
Government Interference: Case Studies, and Implications for South African Football

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Introduction

Football governance worldwide stands at the intersection of sport, politics, law, and public administration. One of the perennial flashpoints is the tension between a national government's desire to ensure accountability, transparency and good governance in football associations, and FIFA's prohibition on governmental or third-party interference in the internal affairs of those associations. In South Africa at present, debates have intensified about whether government intervention in SAFA's maladministration might trigger a FIFA suspension under Article 19 (and related provisions) — and whether there are precedents that suggest government has some room to act, or that FIFA may tolerate certain kinds of intervention.

This article examines Article 19 of the FIFA Statutes (and related articles), explores international examples (Namibia, India, Zambia, Sierra Leone, etc.), considers what the UK has done by way of oversight and

regulation (without running afoul of FIFA), and reflects on how SAFA's governance might be reformed in light of these precedents.

What is Article 19 (and related provisions) of the FIFA Statutes?

To understand the issue, one must look not only at Article 19 but also at how FIFA's Statutes as a whole frame governmental or third-party interference.

- Article 19(1) says that *“each member association shall manage its affairs independently and without undue influence from third parties”* (including government bodies or third parties).
- Related articles include Article 14, which obliges member associations to avoid influence from third parties (14(1)(i)) and provides for sanctions even if the interference is beyond the association's control (14.3).¹



- Article 15(c) requires that the statutes of member associations must, as a minimum, include principles of good governance – including independence and avoidance of political interference.²

What is less precisely defined is what counts as “undue influence” or “interference,” and where the line is drawn between legitimate

¹ https://assets.the-afc.com/downloads/member-associations/R1_Informative-Note-on-Third-Party-Interference-In-Football-Organisations_NewAFCLogo_nofax.pdf

² <https://inside.fifa.com/legal/news/legal-handbook-2025-edition-published>

oversight (especially by government in its capacity to regulate public institutions) and prohibited interference.

Precedents & Case Studies

To see how Article 19 has been enforced, and how governments elsewhere have acted (or tried to act) without triggering FIFA sanctions (or while doing so), here are several instructive cases.

1. Namibia

- The Namibia Football Association (NFA) went through serious governance paralysis. Factional disputes (between president and secretary general), terms of office expiring without holding congresses, regionals operating without fresh elections, “puppet” appointments, expired mandates in regional leagues.
- Because of this, FIFA appointed a Normalization Committee first in 2019, and again in 2022, to oversee the day-to-day affairs of NFA, to revise statutes, electoral codes, and to hold elections.³
- Importantly, the Namibian government did *request* or at least consent to FIFA’s intervention. The Minister of Sport tried to work with FIFA, requesting normalization.⁴
- FIFA in turn has insisted on compliance with its statutes: no undue influence, adherence to democratic elections,

proper statutes, and independent electoral codes.⁵

2. India (AIFF – All India Football Federation)

- AIFF was suspended by FIFA in August 2022 for “undue third-party influence.” The trigger included the government (via the Supreme Court) appointing a Committee of Administrators (CoA), delays in elections, failure to adopt a constitution aligned with FIFA’s requirements.⁶
- AIFF was told to finalize its constitution, ensure free elections and remove the CoA’s control for restoring its status.⁷

3. Sierra Leone

- In 2018, FIFA suspended the Sierra Leone Football Association (SLFA) immediately for government interference. The government had removed the SLFA president and general secretary, denying them access to FA premises, interfering in day-to-day operations.⁸

4. Zambia

- More recently, FIFA warned the government of Zambia that interference risked breaching Article 14.1.i and Article 19.1. The government was considering establishing a transitional committee,

³ <https://www.africa-press.net/namibia/all-news/fifa-normalisation-committee-the-namibian-experience>

⁴ <https://neweralive.na/tjongarero-remains-unshaken-by-fifa-threats>

⁵ <https://neweralive.na/fifas-normalisation-committee-the-broad-and-tricky-mandate>

⁶ <https://www.dawn.com/news/1705288/fifa-suspends-indian-football-federation-due-to-third-party-influence>

⁷ <https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/football/fifa-warns-aiff-to-adopt-constitution-or-risk-suspension-10213417/lite>

⁸ <https://inside.fifa.com/media-releases/fifa-suspends-the-sierra-leone-football-association>

which FIFA considered undue influence. FIFA threatened possible suspension.⁹

The United Kingdom: Government Oversight without FIFA Sanctions

The UK (especially England) presents an interesting template because its government has intervened in regulatory oversight of football, generally without triggering FIFA sanctions (because it has acted in ways that respect — or attempt to respect — the boundary between oversight and interference).

