

THE MEANING OF GOOD STANDING IN FOOTBALL GOVERNANCE

Decoding its application in a punitive governance framework

By Dennis A. Mumble

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The 2026 SAFA elections have come and gone, yet the issue of “good standing” has once again surfaced at the very moment it matters most. Members who were regarded as being in good standing only three months earlier — and were therefore permitted to participate and vote on consequential constitutional amendments — were suddenly excluded from participating and voting at elective Congress — without any changes in their material conditions. We’ve all read about it in the news!

This raises some obvious questions. What criteria determine good standing? Who determines it? Why does the issue appear to arise immediately before elections, rather than being addressed consistently throughout the electoral cycle? And how can a member be sufficiently compliant to

participate in decisions affecting the Constitution one moment, but suddenly deemed non-compliant and excluded from an election just three months later?

The pattern raises a more fundamental question about whether “good standing” is being applied as a genuine governance requirement or, at times, as an instrument of power. That question deserves closer examination against the SAFA constitutional framework.

There are certain expressions in football administration that are used so frequently that we can easily forget that they have very specific consequences. One of them is the expression “Member in good standing”.

At first glance, it sounds like an ordinary administrative description. In reality, it can have significant constitutional consequences. Under the 2026 SAFA Statutes, Members enjoy important rights, including the right to participate in Congress, exercise voting rights, submit proposals and nominate candidates for elected positions. A determination that a Member is not in good standing can therefore have implications far beyond an administrative record. It can affect that Member's participation in the democratic affairs of football.

For that reason, the question of what constitutes good standing deserves greater attention than it has traditionally received.

The starting point should be quite straightforward. The SAFA Statutes describe membership in terms of both rights and obligations. Members are entitled to participate in the affairs of the Association, but membership also carries responsibilities. Article 13, for example, requires Members to comply with the Statutes, regulations, directives and decisions of FIFA, CAF and SAFA; to ensure the election of their decision-making bodies; to participate in SAFA competitions; to meet their financial obligations; to respect the Laws of the Game; to maintain appropriate membership records; and to observe principles of loyalty, integrity and good sporting behaviour.

Good standing therefore has to be understood within this reciprocal relationship. It is essentially a question of whether a Member is complying with the obligations attached to its membership.

That sounds uncomplicated until one considers how easily such a concept can become confused with something quite different: whether an official is satisfied with the conduct of a Member, whether a Member is regarded as cooperative, or even whether the people running the Member happen to be politically aligned with those exercising authority higher up the football structure.

Those considerations have no place in an objective compliance assessment.



A familiar example from the football field

Perhaps the easiest way to understand the principle is to think about something every football administrator already understands: the referee.

A referee does not decide that a player has committed an offence simply because the player is unpopular, difficult or has previously disagreed with the referee. There has to be a rule governing the conduct, facts that establish what happened and an application of the rule to those facts.

The same discipline should apply to membership compliance.

If a Region, LFA or other Member is said to be “not in good standing”, the natural questions should be what obligation has not been complied with, where that obligation is found, what

evidence establishes the failure, who is authorised to make the determination and what consequence the applicable rules provide.

These questions are particularly important because SAFA is a constitutional organisation. Its different bodies have different functions and powers. The 2026 Statutes identify Congress as the supreme legislative authority and provide that SAFA's bodies must be elected or appointed in accordance with the procedures established by the Statutes and without external influence.

It follows that the existence of a problem does not, by itself, establish who has the authority to decide the problem or what consequence may follow from it.

This is a difference that is sometimes lost in administration. An official may discover a compliance problem without possessing the authority to determine the Member's constitutional status. A committee may provide advice without possessing decision-making power. An administrator may maintain records without having the authority to impose a sanction.

Understanding those differences is an important part of what might properly be called governance literacy.

Good standing is a compliance assessment

A sensible framework approaches good standing in much the same way that a responsible organisation might approach an institutional audit. Instead of looking for a single reason to declare a Member compliant or non-compliant, the assessment considers the various responsibilities that accompany membership.

These include constitutional compliance and democratic governance; membership administration and record-keeping; financial and sporting obligations; ethics and integrity; protection of Members' rights; proper dispute resolution; organisational governance; transparency; institutional independence; and the responsibilities associated with football development and administration.

This broader approach is important because a football organisation is more than the people who happen to occupy office at a particular moment. It is an institution with a constitution, members, records, elected bodies, financial responsibilities, sporting responsibilities and relationships with other structures in the football pyramid.

A proper compliance assessment should therefore examine the institution rather than simply the personalities involved in running it. It should also distinguish between different degrees and types of non-compliance.

A minor administrative deficiency is not necessarily the same thing as a serious constitutional breach. An outstanding document is not necessarily equivalent to a disciplinary offence. A

regulatory infringement is not automatically a suspension. And a Member whose compliance has not been established cannot fairly be treated as though non-compliance has been proved.

