



The Indian Olympics Game Model: Lessons from Global Precedents for a 2036 Bid

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Abstract

As the Indian Olympic Association submitted a letter of intent to the International Olympic Committee to bid for the 2036 Summer Olympic Games, recognising the absence of an established national framework to assess its feasibility and developmental implications, this study aimed to evaluate whether hosting the Olympics can stimulate sustainable national development. The research employed a qualitative, comparative case-study approach by examining historical precedents from previous host nations, using official documents from the International Olympic Committee, academic literature, independent indices, and media analyses to evaluate four interrelated dimensions of infrastructure and urban transformation; economic growth and employment; diplomatic capital and global branding; and sports culture and legacy building. The results suggested that while the Olympics can deliver substantial benefits in terms of international visibility, urban renewal, and youth engagement, such outcomes are not automatic and depend heavily on governance capacity, fiscal discipline, and long-term legacy planning. Thereafter, this paper proposes an “Indian Olympic Games Model” emphasising a multi-city hosting framework, public–private investment synergies, and sustainability-led infrastructure design. Ultimately, the study highlights that India’s Olympic aspiration represents both a transformative opportunity and a structural challenge, contingent upon evidence-based planning and institutional coordination.

Keywords: *Olympic Games; India 2036; Mega-Events; Public–Private Partnerships; Legacy Planning*

1. Introduction

The proposition of India hosting the Olympic Games, hereafter referred to as the ‘Olympics’, has garnered increased attention in recent years from politicians, sports administrators, and academic observers alike. Historical experiences demonstrate inconsistent outcomes of hosting the Olympics, where, while some countries, like Greece and Brazil, experienced financial crises, underutilised venues, and unfulfilled promises of long-term societal benefits, other countries, like China, Australia, and the United Kingdom, successfully used the Games to modernise their infrastructure and improve their reputation internationally. [1].

A thorough evaluation is required in light of this background and India's formal announcement to host the Summer Olympics in 2036. More than just a declaration of national aspirations, hosting the Olympics requires substantial governmental spending, diplomatic efforts, urban development, and social mobilisation, where there may be long-term effects that include potential hazards as well as lingering advantages.

This study is motivated by the uneven track record of host nations for the Olympic Games [2]. It seeks to evaluate whether the Olympics can constitute a genuine development opportunity, rather than a costly burden, particularly for countries in the Global South. Specifically, it examines India's readiness to host the Olympics, generating sustainable value, given its economic trajectory, institutional capacity, and socio-political conditions. India is conceptualised both as a learner, drawing lessons from prior hosts, and as a contender capable of creating a context-sensitive model for Olympic planning and execution.

Because the Olympics are a self-explanatory test of national branding, governance, and long-term planning, an interdisciplinary approach is essential. For India, complexity is heightened by federal governance, regional disparities, diverse development priorities, and a rapidly growing youth population. The implications of hosting extend beyond infrastructure to national cohesion, equity, and access. Accordingly, this study explores four interrelated dimensions:

1. The actual benefits and risks observed by previous host nations.
2. The balance between projected gains, such as global exposure, economic stimulus, and national pride, and India's financial and infrastructural constraints.
3. The role of the Olympics in advancing India's international standing and soft power.
4. The potential for Olympic preparation to catalyse grassroots sporting development, youth engagement, and physical education reform.

This research contributes to both policy and academic levels. It provides evidence-based recommendations for India's Olympic candidature in areas such as financing, legacy planning, and sustainable infrastructure. Simultaneously, it enriches the literature on the governance and development impact of mega-events by incorporating perspectives from a Global South democracy, a discourse traditionally dominated by experiences from the Global North.

Thus, this paper investigates the extent to which the 2036 Summer Olympic Games can catalyse sustainable socio-economic and infrastructural development in India, and what strategies in governance, financing, and legacy planning can risks of fiscal strain and underutilised infrastructure be mitigated.

Ultimately, the study aims to shift the discussion from whether India can host the Olympics to how it should host them to maximise national benefit and minimise long-term burdens. Beyond being a sporting spectacle, hosting the Olympics could serve as a declaration of capability, inclusive development, and an investment in India's youthful demographic dividend. At a time when global influence increasingly hinges on non-military instruments such as culture and sport, India's Olympic ambition presents both opportunities and risks. The central challenge is ensuring that, if undertaken, the Games leave behind not only sports facilities but enduring systems, institutions, and communities that embed sport into the nation's long-term development trajectory.

2. Literature Review of Previous Host Nations' Experiences

Hosting the Olympic Games is widely regarded as a prestigious opportunity, promising international visibility, urban transformation, and potential economic growth. Yet historical evidence

demonstrates that outcomes vary greatly; some nations use the Olympics to spur transformation, while others are plagued with debt, underutilised facilities, and unmet expectations.

The literature review is organised into six thematic sections:

- A. Evolution of the Olympic Games Financing
- B. Persistent Cost Overruns
- C. Macroeconomic Impact
- D. Case Studies of Select Host Nations
- E. India's Experience with Mega-Events
- F. Lessons for Emerging Economies like India

A. Evolution of Olympic Games' Financing

Pre-1984 Model

From the modern Olympics' inception in Athens in 1896 until the 1984 Los Angeles Games, host nations primarily relied on government funding. Events operated on a non-profit basis, with public expenditure accounting for the bulk of costs. This model frequently led to financial strain; the 1972 Munich Olympics incurred losses of \$600 million, while the 1976 Montreal Games left the city nearly bankrupt with debts approaching \$1 billion, a phenomenon known as the "Montreal Trap" [21].