Here are some relevant developments:

- The Football Governance Bill (2023–24) is legislation that proposes to establish an independent regulator for men’s elite football in England: licensing, owners’ & directors’ test, financial oversight.¹⁰
- The Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO) was established in 2008 (replacing the Independent Football Commission), by the FA, Premier League, EFL, with agreement of government. It handles unresolved complaints, reviews due process in how complaints have been handled. It is not an enforcement body over elections or governance of FA internal affairs per se.¹¹
- The 2025 Football Governance Act (UK Parliament, passed 21 July 2025) creates the regulatory framework. While it imposes new rules (licensing, regulation, oversight), it seeks to remain consistent with FIFA obligations (by not becoming entangled with internal elections, etc.). The government often seeks to define the

boundaries of “regulation” such that FIFA’s statutes are respected.¹²

Thus in the UK’s case, government is acting — but generally not by directly removing FA executives or courts ordering that executives be replaced in ways that conflict with the FA’s statutes, but rather by legislative oversight, regulatory oversight, consumer protection, licensing, and requiring good governance structures.

Comparison: When FIFA has not intervened or suspended despite government involvement

There are cases where governments have held parliamentary hearings, passed sports laws, or worked through oversight and inquiry bodies, without prompting FIFA to act (or at least not to suspend). Some observations:

- The UK government’s proposals, though strong, are mostly regulatory, done with consultation with football authorities, with formal statutes of the Football Association & League structures intact. No executive of FA being replaced by government decree, etc.
- The Independent Football Ombudsman, though created with government’s involvement, is part of self-regulation (appointed by the FA, EFL, PL) not by government takeover. Thus, while there is oversight, it’s not direct interference under FIFA’s definition.
- The mere existence of parliamentary oversight or working groups doesn’t appear automatically to trigger FIFA

⁹ <https://zambiareports.news/2025/03/06/fifa-warns-government-against-third-party-interference-in-faz-affairs>

¹⁰ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9996>

¹¹ <https://www.theifo.co.uk/about-the-ifo>

¹² <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2025/21>

enforcement action, unless there is direct government interference in elections, governance structures, removal of officers, etc.

Key Dimensions: What Triggers FIFA Action

From the case studies, one can see common factors that seem to trigger FIFA to threaten or impose suspension or normalization:

1. Removal or dismissal of officers by government or courts, not by internal FA procedure.
2. Government or third party taking over daily or executive functions of the FA (e.g. administration, finances, elections).
3. Failure to hold elections or expiry of terms, especially when contested or manipulated.
4. Statutes or constitution of FA being inconsistent with FIFA Statutes, especially regarding electoral rules, independence, political neutrality.
5. FA being unable to show control over premises, accounts, operations (e.g. when government denies access).
6. Persistent and unresolved impasse, often after warnings from FIFA.

Conversely, absent those, government can act in ways that are oversight, regulation, inquiry, or encouragement of reform, without immediate sanction — especially if done with transparency, consultation, within the law, without seizing control of FA functions.



The South African Context: SAFA, Government Intervention, and Risk

• SAFA's Recent Controversies & Problems

• Financial Strain / Sponsorship Decline

- SAFA has repeatedly admitted to having inadequate financial reserves, citing “*dwindling sponsorship income*” and delayed payments from partners.¹³
- In its financial report for 2022-23, SAFA reportedly showed a shortfall of around R107 million.¹⁴

• Delays & Failure to Pay Salaries & Bonuses

- SAFA failed to pay staff salaries on time (e.g. March 2025 salaries delayed) due to cash-flow issues.¹⁵
- Players (both Bafana Bafana and Banyana Banyana) have not been paid match bonuses on schedule. For example, bonus payments from as far back as September were still outstanding.¹⁶
- Banyana Banyana had to protest over unpaid bonuses while away

