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# Policy Attention Reconfiguration across Three Generations of Canadian Sport Policy

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**Article**

**Keywords:** Canadian Sport Policy, policy attention, policy change, policy design, sport governance

**Posted Date:** November 16th, 2026

**DOI:** https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11292614/v1

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**Additional Declarations:** No competing interests reported.

**Policy Attention Reconfiguration across Three Generations of Canadian Sport Policy**


## Abstract

Research question: How does policy attention change across successive generations of national sport policy? This study develops the Policy Attention Reconfiguration Model (PARM) to examine how attention to institutional, operational, and normative policy components is reconfigured over time.

Research methods: Longitudinal qualitative document analysis compared three generations of Canadian Sport Policy (2002, 2012, and 2025–2035). Hybrid deductive–inductive coding generated 31 analytical nodes across six dimensions and 3,592 coded references. Agreement between the original and reviewed coding versions was assessed using policy-equal, character-level Cohen's kappa ($\kappa = 0.8256$).

Results and findings: The three policy generations exhibited overlapping but distinct configurations of policy attention. Governance structures and policy actors received their greatest relative emphasis in CSP1, while policy goals and instruments peaked in CSP2. CSP3 placed greater emphasis on policy discourse and values, alongside increased attention to health, participation, inclusion and equity, marginalised populations, and sport as a public good. Overall, policy attention shifted from system organisation through implementation coordination toward broader public purposes, while established priorities remained present.

Implications: PARM demonstrates how continuity in policy components can coexist with changes in their relative emphasis. By connecting policy attention with policy design and sport governance, the framework provides a structured approach for examining how the priorities through which sport systems are organised, implemented, and justified change over

time.

**Keywords:** Canadian Sport Policy; policy attention; policy change; policy design; sport governance

## Introduction

National sport policy brings together commitments to elite performance, broad participation, public health, inclusion, athlete welfare, and integrity. Pursuing these commitments within a shared policy framework raises questions about how responsibilities, means of intervention, and policy purposes are prioritised. Research on sport federations illustrates the tensions involved: organisations charged with promoting both high performance and Sport-for-All face competing expectations that shape their approaches to participation (De Bock et al., 2022) . Understanding policy development therefore requires attention to how these commitments are expressed alongside the institutional and operational arrangements through which they are to be pursued. This study examines that changing balance across successive generations of national sport policy.

Policy attention provides a starting point for this analysis. Government information-processing research explains how bounded attention and institutional arrangements shape the selection and prioritisation of policy concerns(Workman et al., 2009) . In this study, policy attention is examined through the relative prominence given to particular concerns and components within policy documents. An attention-based perspective thus directs analysis towards what a policy foregrounds and how that emphasis changes over time. Existing research has extended this perspective beyond issue salience: Lemke et al.(2023), for example, examine how attention to policy issues and instruments varies across institutional

venues. This development opens a further question for national sport policy: how does the balance of attention across its constituent dimensions change as a policy framework is renewed?

Policy integration and policy design research provide complementary foundations for addressing this question. Candel & Biesbroek, 2016 conceptualise integration as a multidimensional process in which policy frames, subsystem involvement, goals, and instruments can develop at different rates or in different directions. Dorado-Rubín et al., 2025 further distinguish the breadth of policy objectives from the integration of actions intended to achieve them. These studies establish the importance of examining distinct policy components together while retaining their analytical differences. Research on the social construction of target populations also shows that the groups addressed by policy are connected to policy rationales and the selection of instruments (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). Reviewing applications of this approach, Pierce et al., 2014 identify goals, tools, implementation structures, rationales, and target populations among the elements of policy design. Together, these perspectives motivate an analysis of how attention is distributed across the institutional, operational, and normative components of a policy framework.

For sport policy, the analytical task is to connect these components within a consistent approach to comparison across policy generations. Lindsey et al. (2025) identify opportunities to strengthen the analysis of sport policy content through engagement with different conceptual and disciplinary approaches. Building on this work, the present study examines the changing relative emphasis placed on governance arrangements, policy actors, purposes, instruments, values, and populations. The distinction between the continued presence of a priority and its

relative prominence is central: a commitment can remain in successive policy documents while its place within the overall configuration changes. Tracing this distinction makes it possible to examine continuity and reorientation together.

To undertake this analysis, the study develops the Policy Attention Reconfiguration Model (PARM). The model examines six interrelated dimensions: governance structures; policy actors; policy discourse and value orientations; policy goals; policy instruments and implementation mechanisms; and target populations. These dimensions provide a common basis for analysing three broader aspects of policy: its institutional arrangements, operational approach, and normative orientation. Policy attention reconfiguration refers to changes in the relative emphasis placed on these dimensions across successive policy generations. PARM connects the distribution of attention within each policy to patterns of change across policies, allowing established and emerging priorities to be examined together.

Canada provides an empirical setting in which to examine this process. Its national sport policy operates across governmental levels and through governmental and non-governmental organisations. Research on the implementation of the 2012 Canadian Sport Policy identifies the coordination and accountability challenges associated with this multi-level, multi-sectoral setting (Parent & Jurbala, 2023). The Canadian Sport Policy (2002), Canadian Sport Policy 2012, and Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035 provide three successive frameworks through which changes in policy attention can be traced. The latest framework explicitly foregrounds participant-centered sport, safety, fairness, inclusion, and health (Canadian Heritage, 2026). Examining the three generations together enables analysis of how such commitments are positioned alongside institutional responsibilities, policy goals, and implementation

mechanisms.

Using longitudinal qualitative policy document analysis and a hybrid deductive–inductive coding approach, the study addresses three research questions:

1. How is policy attention distributed across the six analytical dimensions within each generation of Canadian Sport Policy?

2. What patterns of continuity and redistribution characterise policy attention across the three generations?

3. What changes in the governing priorities and rationales articulated in national sport policy are indicated by these patterns?