These differences may appear technical, but they become very important when the consequences of a finding include the loss of voting or other membership rights.

The difference between a compliance problem and a suspension

The SAFA Statutes provide a useful illustration of this principle.

Article 13 sets out Members' obligations and provides that violations may lead to sanctions under the Statutes. Article 14 then deals specifically with a sanction – a consequence of non-compliance – and establishes a separate constitutional process governing that status. Congress may suspend a Member, while the NEC may suspend a Member that seriously violates its membership obligations, subject to the constitutional requirements concerning the duration and confirmation of such suspension in accordance with the principle of proportionality. During suspension, the Member loses its membership rights.

This matters because the consequences are different.

If a Member has failed to submit a particular document, for example, the appropriate response may be to require the deficiency to be corrected. If there has been a more serious regulatory violation, the applicable disciplinary or other procedure may need to be followed. If the circumstances justify suspension, then the constitutional requirements governing suspension must be observed.

It would therefore be a mistake to use the expression “not in good standing” as an informal substitute for a disciplinary or suspension process. Doing so risks giving an administrative label consequences that the Constitution has reserved for a particular procedure.

Sometimes the correct answer is that the evidence is insufficient

There is another feature of the framework that may seem unusual but is important for sound administration: the recognition that sometimes the available evidence simply does not establish whether a Member is compliant.

In some instances and assessment would include an “*NE — Not Established*” category. This is not a loophole through which a Member escapes accountability. It is an acknowledgement of a basic principle of responsible decision-making: uncertainty should not automatically be converted into an adverse finding.

If a membership register cannot be located, for instance, the responsible conclusion may be that compliance cannot presently be established. That is different from concluding that the register

does not exist. If a complaint has been made but has not been investigated, the existence of the complaint is not necessarily evidence that the underlying conduct occurred.

The difference between information and evidence is particularly important where membership status can affect democratic rights.

Not everything can be reduced to a score

The good standing framework that I developed more than 10 years ago proposes a five-point compliance scale, ranging from fully compliant to non-compliant, with additional categories for matters that are not applicable or have not been established.

The purpose is not to turn constitutional governance into a mathematical exercise. A score can help an administrator identify patterns and areas requiring attention, but it cannot replace legal judgment or the applicable constitutional process.

There are some matters that are too important simply to disappear into an overall average. Serious constitutional breaches, formal suspension, material financial obligations, mandatory membership requirements, significant disciplinary or integrity matters and other critical obligations may require specific attention irrespective of how well the Member performs in other areas.

This is similar to the way we understand football itself. A team may have performed exceptionally well for most of a match, but that does not mean that an infringement occurring in the penalty area can simply be ignored because the team's overall performance has been good. Conversely, an isolated mistake does not necessarily mean that everything about the team is defective.

The same principle of proportionality should inform institutional compliance.

A practical way of understanding the different statuses

For ordinary administrators, the framework proposes a simple traffic-light model.

A **Green** status would indicate that the evidence establishes that the Member is in good standing. **Amber** would indicate that there are deficiencies requiring corrective action but not necessarily a basis for treating the Member as fundamentally non-compliant. **Orange** would indicate material compliance deficiencies requiring structured intervention. **Red** would indicate established and material non-compliance sufficient to affect the Member's standing. **Black** would be reserved for a Member that is formally suspended under the applicable constitutional process.

The colours are simply a means of making the system understandable. They do not create powers that the Constitution does not otherwise confer. This point is essential. No spreadsheet, compliance certificate or administrative checklist can create a power to suspend, exclude or

remove a Member's rights if the underlying constitutional or regulatory framework does not provide such a power.

The rules must also apply to those exercising authority

There is an important principle of reciprocity that should accompany any serious membership-compliance system.

Members have obligations to the Association, but the institutions and officials exercising authority over those Members also operate within a framework of rules.

If a Region is expected to conduct its elections according to its Constitution, those exercising oversight over the Region must respect the rules governing their own authority. If an LFA is required to maintain proper records, the structures assessing its compliance should themselves maintain adequate records of the basis upon which their conclusions are reached.

This is not an argument for weakening authority. It is an argument for making authority more legitimate and more dependable.

The principle has a familiar resonance in South African constitutional culture, where accountability, fairness, transparency and impartiality are regarded as important elements of good administration. Although football associations are not organs of state and their constitutions operate within a different set of legal principles, these broader principles provide useful guidance for thinking about how institutional power should be exercised.

It is also consistent with the spirit of Ubuntu. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's well-known description of Ubuntu — that our humanity is bound up with that of others — offers a useful way of thinking about football governance. A national association is ultimately a community of Members, and the strength of the institution depends upon the strength and legitimacy of the relationships between its different parts.