¹³ <https://iol.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-03-25-safa-unable-to-pay-staff-as-financial-woes-deepen>

¹⁴ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-03-25-embattled-safa-fails-to-pay-march-salaries-on-time>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ <https://farpost.co.za/2024/12/12/gayton-mckenzie-intervenes-to-pay-bafana-and-banyana-players>

(training / tournament base) ahead of WAFCON.¹⁷

- **Government Advance / Intervention**

- The Department of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC) advanced R5 million to SAFA to assist with paying players' salaries/bonuses ahead of certain fixtures or festive periods. This was conditional on SAFA providing an explanation and a turnaround plan.¹⁸

- **Legal / Criminal Allegations Against Leadership**

- SAFA President Danny Jordaan and CFO Gronie Hluyo have been charged with fraud and conspiracy to commit fraud (and other counts), involving amounts around R1.3 million, for allegedly using SAFA funds for private security and public relations work without board approval.¹⁹
- Theft charges initially included but later withdrawn; fraud / conspiracy counts remain.²⁰
- Hawks raided SAFA House in connection with alleged fraud and theft.²¹

- **Administrative / Governance Failings**

- SAFA was sanctioned by FIFA/disciplinary authorities for fielding an *ineligible player* (Teboho Mokoena) in a World Cup qualifier vs Lesotho, which resulted in a 2-0 win being overturned (forfeited) and a points deduction and fine.²²
- Internal committees are said by staff to be weak or "basically non-existent." Oversight structures are being criticised.²³
- SAFA has "late wages" or late staff payments, which point to operational dysfunction.²⁴

- **Reputational & Operational Consequences**

- The financial and legal troubles have led to reputational damage, which is believed to be weakening SAFA's ability to attract sponsorships. SAFA leadership has admitted that sponsorship revenues have reduced.²⁵
- Disquiet among players: protests / boycotts, training interruptions linked to non-payment of bonuses.²⁶

¹⁷ <https://www.sowetan.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-06-30-banyana-back-in-training-despite-no-pay>

¹⁸ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/departments/advances-r5-million-safa>

¹⁹ <https://centralnews.co.za/safa-president-danny-jordaan-arrested-amid-r1-3-million-fraud-allegations>

²⁰ <https://scrolla.africa/state-withdraws-theft-charges-against-safa-president>

²¹ <https://iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/2024-03-08-hawks-raid-safa-house-amid-r1-3-million-fraud-allegations>

²² <https://dfa.co.za/sport/2025-09-30-bafana-bafana-betrayed-administrative-negligence-costs-our-team-dearly>

²³ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-03-26-angry-safa-employees-lash-out-over-late-wages>

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ <https://www.sanews.gov.za/south-africa/departments/advances-r5-million-safa>

²⁶ <https://www.sowetan.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-06-30-banyana-back-in-training-despite-no-pay>

- **Other Notable Allegations or Issues**

- Alleged misuse of SAFA resources by its president for personal benefit (private security, PR) without board authorisation, violating SAFA statutes.²⁷
- Delay in elections or failure in governance oversight (e.g. staff complaining about non-existent oversight committees).²⁸
- Government (Ministry of Sport) has expressed concern; civil society, the public, media have called for reforms.
- The threat of FIFA sanctions is being used as a deterrent by some in government: fear that too much interference would lead to banning; others argue doing nothing perpetuates rot.

What Government Could Do (without crossing into prohibited interference)

- The government could request FIFA to send a Delegation / Fact-Finding mission to investigate SAFA's governance (similar to what has happened in Zambia, India, Namibia).
- Government could encourage or facilitate a Normalisation Committee, if it's done in accordance with FIFA rules (i.e. via an FA Congress, statutes, internal regulation). In Namibia, the normalization was requested / accepted.²⁹

- The government could review or require updates to SAFA's constitution and electoral code, ensure independence, performance criteria, ensure members of National Executive Committee (NEC) have competence, not just election by popularity.