The study makes three contributions. Conceptually, it specifies attention reconfiguration as a form of policy evolution in which shifts in relative emphasis can coexist with the persistence of established priorities. Analytically, PARM connects policy attention with policy design through a common framework for comparing institutional, operational, and normative emphases across policy generations. Empirically, the study traces these configurations across three generations of Canadian Sport Policy, examining how successive frameworks articulate responsibilities, means of intervention, and the purposes and populations that sport policy is intended to serve.

## Theoretical Background and Development of PARM

### Policy attention and policy change

Policy attention concerns the selective emphasis placed on policy problems and responses under conditions of limited information-processing capacity. Its distribution provides a means of examining both continuity and change in policy priorities. Research within the

punctuated equilibrium tradition highlights how cognitive and institutional constraints shape these patterns. Examining the American public's policy agenda, Yildirim (2022) demonstrates that attention shifts vary across issues and differ from those observed in institutional agendas. This variation makes the location and expression of attention important considerations in its analysis.

Political texts provide observable evidence of these selective emphases. Peterson et al. (2023), for example, measure the distribution of policy topics in US state legislators' Twitter communication, demonstrating how expressed attention can be compared systematically across political settings. In the present study, the analytical focus is the attention articulated in successive national policy documents: which components receive emphasis and how their relative prominence changes between policy generations.

Connecting this distribution to policy change requires specifying the components being compared. Siddiki and Curley (2022) distinguish policy designing as a process from policy design as its substantive content and identify opportunities to connect these perspectives. Their distinction provides a basis for examining policy texts as organised combinations of goals, instruments, actors, and other design elements. Attention analysis can consequently address both the prominence of substantive issues and the balance among the components through which policy addresses them.

**From issue salience to attention reconfiguration**

A change in issue salience identifies what has become more or less prominent. Attention reconfiguration concerns how these shifts alter the overall configuration of policy content. An established objective may persist while greater emphasis is placed on its implementation,

justification, or intended beneficiaries. Policy renewal can therefore change the relationship between established and emerging priorities without removing earlier commitments.

Policy design research supports this differentiated understanding of change. Koski and Siddiki (2022) show that changes in policy targets, instruments, and incentives have different relationships with patterns of policy outputs. Their analysis demonstrates the value of distinguishing changes in individual design elements. Complementing this perspective, Capano and Lepori (2024) connect the ideational characteristics of policy design and the functions of instruments to organisational responses. Together, these studies support examining policy components in relation to one another.

PARM defines policy attention reconfiguration as a longitudinal change in the relative distribution and articulation of attention across interconnected policy dimensions. Redistribution concerns changes in their relative prominence; recombination concerns how existing and emerging priorities are brought together; and realignment concerns changes in the purposes and responsibilities around which they are organised. These processes may overlap within a policy generation.

This distinction gives reconfiguration an analytical meaning beyond changes in topic frequency. Comparing distributions identifies shifts in emphasis, while interpreting the associated text establishes what those shifts mean for the policy's stated responsibilities, means, and purposes. For example, increased attention to inclusion may involve changes in the populations addressed, the justification of existing goals, or the instruments proposed to pursue them. The analysis therefore examines both where attention moves and how the surrounding policy content expresses that movement.

**Sport governance and the dimensions of PARM**

Sport governance provides a setting in which institutional arrangements, operational choices, and normative commitments are closely connected. In their systematic review, Thompson et al. (2023) organise governance principles into structural, process, outcome, and contextual categories, demonstrating the breadth of governance beyond formal organisational structures. Dowling et al. (2024)further emphasize the reciprocal relationship between institutional environments and organisational agency. In Canadian regional sport policy, Rich et al. (2024) show how administrative arrangements and underlying ideas and beliefs shape organisational fields and policy implementation. These perspectives inform PARM's examination of six dimensions within three connected layers.

The *institutional layer* comprises governance structures and policy actors. Governance structures concern the arrangements through which authority, responsibilities, and coordination are organised. Policy actors concern the organisations, groups, and individuals assigned roles in policy formulation, delivery, or oversight. Distinguishing these dimensions allows the analysis to identify whether attention centers on institutional arrangements, the actors operating within them, or both.

The *operational layer* comprises policy goals and policy instruments and implementation mechanisms. Goals specify the outcomes or conditions that policy seeks to achieve. Instruments and implementation mechanisms specify the means through which these objectives are to be pursued. Their separate treatment captures changes in emphasis between articulating ambitions and specifying action. A continuing goal can thus acquire greater operational elaboration without becoming a new policy priority.

The *normative layer* comprises policy discourse and value orientations, together with target populations. Discourse and values concern how policy purposes and interventions are framed and justified. Target populations identify those whose participation, conduct, or circumstances policy seeks to address. Hornung et al. (2025) demonstrate the importance of recognising heterogeneity within target groups, linking their social identities to differing policy preferences. Within PARM, attention to target populations helps identify whose needs and interests are recognized in the stated purposes of sport policy.

The six dimensions distinguish the functions that policy statements perform. Goals specify intended achievements, whereas values articulate their justification; actors are identified through their governing roles, whereas target populations are identified through their relationship to policy interventions. At the broader level, the three layers organise these distinctions around who governs, what is pursued and how, and why and for whom governance is undertaken.

**The Policy Attention Reconfiguration Model**

PARM brings these dimensions together to examine policy configurations within and across generations (Figure 1). Within each generation, the model identifies the distribution of attention across the six dimensions. Across generations, it examines changes in that distribution alongside the continued presence, elaboration, or recombination of priorities. The three layers provide a higher-level interpretation of whether these changes foreground institutional arrangements, operational delivery, or normative purposes.

The model treats the layers as connected parts of a policy configuration. Greater attention to implementation may accompany clearer actor responsibilities, while a stronger

emphasis on equity may coincide with broader target populations or revised policy goals. Such connections direct the analysis towards the combinations expressed in policy texts and the extent to which different dimensions change together.

Performance pressures, governance demands, and legitimacy concerns provide interpretive questions for examining these patterns. Performance pressures direct attention to the articulation of goals and delivery mechanisms. Governance demands draw attention to authority, coordination, and actor responsibilities. Legitimacy concerns focus interpretation on the values invoked and the populations recognized. These perspectives guide contextual interpretation of the observed configurations; their causal influence would require separate empirical investigation.