Good standing should therefore help strengthen those relationships rather than becoming a mechanism for arbitrary exclusion.

Compliance should lead to improvement

One of the most constructive ideas in the compliance framework is that compliance should not be viewed primarily as an exercise in finding fault.

A Member may have weaknesses in its administration without being fundamentally dysfunctional. Its records may need attention. Its constitution may require updating. Its officials may need training. Its financial systems may need improvement. Its election procedures may need to be strengthened.

The first objective should often be to identify the problem and help the Member correct it. That was the purpose of the framework that I developed as far back as 2013. I created an instrument to monitor the state of governance and administration in each Region consisting of five broad areas (Governance, Administration, Financial, Technical, i.e. Competitions and Development) with 33 sub-categories and hired an intern to construct monthly reports to help us apply timely intervention measures without interfering in the internal affairs of members.

This is particularly important in a football system that operates through many layers of administration. The quality of governance at national level ultimately depends on what happens in provinces, Regions, LFAs, leagues and clubs.

A compliance framework that simply identifies failures and imposes consequences may produce fear without necessarily producing better governance. A framework that identifies weaknesses, establishes objective standards and provides a pathway towards correction can contribute to institutional development. That is where *governance literacy* becomes important.

Football administrators need to know the rules they administer

South African football has invested enormous energy over many years in developing players, coaches, referees and technical officials. There is much less public discussion about the education of the people who administer the institutions themselves.

Yet the principle is obvious. A coach needs to understand the Laws of the Game. A referee needs to understand them even more precisely. An administrator needs a comparable understanding of the constitutional and regulatory framework within which he or she exercises authority.

The basic questions are not complicated. Where does this power come from? What does the relevant provision actually say? Does it apply to this Member? What evidence is required? Who is authorised to make the decision? What procedure must be followed? What rights does the affected Member have? What consequence does the rule prescribe? Is there a review or appeal mechanism? These questions are the administrative equivalent of knowing the Laws of the Game.

The late former President, Nelson Mandela once observed that sport has the power to inspire and unite people. That potential is especially significant in South Africa, where football has always been about more than the ninety minutes played on a field. But sport can only perform that unifying function when the institutions that administer it command confidence and when those who participate in them understand the rules by which they are governed.

A simple test for every good-standing decision

A compliance framework ultimately reduces the question of good standing to a series of practical enquiries.

Before an adverse finding is made, the decision-maker should be able to identify the source of the obligation, explain precisely what the Member was required to do, identify the evidence establishing non-compliance, confirm that the obligation actually applies to that Member, and demonstrate that the Member has been given a fair opportunity to respond.

The decision-maker should also be able to identify the source of his or her own authority, explain why the particular consequence follows from the established non-compliance, and identify any applicable review or appeal mechanism.

This approach does not make administration unnecessarily complicated. On the contrary, it provides a reliable way of dealing with difficult questions without allowing personal opinions or institutional relationships to determine the outcome.

It also protects the football administrator. An official who can demonstrate the rule relied upon, the evidence considered, the authority exercised and the reasons for the decision is in a much stronger position than one who can only say that a Member was regarded as being “not in good standing”.

Building a culture of compliance

Ultimately, good standing should be understood as part of a much larger project: building football institutions that are capable of governing themselves properly.

The objective should be for every Region and LFA to understand its constitutional responsibilities, maintain reliable records, conduct proper elections, meet its financial obligations, respect sporting and ethical rules, protect the rights of its Members and use the appropriate dispute-resolution mechanisms.

At the same time, the officials responsible for oversight should understand the limits of their own powers and apply the same standards of accountability to themselves. That is the real value of a Membership Compliance and Good Standing Framework.

It provides a common language through which compliance can be understood and discussed, while helping officials distinguish between a deficiency that can be addressed through corrective action and a violation that may require a formal process. It encourages decisions to be grounded in evidence rather than assumption, makes the source and limits of institutional authority more visible, and strengthens procedural fairness by requiring decisions to be taken consistently and proportionately. Most importantly, it helps move good governance beyond something that is considered only when a dispute arises, making it an ordinary and continuing part of responsible football administration.

Good standing should therefore not be understood as a favour bestowed by an official or as a badge of approval granted to a compliant political ally. It should be something that can be demonstrated through the ordinary operation of the rules.

For the ordinary football official, perhaps the most useful way to think about it is simply this: a Member in good standing is a Member that can demonstrate that it is meeting the responsibilities that come with membership, while the organisation exercising oversight can demonstrate that it has reached its own conclusions lawfully, consistently and fairly.

That is a standard that protects Members, protects administrators and, ultimately, protects the credibility of the game itself.

Good standing is therefore not about who you support. It is about how the organisation complies with the rules by which it has agreed to be governed.

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