What Government Should Not Do (to avoid running afoul of Article 19)

- Government appointing or removing SAFA NEC officers by decree.
- Government taking over FA premises, finances, or day-to-day operations without FA consent.
- Government interfering in internal electoral processes (e.g. dictating who can vote, how the voting is done, or invalidating internal FA elections) unless such action is provided for in SAFA's own statutes and in line with FIFA's statutes.
- Allowing courts or government ministries to impose structures not recognised under SAFA's statutes or not compliant with FIFA's requirements.

Thus, the risk SAFA faces is not from government oversight per se, but from *overstepping* into direct control.

Lessons from Precedents for What Article 19 Does / Does Not Prohibit

From examining those cases, these points emerge clearly:

- Article 19 does not prohibit all government involvement. It prohibits "undue" / "third-party" interference.

²⁷ <https://iol.co.za/news/crime-and-courts/2024-03-08-hawks-raid-safa-house-amid-r1-3-million-fraud-allegations>

²⁸ <https://www.timeslive.co.za/sport/soccer/2025-03-26-angry-safa-employees-lash-out-over-late-wages>

²⁹ <https://neweralive.na/fifas-normalisation-committee-the-broad-and-tricky-mandate>

There is a spectrum: oversight, regulation, inquiry, legislation vs direct control, appointment, or removal.

- Precedents exist where governments have shaped governance frameworks (statutes, constitution, oversight, regulation) and these have been tolerated or even encouraged, if done in compliance with FA statutes and with transparency. The UK is a prime example.
- FIFA's own mechanism includes Normalization Committees under exceptional circumstances (see Article 8(2) of FIFA Statutes, and related to Article 19) to restore proper governance. This is not seen strictly as punishment but as a corrective tool for associations in dysfunction.
- Other cases show that when government interference is evident and persistent, FIFA will act: suspensions, letters of warning, mandates to rectify statutes, threats of bans. The cost for the association (and national teams, players, clubs) can be high.

What Britain Has Done: Parliamentary Hearings, Ombud, Regulatory Reform

One of your goals is to show that the British government has intervened in football governance but not been banned by FIFA. How?

- Parliamentary inquiries and working groups: The UK's Culture, Media and Sport Select Committee has held investigations into football governance for many years (e.g. inquiries into ownership, finances, fan involvement). These are legislative oversight tools. These hearings may lead

to recommendations, but not direct replacement of FA leadership by government.

- Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO): As noted, this was created in 2008 by the FA, Premier League and EFL, with agreement of government. Its role is not in internal governance or electoral oversight, but in complaints, due process, and transparency. It helps enhance accountability without removing internal autonomy.³⁰
- Legislative steps: The Football Governance Bill and the Football Governance Act (2025) are statutory interventions to regulate the football industry (e.g. club ownership thresholds, licensing, financial sustainability, revenue distribution), not to intervene in FA internal elections — or so the proposals attempt. The goal is better governance, not takeover.

Britain illustrates that governments can take substantial steps to enforce or demand good governance, regulatory oversight, accountability, fan rights, etc., without violating Article 19 (or at least, avoiding FIFA punitive response). The key is *how* those steps are taken — respecting FA statutes, giving FA space to act internally, ensuring transparency and abiding by legal norms.

What South Africa Can Learn / Possible Paths Forward

Based on these precedents, here are some suggestions for what is possible for the South African government, SAFA, civil society, and stakeholders, if the aim is to clean up SAFA while avoiding a FIFA ban under Article 19.

³⁰ <https://www.theifo.co.uk/about-the-ifo>

Proposed steps

1. Constitutional Reform of SAFA

SAFA needs a constitution that is properly FIFA-aligned and that requires competence, integrity, and transparency, with clear eligibility criteria for NEC posts (not just popularity, but managerial / technical / administrative experience); term limits; conflict of interest rules; a FIFA-compliant electoral code; regular policy congresses; internal checks and balances. This provides internal legal structure consistent with FIFA's rules.

2. Dialogue with FIFA

The government or SAFA can request a FIFA fact-finding mission, or invite FIFA to monitor or advise on reforms. This was done in Namibia. A normalization committee may be acceptable if SAFA itself is in significant dysfunction.

3. Use of "Normalization" rather than takeover

If SAFA is unable to resolve internal governance issues (fixed elections, finances in disarray, multiple scandals, etc.), then a normalization committee, appointed in consultation with FIFA (and CAF) may be a tool. But the government must ensure that the process is initiated in a way compliant with good governance principles and acceptable to FIFA (so that it's not seen as government forcing takeover but as restoring compliance).