Applied to CSP1, CSP2, and CSP3, PARM examines whether successive policies retain, accumulate, redistribute, or recombine priorities. Its theoretical contribution lies in connecting these patterns to the governing logic articulated in policy: how responsibilities, means of intervention, and public purposes are brought together over time.

Please insert Figure 1 about here.

## Method

### Research Design and Case Selection

This study used longitudinal qualitative document analysis to examine policy attention across three generations of Canadian national sport policy. Document analysis provides a systematic approach to interpreting documentary evidence in relation to a research question (Morgan, 2022). Comparing successive policy frameworks enabled the study to identify continuity and change in the attention given to different components of national sport policy.

Canada was selected because the Canadian Sport Policy (2002), Canadian Sport Policy 2012, and Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035 constitute successive national frameworks with a shared policy function. Their common scope supported comparison, while their publication at different stages provided a longitudinal perspective on policy development. The three generations, designated CSP1, CSP2, and CSP3, were compared across the six PARM dimensions and interpreted through the model's institutional, operational, and normative layers.

**Data Sources**

The corpus comprised the three official policy documents listed in Table 1. Documents were selected on the basis of their status as successive national frameworks for Canadian sport. Analysis focused on their substantive policy content, including statements of priorities, responsibilities, intended outcomes, and implementation arrangements. Supplementary commentary and secondary interpretations were excluded from the coding corpus.

Please insert Table 1 about here.

The documents were treated as formal expressions of policy priorities and intended action. This use of documentary evidence is consistent with sport policy research examining target groups, policy instruments, and implementation arrangements(Van Hoye et al., 2024).

**Analytical framework and coding**

The coding framework translated PARM into six dimensions organised within three analytical layers. The institutional layer comprised governance structures and policy actors; the operational layer comprised policy goals and policy instruments and implementation mechanisms; and the normative layer comprised policy discourse and value orientations and target populations.

A hybrid deductive–inductive strategy guided coding. The six dimensions provided the initial structure, while second-level categories were refined through iterative reading of the policy documents. This approach maintained a common framework across generations while accommodating substantive distinctions identified in the texts, following the logic of combining theoretically informed categories with inductive refinement (Proudfoot, 2023).

The final framework contained 31 second-level nodes: six for governance structures, five for policy actors, four for policy discourse and value orientations, six for policy goals, five for policy instruments and implementation mechanisms, and five for target populations. Governance nodes distinguished centralised, decentralised, federal, local, multilevel, and network arrangements. Goal nodes covered economic development, health promotion, high-performance sport, nation branding, participation promotion, and social inclusion and equity.

The coding unit was the smallest meaningful text segment, usually a sentence or clause, expressing a distinct policy proposition. A segment could be assigned to multiple nodes when it contained explicit and independently interpretable elements relevant to different categories. For example, a statement assigning a delivery role to a sport organisation and specifying funding for youth participation could be coded under policy actors, policy instruments, and target populations. Each assignment required identifiable textual support.

Category boundaries were defined by the function of the statement. Policy goals concerned intended outcomes, whereas policy instruments concerned the mechanisms used to achieve them. Policy actors were identified through responsibilities for governance or delivery, whereas target populations were identified as the intended recipients of policy measures. These distinctions guided the interpretation of passages containing several policy elements.

**Data Analysis**

All three policy documents were imported into NVivo 15, read in full, and coded using the 31 second-level nodes. Coding produced 3,592 references: 1,155 for CSP1, 1,373 for CSP2, and 1,064 for CSP3. These reference counts provide a descriptive summary of coding activity.

Policy attention was operationalised as the cross-generational distribution of coded words within each analytical category. For category $i$ in policy generation $j$, the percentage was calculated as:

$$P_{ij} = \frac{W_{ij}}{W_{i,\mathrm{CSP1}} + W_{i,\mathrm{CSP2}} + W_{i,\mathrm{CSP3}}} \times 100\%$$

Where $W_{ij}$ denotes the number of words coded to category $i$ in generation $j$, as reported by NVivo. Each percentage therefore represents the proportion of that category's total coded-word count across the three generations attributable to a particular policy document. The calculation was applied separately to the 31 second-level nodes and the six first-level dimensions, using the corresponding NVivo outputs at each analytical level. First-level dimensions were assessed using their own dimension-level outputs, without assuming that their coded-word counts equalled the sum of their constituent second-level nodes. Percentages for each category summed to approximately 100% across the three generations, subject to rounding. Changes between CSP1 and CSP3 were expressed in percentage points.

Analysis proceeded from individual nodes to the six dimensions and the three PARM layers. Numerical patterns were interpreted alongside the coded passages to examine continuity and changes in policy emphasis. Sankey-style ribbon plots presented the cross-generational distributions, with ribbon thickness at each generation proportional to the corresponding category's share of coded words. Connections linked the same category across generations, and

first-level dimensions and second-level nodes were displayed separately.

### Coding-version agreement

Two coding versions were compared using the same 31 formal leaf nodes across all three policy texts: the original coding dataset (3,592 assignments) and the reviewed second-coder dataset (3,431 assignments). Exact exported character intervals were used to evaluate whether each character was coded at each node in each version. Repeated quotations at different positions and the original checkmark characters were retained. Overlapping intervals within a node were represented by binary character coverage (O'Connor & Joffe, 2020).

An external calculation from the exported positions yielded an overall Cohen's kappa of 0.8256, with observed agreement of 96.0678%. The four-cell proportions were calculated within each policy, averaged with equal weight across policies, and used to compute overall kappa; the three policy-level coefficients were not simply averaged. Policy-level kappa values were 0.7550 (CSP1), 0.8337 (CSP2), and 0.8847 (CSP3). The accompanying calculation document and reproducibility files specify the formula, inputs, exclusions, and aggregation. Because the reviewed version includes historical coding carried forward during review, this coefficient measures agreement between versions and does not demonstrate independent blinded inter-coder reliability (Halpin, 2024).

