history of sport in India*. Columbia University Press.
37. Sengupta, M. (2010). "World-class" dreams and urban change: A critique of the 2010 Commonwealth Games. *Indian Journal of Human Development, 4*(2), 431–441.
38. Sivaramakrishnan, A. (2020). *Sport and society in India*. Routledge.
39. Waitt, G. (2003). Social impacts of the Sydney Olympics. *Annals of Tourism Research, 30*(1), 194–215.
40. Zimbalist, A. (2015). *Circus Maximus: The economic gamble behind hosting the Olympics and the World Cup*. Brookings Institution Press.
41. Zimbalist, A. (2017). *Rio 2016: Olympic myths, hard realities*. Brookings Institution Press.

***