4. Legislative Oversight & Regulatory Mechanisms

Government can pass or implement legislation or policies governing sports associations or non-profit organisations, setting minimum standards for transparency, financial accountability, perhaps auditing and reporting, but stop

short of dictating internal elections or substituting governance structures.

5. Public Accountability, Civil Society, Media Pressure

These constituencies are powerful. Public scrutiny, investigative journalism, stakeholder pressure can help force SAFA leadership to comply, call congresses, implement reforms. This tends to be less risky legally than direct governmental imposition.

6. Ensure Capacity Building & Training

Leaders with proven competence (in administration, finance, ethics, sport technical knowledge) should be elevated; or those in leadership must undergo governance training. This improves the likelihood SAFA can internalise reforms without external coercion.

Risks to avoid

- Government or minister making public declarations of removing or suspending SAFA officers without process.
- Courts ordering replacement of NEC or president outside SAFA's constitution or electoral code.
- Government appointing *ad hoc* committees to take over SAFA's functions.
- Delay in implementing reforms after warnings: in many cases, FIFA has given warnings first. If SAFA or government ignore those, risk becomes higher.

How Similar Cases Were Resolved & What the Outcomes Were

- In India, after the suspension, AIFF adopted a new constitution, held elections, removed the Committee of Administrators (CoA), aligned statutes

with FIFA/AFC, to satisfy FIFA's demands.

The suspension was lifted.³¹

- In Namibia, normalization committees fulfilled mandates (reviewing statutes, holding elections, cleaning up regional structures), which led to fresh leadership being elected under revised statutes.
- Zambia was warned; action taken or under discussion.

These show that while sanctions and normalization are painful and messy, reform is possible — but often when there is external pressure and internal willingness.

Bringing it Back to SAFA: What Should Be Done

Here's a possible roadmap for South Africa to deal with SAFA's governance challenges, mindful of Article 19 risks:

Step	Action	Purpose / Benefit	How to avoid crossing FIFA red lines
1	Comprehensive audit (financial, governance, compliance) of SAFA by independent external experts	Identifies root causes; builds case for reform	Audit must be mandated; must not let government assume control of finances
2	Constitutional reform – clarify NEC eligibility, term limits, conflict of interest, electoral code, etc.	Strong internal standards; compliance with FIFA's governance requirements	A lekgotla similar to what the 1997 "Walls to Bridges" one must be held; SAFA must conduct congress to adopt reforms proposed by the lekgotla; statutes must align with FIFA and CAF Statutes
3	Invite FIFA / CAF mission / observer to assess governance, help advise on normalisation if needed	Leverage and legitimacy; external experts; possible normalization if SAFA is dysfunctional	Process must be seen as restorative; government should not simply issue directive replacing SAFA leadership
4	Government working group or oversight framework for sports bodies in SA, with	Public accountability; institutional capacity	Should not give government power to install or remove internal officers; oversight

³¹

<https://indianexpress.com/article/sports/football/fifa>

-warns-aiff-to-adopt-constitution-or-risk-suspension-10213417

	legal recognition (law) for minimal standards of transparency, governance		should be framework, not takeover control
5	Promote leadership training, technical competence, ethics	To ensure future NEC members are well-prepared; reduce reliance on popularity or politics	Could be part of SAFA's statutes; possibly government-supported but independent in execution

Summary

Article 19 is a powerful shield that FIFA uses to prevent undue external (especially governmental) interference in the governance of national football associations. But the shield is not impenetrable, nor is it absolute in prohibiting any government involvement. The precedents show that governments can legislate, regulate, oversee, and encourage reform, so long as they do not seize executive control of a football association, or directly dispose of internal elections/officers unlawfully under the association's statutes.

For South Africa, the stakes are high: failure to reform SAFA risks long-term decay; overstepping may bring FIFA sanctions. The path forward is likely through a complete reform of SAFA's internal statutes, building competence and transparency, inviting FIFA's help (normalization if needed), establishing oversight mechanisms in law that respect autonomy, and ensuring integrity.