## Results

### Overall Pattern of Policy Attention Reconfiguration

The analysis identified 3,592 coded references across the three generations of Canadian Sport Policy: 1,155 in CSP1, 1,373 in CSP2, and 1,064 in CSP3. These references covered six analytical dimensions and 31 second-level nodes. The percentages presented below describe

each dimension's or node's distribution across the three policy generations, with each category summing to approximately 100%.

The six dimensions followed distinct trajectories (Figure 2). Governance structures declined from 37.78% in CSP1 to 37.26% in CSP2 and 24.97% in CSP3. Policy actors also declined, from 38.92% to 34.30% and 26.78%. Policy discourse and value orientations followed a different pattern, falling from 32.45% in CSP1 to 30.51% in CSP2 before reaching 37.05% in CSP3.

Both operational dimensions peaked in CSP2. Policy goals accounted for 33.02%, 35.95%, and 31.03% of their cross-generation distribution, while policy instruments and implementation mechanisms accounted for 33.30%, 36.77%, and 29.92%. Target populations varied less, rising from 31.29% in CSP1 to 34.99% in CSP2 before falling slightly to 33.71% in CSP3.

These patterns distinguish declining institutional dimensions, intermediate peaks in the operational dimensions, and a later peak in discourse and values. Examination of the 31 second-level nodes reveals further variation within each dimension (Figure 3).

Please insert Figure 2 about here.

**Institutional Layer**

***Governance Structures***

Although the governance-structure dimension recorded its lowest share in CSP3, individual arrangements followed different trajectories. Multilevel governance declined across successive generations, from 46.39% in CSP1 to 30.77% in CSP2 and 22.85% in CSP3. Its earlier concentration was accompanied by an explicit commitment to system coordination.

Under its goal of enhanced interaction, CSP1 called for collaboration "within governments, between governments, and between sectors" (Canadian Heritage, 2002, p. 19), placing connections across institutions at the center of this objective.

Four governance nodes peaked in CSP2. Centralisation rose from 29.91% in CSP1 to 56.41% in CSP2 before falling to 13.68% in CSP3. Local governance showed a more pronounced intermediate peak, moving from 23.23% to 70.54% and then 6.23%. Decentralisation increased from 35.71% to 38.19% before declining to 26.09%, while network governance rose from 36.01% to 40.37% before falling to 23.63%. CSP2's implementation provisions combined collaboration with recognition of existing governmental responsibilities, supported by "complementary action plans, both individual and collective" (Canadian Heritage, 2012, p. 15) . This formulation illustrates how coordinated action and jurisdictional differentiation were accommodated within the same framework.

Federal governance followed a different trajectory, falling from 37.41% in CSP1 to 24.65% in CSP2 before recovering to 37.93% in CSP3, slightly above its initial share. The lower dimension-level share in CSP3 therefore coexisted with a recovery in attention to federal governance. Across the three generations, the results show distinct patterns among governance arrangements, with CSP2 combining peaks in several forms of governance.

***Policy Actors***

The declining dimension-level distribution of policy actors was accompanied by contrasting trajectories among actor categories. Federal government attention fell from 65.66% in CSP1 to 23.29% in CSP2 and 11.05% in CSP3. National sport organisations followed a similar pattern, declining from 68.66% to 18.90% and 12.44%. Provincial governments also

declined across the three generations, from 42.48% to 29.65% and 27.86%.

Community organisations and private-sector actors both peaked in CSP2. Community organisations increased from 21.14% in CSP1 to 41.79% in CSP2 and remained above their initial share at 37.07% in CSP3. Private-sector actors rose from 28.28% to 43.80% before returning to 27.92%, close to their CSP1 share. These intermediate peaks accompanied CSP2's emphasis on partnerships extending beyond established sport organisations. Its policy vision explicitly included "municipalities, local governments and community organizations," alongside schools, recreation providers, and the private sector (Canadian Heritage, 2012, p. 5) .

Government responsibilities remained explicit in CSP3. The policy stated that "governments influence sport delivery, particularly at federal and provincial-territorial levels," through the direction of funding support (Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 10) . It also assigned governments roles in policy development and convening stakeholders. The actor-level findings therefore combine declining shares for governmental and national sport organisation categories with continuing governmental responsibilities and a higher share for community organisations in CSP3 than in CSP1.

## Operational Layer

### *Policy Goals*

The intermediate peak in the policy-goal dimension encompassed contrasting trajectories among specific objectives. Economic development increased from 39.02% in CSP1 to 42.24% in CSP2 before declining to 18.74% in CSP3. Nation branding followed a similar pattern, rising from 36.52% to 46.47% and then falling to 17.01%. High-performance sport declined across successive generations, from 38.91% to 36.87% and 24.21%. CSP2 explicitly

connected sport events with economic objectives, stating that they should “benefit host communities and local economies” (Canadian Heritage, 2012, p. 14).

Health promotion, participation promotion, and social inclusion and equity each reached their highest share in CSP3. Health promotion remained nearly unchanged between CSP1 and CSP2, at 28.80% and 28.82%, before increasing to 42.38%. Participation promotion rose progressively from 30.13% to 33.00% and 36.87%, while social inclusion and equity increased from 29.17% to 30.34% and 40.49%. These later peaks accompanied an explicit emphasis on population wellbeing. Under the outcome “Canadians are Healthy,” CSP3 identified benefits encompassing “physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and mental wellbeing”(Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 19) . The same section linked public support to access and participation, including initiatives for newcomers, underrepresented groups, and Indigenous Peoples.

The lower dimension-level share for policy goals in CSP3 therefore coexisted with higher shares for health, participation, and inclusion. The node-level results distinguish these later peaks from the intermediate peaks in economic development and nation branding and the progressive decline in high-performance sport.

***Policy Instruments and Implementation Mechanisms***

Three instrument nodes peaked in CSP2. Data- and evidence-based governance increased from 31.45% in CSP1 to 42.50% in CSP2 before declining to 26.05% in CSP3. Programme-based instruments followed the same pattern, moving from 33.28% to 42.91% and then 23.81%. Monitoring and evaluation rose from 24.97% to 39.69% before declining to 35.34%, remaining above its CSP1 share.

CSP2's policy principles connected programme design with explicit objectives, research, and evaluation. They stated that monitoring and evaluation should "support improvement, innovation and accountability" (Canadian Heritage, 2012, p. 6). The accompanying research agenda sought to identify the conditions under which programmes and policies could achieve their objectives. These provisions illustrate how evidence and monitoring were positioned as mechanisms for improving delivery.

Financial and regulatory instruments both reached their lowest share in CSP2 but differed in their subsequent recovery. Financial instruments fell from 41.44% in CSP1 to 23.05% in CSP2, then increased to 35.51% in CSP3. Regulatory instruments declined from 32.08% to 28.80% before reaching their highest share, 39.12%, in CSP3. The latter policy linked organisational responsibilities to standards and compliance, specifying that sport organisations should "establish and enforce measures to ensure sport is safe" (Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 20) . Its government objectives also connected resource provision with organisational safety responsibilities (Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 19).

The operational pattern thus combined CSP2 peaks in evidence, programmes, and evaluation with a CSP3 peak in regulatory instruments and a partial recovery in financial instruments. These trajectories show changes in the mix of implementation mechanisms alongside the reorientation of policy goals.

**Normative Layer**

***Policy Discourse and Value Orientations***

The discourse and value-orientation dimension peaked in CSP3, although its four

constituent nodes followed different trajectories. Individual responsibility for health recorded the largest endpoint increase within this dimension, falling from 27.56% in CSP1 to 5.25% in CSP2 before rising to 67.19% in CSP3. Sport as a public good also declined initially, from 33.86% to 25.91%, before reaching 40.23%.

These patterns correspond to two complementary framings in CSP3. Its account of participation encourages people to "take responsibility for engagement in physical activities for life" (Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 15) , connecting personal responsibility with sustained participation. Alongside this emphasis, the policy describes sport as "a public good worthy of support" (Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 10). Individual engagement and public support thus appear together in the policy's articulation of sport's value.

Sport and national identity, by contrast, peaked in CSP2, increasing from 25.56% to 52.18% before declining to 22.27% in CSP3. Sport as investment followed a similar trajectory, rising from 27.40% to 44.89% and then returning to 27.71%. The dimension's later peak therefore reflected greater attention to personal engagement in health-related activity and the public value of sport, while national identity and investment framings were most prominent in the middle generation.

***Target Populations***

The relatively small variation in the target-population dimension accompanied substantial changes among its constituent categories. Elite athletes declined progressively from 44.78% in CSP1 to 31.01% in CSP2 and 24.21% in CSP3. Youth and school sport increased slightly from 35.49% to 37.73% before falling to 26.78%.

The remaining three categories increased across successive generations. The general population rose from 26.48% to 32.61% and 40.91%, while sport organisations increased from 27.02% to 31.68% and 41.30%. Marginalised groups recorded the largest endpoint increase within this dimension, rising from 17.53% to 29.08% and 53.38%—a gain of 35.85 percentage points.

CSP3 gives this broader orientation a concrete expression by calling for efforts to "remove barriers at all levels of sport, and to all roles in sport"(Sport Physical Activity Recreation Council et al., 2025, p. 12). The surrounding text connects diversity in participation with opportunities to enter competition, high-performance sport, and leadership. Inclusion therefore extends across sporting pathways and organisational roles, linking wider access with representation within the sport system.

Although the dimension as a whole peaked in CSP2, the general population, marginalised groups, and sport organisations each reached their highest share in CSP3. At the category level, the pattern was one of declining attention to elite athletes alongside growing attention to broader populations and the organisations supporting sport delivery.

**Cross-generational synthesis**

The findings reveal three overlapping configurations of policy attention. CSP1 recorded the highest shares for both institutional dimensions, alongside peaks in elite athletes and high-performance sport. CSP2 combined peaks in both operational dimensions with higher shares across several governance arrangements, indicating a configuration extending across institutional organisation and implementation mechanisms. CSP3 recorded the highest share for discourse and value orientations, accompanied by node-level peaks in health promotion,

participation, social inclusion and equity, and broader target populations. These later peaks crossed the normative and operational layers, while federal governance recovered to slightly above its CSP1 share.

Figure 3 summarizes these trajectories, including progressive changes, intermediate peaks, and later recoveries. All 31 nodes remained represented across the three generations, showing continuity in the policy components alongside changes in their relative emphasis. Dimension-level patterns also differed from those of their constituent nodes: policy goals and target populations peaked overall in CSP2, while several social objectives and population categories peaked in CSP3. Policy attention reconfiguration therefore involved both changes within dimensions and distinct temporal patterns across PARM's three layers.

Please insert Figure 3 about here.

## Discussion

### Policy attention reconfiguration within a continuing policy framework

This study identifies a pattern of policy evolution in which institutional, operational, and normative components follow different trajectories within a continuing national framework. Across the three Canadian Sport Policy generations, established categories remained present while their distributions changed. The central finding is therefore the coexistence of continuity in policy content and change in its emphasis. Understanding that combination requires attention to both the dimensions being emphasized and the categories changing within them.

Research on government information processing explains how selective attention shapes policy stability and change(Jones & Baumgartner, 2012). PARM adds a complementary perspective within a policy domain by distinguishing attention to governing arrangements,

responsible actors, intended outcomes, implementation mechanisms, justifications, and recipients. This distinction makes it possible to examine how the formulation of a policy changes even when its broad subject remains constant.

The target-population results demonstrate the value of this approach. Its dimension-level distribution changed relatively little, yet elite athletes recorded declining shares while the general population and marginalised groups recorded increasing shares. Similarly, the policy-goal dimension peaked in CSP2, although health promotion, participation, and social inclusion and equity each peaked in CSP3. A broad category can therefore remain comparatively stable, or even decline, while particular commitments within it become more prominent.

This finding connects attention analysis with research on policy portfolios. Migone and Howlett (2024) argue that understanding a portfolio requires examining its purposes and substantive composition alongside quantitative descriptions. The Canadian findings show how attention distributions can contribute to this task when interpreted at more than one analytical level. PARM locates changes within the policy framework and identifies which combinations of institutional, operational, and normative elements distinguish successive generations.

**Three generations as overlapping policy configurations**

The relationship between CSP1, CSP2, and CSP3 is best understood through their different emphases on organising the sport system, coordinating its operation, and articulating its public purposes. These emphases overlap: institutional questions remain visible in CSP3, while participation and public benefit were already represented in CSP1.

CSP1 provides the institutional reference point for the comparison. Governance structures and policy actors recorded their highest dimension-level shares in this generation,

alongside early peaks for federal government, national sport organisations, provincial governments, and multilevel governance. Read together, these patterns are consistent with an emphasis on specifying the organisations and governing arrangements through which national sport policy would be pursued. Its contribution to the sequence is the articulation of the system and its responsibilities.

CSP2 is analytically significant because it forms a distinct configuration between the earlier and later frameworks. Its peaks in evidence-based governance, programme-based instruments, and monitoring and evaluation occurred alongside peaks in centralisation, local governance, network governance, and several actor categories. This combination suggests attention to coordinating action across an organisationally varied system. The simultaneous prominence of central and local arrangements is particularly informative: organising implementation can involve several modes of governance within the same policy framework.

Research by von Lüpke et al (2023) treats institutional coordination arrangements as substantive elements of policy design. The Canadian findings reinforce the analytical connection between governing arrangements and implementation mechanisms. CSP2's institutional and operational patterns can be read together as an emphasis on how the system should work. Its concurrent peaks in national identity, investment, economic development, and nation branding also show that implementation concerns accompanied a particular set of purposes and justifications.

CSP3 broadens the public purposes articulated through the framework. Its later peaks span discourse, goals, and target populations: sport as a public good, health promotion, inclusion and equity, the general population, and marginalised groups. The change therefore

extends across several dimensions through which a policy identifies its purposes and intended beneficiaries. The later peak in regulatory instruments adds an operational element to this configuration, while the recovery of federal governance shows the continued presence of institutional concerns.

The relationship between elite sport and public participation is consequently one of coexistence under changing policy emphasis: participation becomes more explicit as a purpose in its own right, consistent with evidence that participation gains require supporting interventions rather than following automatically from elite sporting inspiration(Weed et al., 2015).

A further feature of CSP3 is the coexistence of increased attention to individual responsibility for health and sport as a public good. These categories locate responsibility differently, bringing personal conduct and collective provision into the same normative configuration. Value reorientation is thus internally differentiated. Its policy significance lies in how expectations placed on individuals are connected to the opportunities and support that organisations and governments provide. Research on public value in elite sport similarly directs attention to the organisational and stakeholder arrangements through which societal benefits are developed(Van Der Roest & Dijk, 2021).

Taken together, the three generations suggest a progression from emphasis on system organisation, through coordination and implementation, toward a broader articulation of public purposes. This is a sequence of overlapping configurations. Performance, governance, and legitimacy provide interpretive perspectives on these configurations, while their interconnections remain visible throughout the period.

**Theoretical contribution: continuity, differentiation, and policy roles**

PARM contributes to policy change research by specifying how continuity and reorientation can coexist. Hall's (1993) distinction between changes in policy settings, instruments, and overarching goals established the importance of differentiating what changes within a policy. The present study adds a longitudinal account of attention across institutions, operational components, and normative commitments. It identifies changes in emphasis among continuing categories, including cases where those categories follow different temporal patterns.

The contribution is particularly clear in three empirical relationships. First, dimension-level stability can coexist with substantial differentiation among constituent nodes, as shown by target populations. Second, an intermediate generation can have its own configuration, as demonstrated by CSP2's combination of governance, implementation, and national-purpose peaks. Third, normative reorientation can extend across several dimensions without eliminating earlier commitments. Together, these relationships give reconfiguration a specific empirical meaning beyond the general observation that policy priorities change.

This interpretation also connects with policy-mix scholarship. Howlett and Rayner (Howlett & Rayner, 2007) explain how new policy arrangements develop within constraints created by institutionalised choices. In the Canadian case, the continued representation of all 31 nodes provides a basis for examining how established components are retained as the policy's expressed purposes change. PARM makes this continuity visible alongside the differentiated trajectories of individual components.

A further contribution concerns the roles assigned to organisations. National sport

organisations as policy actors and sport organisations as target populations followed different trajectories. Although these categories are not identical, their contrast demonstrates the value of distinguishing organisations responsible for governance or delivery from organisations addressed by policy measures. An actor-only analysis would overlook this difference. PARM incorporates both roles and connects them to the goals, instruments, and values through which they are expressed.

For sport management research, the resulting contribution is a framework for analysing the changing terms on which sport systems are organised, directed, and justified. Its explanatory value comes from identifying patterns that an isolated focus on governance reform, policy goals, or participation priorities would leave disconnected.

**Implications for sport governance and policy design**

The practical implication is to examine whether changing public purposes are connected to responsibilities and delivery arrangements. When policy gives greater attention to inclusion, health, and marginalised populations, managers need to identify which organisations are expected to act, which instruments address participation barriers, and which measures will indicate progress. PARM provides a structure for organising that assessment.

This does not require equal attention across the six dimensions. Different purposes can call for different combinations of arrangements and instruments. Research on regional transport policy shows that the relationship between design fit and effectiveness depends on how policy components operate in context (Van Geet et al., 2021). The relevant managerial question is whether a particular configuration supports its stated purposes.

For Canadian sport policy, the findings identify two relationships for closer

examination: the connection between broader inclusion commitments and the organisations expected to deliver them, and the connection between individual health responsibility and collective support for participation. Policy reviews could address these relationships by tracing selected commitments from their stated rationale through designated actors, instruments, and intended recipients. This would turn a broad commitment to public benefit into an explicit account of action and responsibility.

Such an approach also makes trade-offs easier to discuss. Cairney (2025) shows why complete policy coherence is an unrealistic objective in systems containing competing purposes and fragmented authority. PARM can support a more focused assessment by identifying where policy components require coordination, where their purposes differ, and where those differences need an explicit managerial response.

**Scope and future research**

The analysis establishes a longitudinal pattern in three national policy texts. The next research step is to examine how these configurations develop through implementation. Linking the identified commitments to funding decisions, organisational mandates, programme criteria, and participation outcomes would show which changes in attention are carried into practice.

Comparative studies could then assess whether the Canadian sequence recurs in other sport systems or varies with their institutional arrangements. More frequent observations between policy generations would help distinguish enduring reorientation from temporary emphasis. Process tracing of policy formulation could also examine when performance, coordination, and legitimacy concerns influence particular changes. Together, these approaches would extend PARM from identifying configurations of policy attention to explaining their

formation and consequences.

The coding comparison is limited to agreement between the original and reviewed versions, rather than a blinded independent reliability design. Character-level agreement includes uncoded positions and is influenced by category prevalence. It should therefore be interpreted alongside the four-cell tables, coding scheme, and qualitative evidence. The comparison does not independently validate policy implementation or the causal explanations of observed changes.

## Conclusion

This study examined three generations of Canadian Sport Policy through the Policy Attention Reconfiguration Model (PARM). The findings identify policy evolution as a reconfiguration of attention across institutional, operational, and normative components. Established categories remained present across all three generations, while their trajectories differed both between and within the six analytical dimensions. Continuity in policy content thus coexisted with substantial changes in emphasis.

The three generations formed overlapping configurations. CSP1 provided the institutional reference point, with earlier peaks in governance structures and policy actors. CSP2 combined attention to implementation mechanisms with several governance arrangements and policy purposes, giving it a distinct position in the sequence. CSP3 brought health, participation, inclusion, equity, and broader populations into greater focus across several dimensions. This pattern supports an interpretation centered on system organisation, implementation coordination, and public-purpose reorientation. Each generation combined these concerns differently.

PARM's contribution is to connect policy attention, policy design, and sport governance within a framework that distinguishes broad dimensional patterns from changes in their constituent categories. The target-population findings illustrate its value: a comparatively stable dimension-level distribution accompanied substantial changes among specific groups.

By identifying such relationships, PARM reveals how policy reorientation can occur within a continuing framework and provides a structured basis for comparing successive policy generations.

For policymakers and sport managers, the framework directs attention to how public purposes connect with responsible organisations, implementation instruments, and intended recipients. Comparative research linking these configurations to funding, delivery, and outcomes can examine how changes in expressed priorities become changes in practice. The Canadian case establishes the value of studying policy evolution through the changing combinations of institutions, means, and purposes that give national sport policy its direction.

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**Table 1**

*Policy documents included in the analysis*

| Policy generation | Document | Year |
|---|---|---|
| CSP1 | Canadian Sport Policy | 2002 |
| CSP2 | Canadian Sport Policy 2012 | 2012 |
| CSP3 | Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035 | 2025 |

**Figure 1**

*PARM*

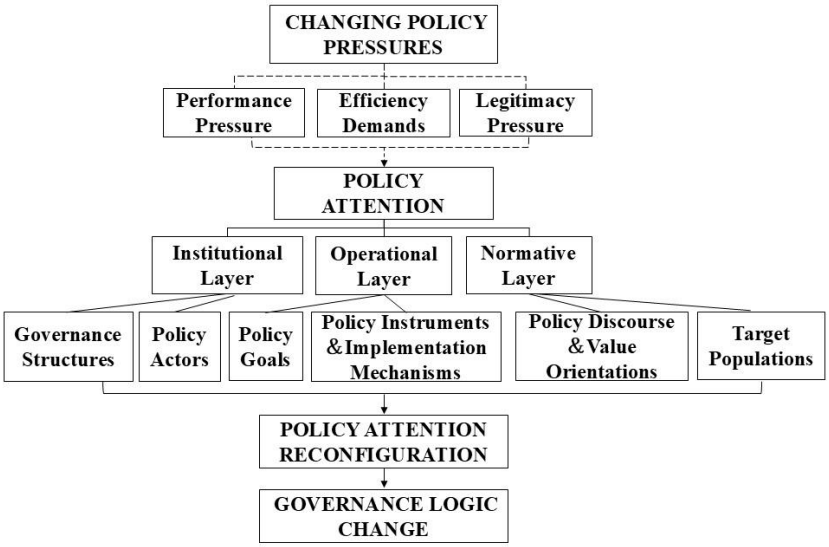


**Figure 2**

*Dimension-level attention evolution across three generations of Canadian Sport Policy*

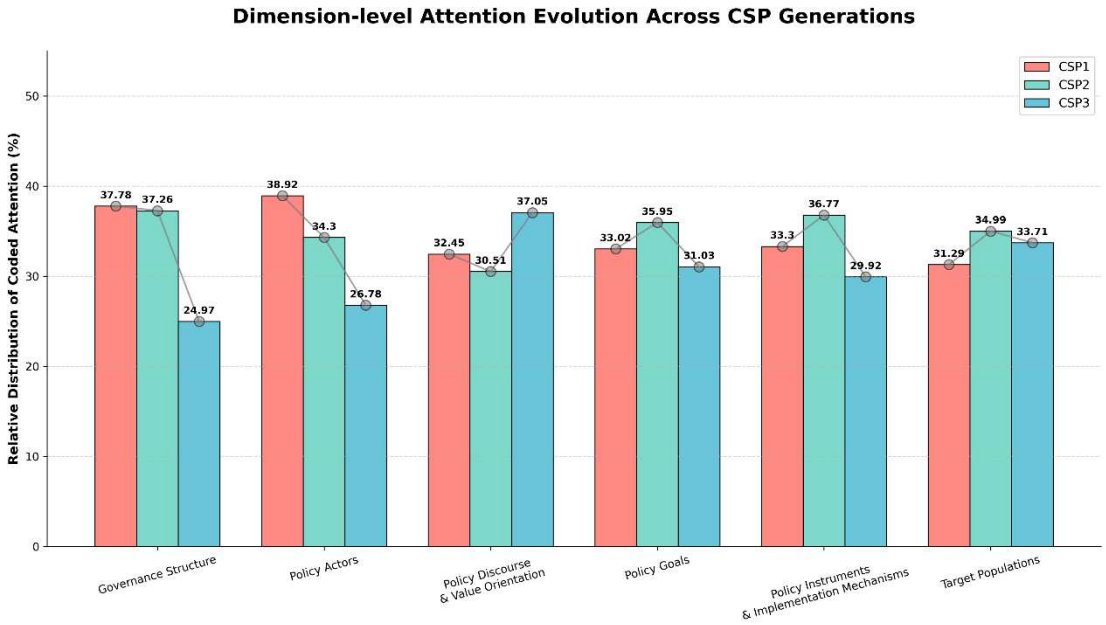
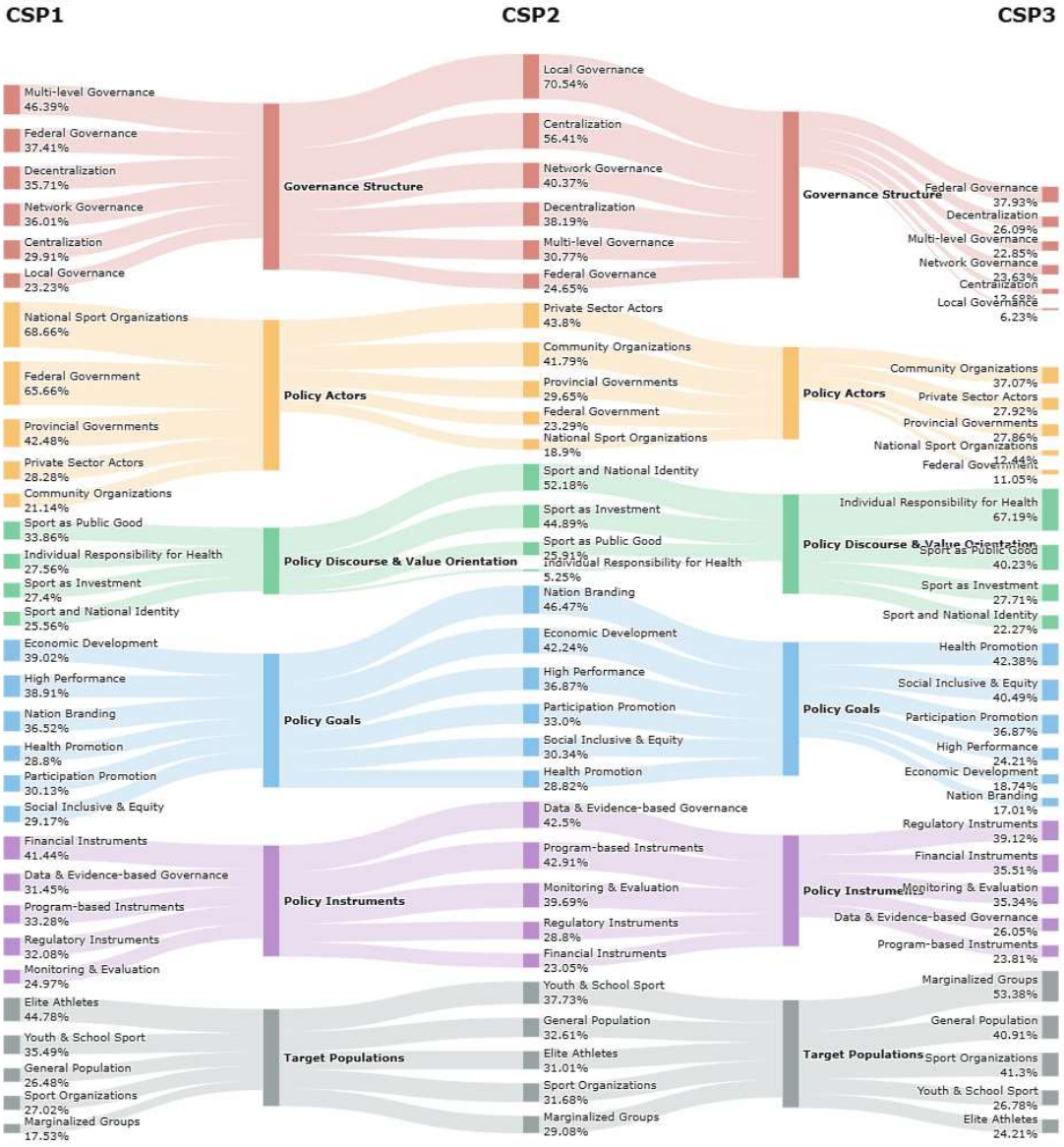


**Figure 3**

*Policy attention reconfiguration across 31 second-level nodes of Canadian Sport Policy*




# Data Availability

The original coding data are provided in Research_Data_CSP_Three_Generations.xlsx, and the reviewed second-coder data are provided in Second_Coder_Three_Generation_Coding_Data.xlsx.

These supplementary workbooks contain the English coded passages, policy and node identifiers, coding hierarchy, and data dictionaries. Kappa_Calculation_Methods_and_Results.docx and the Kappa_Reproducibility files provide the comparison method, character-position inputs, canonical policy texts, node-level four-cell tables, and executable Python script. These materials are supplied to editors and referees with the revised submission. The source corpus consists of the three publicly available Canadian Sport Policy documents identified in Table 1. No access restrictions are imposed on the shared research materials.

## Supplementary Files

This is a list of supplementary files associated with this preprint. Click to download.

- KappaReproducibility.zip
- ResearchDataCSPThreeGenerations.xlsx
- SecondCoderThreeGenerationCodingData.xlsx
- KappaCalculationMethodsandResults.docx