Post-1984 model

The 1984 Los Angeles Olympics marked a paradigm shift toward private financing. Rejecting taxpayer funding, organisers sourced the budget entirely from private capital, turning a profit and demonstrating the commercial viability of the Olympics [4]. This model established a precedent for corporate sponsorship and privatisation in Olympic funding.

B. Persistent Cost Overruns

Despite increased private sector involvement, cost overruns remain endemic. The 2024 update of the *Oxford Olympics Study* reports that the last three Summer Games collectively cost \$51 billion, representing a 185% overrun in 2022 terms [2]. The Paris 2024 Olympics alone escalated from an initial \$3.6 billion budget to \$8.8 billion, excluding broader capital expenditures such as transportation or urban renewal. Greece's 2004 Athens Olympics similarly exemplify fiscal overextension; while not the sole cause, Olympic spending contributed significantly to the country's national financial strain [10].

C. Macroeconomic Impact

Several empirical studies have attempted to quantify the broader economic impact of hosting the Olympics. Empirical studies on the economic implications of the Olympics vary. Irons (2000) found that host countries experienced 1.5% higher GDP growth in the four years preceding the Games, followed by a decline over the next eight years [5]. Airola and Craig (2000) disaggregated visitor spending, highlighting that while athlete-related expenditures were limited, corporate sponsorships and International Olympic Committee (IOC)-affiliated spending provided substantial revenue [6]. Hospitality, construction, and transportation sectors often benefit most significantly.

D. Case Studies of Select Host Nations

Table 1. Summary of select host country experiences in hosting the Olympics and other international sporting events, and lessons learnt.

| Host City / Year | Key Spending & Outcomes | Lessons Learned |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Beijing 2022 (Winter Olympics) | Revenue USD 2.289B vs. cost USD 2.237B; GDP per capita increased from 80,976 to 89,358 yuan. | Strong economic planning, technological integration, sustainable urban growth [7]. |
| Rio 2016 | Significant post-Olympic debt; underutilized venues. | Fiscal discipline essential; avoid investing heavily without clear long-term use [8]. |
| London 2012 | UK GDP £1.9B; London-specific gains £4.3B; no white elephants policy. | Strategic planning ensures sustainable economic and social legacy [9]. |
| South Africa 2010 (FIFA World Cup) | Economic boost USD 509M; post-event underutilization. | Developing nations must plan adaptive reuse strategies [29;39]. |
| Athens 2004 | Costs doubled to USD 11B; job creation mostly temporary. | Risk of fiscal overextension; avoid over-optimistic assumptions [10]. |
| Sydney 2000 | Economic benefit USD 4.5–5.1B; 90,000–156,000 jobs. | Benefits often localized; long-term planning essential [3]. |
| Barcelona 1992 | 20,000 permanent jobs; doubled tourism. | Urban regeneration and tourism growth as a sustainable model [36]. |

E. India's Experience with Mega-Events

India's experience with hosting large-scale events, including the Commonwealth Games (2010), the Indian Premier League (IPL) (18 seasons, 2008-2025), the Cricket World Cups (1987, 1996, 2011), and the Asian Games (1951, 1982), showcases its capability to organise global sporting events. Moreover, India's economic policies and rapid infrastructure development signal its preparedness for an Olympic bid. The 2023 G20 Summit¹ hosted in India demonstrated logistical efficiency, security coordination, and high-level international participation.

Despite these strengths in strong execution capacity, cost overruns remain a major concern, as evidenced by the 2010 Commonwealth Games, where the final expenditure exceeded initial estimates nearly ninefold, reaching approximately USD 4 billion [11]. This mirrors global trends, with events like the Rio 2016 Olympics leading to prolonged financial struggles.

F. Lessons for emerging economies like India

In summary, the literature review highlights that the Olympics are a high-risk and high-reward undertaking. Developing nations often frame Olympic bids around promises of housing, urban renewal, and inclusive development [12]. Yet risks of white elephants are high without adequate post-Games

¹ G20 summit: An annual meeting of leaders from 19 countries and the European Union to discuss international economic cooperation, financial stability, and global policy coordination.

planning. Most of the benefits tend to be localised (tourism, construction, branding), while costs are national and long-term. Successful hosts, such as Barcelona, London, and Los Angeles, demonstrated careful planning, private-sector partnerships, and legacy-focused infrastructure. By contrast, Athens, Montreal, and Rio illustrate how fiscal mismanagement can overshadow potential gains.

For India, the challenge lies in translating its organisational experience into a financially disciplined and socially inclusive model of Olympic hosting, with a focus on building a legacy. India can capitalise on its strengths such as favourable youth demographics, rapid infrastructure development and diplomatic credibility. Still, it must enforce strict budget discipline, post-Games infrastructure use, and inclusive planning to avoid fiscal distress.

3. Methodology

To evaluate India's potential to host the 2036 Summer Olympic Games, this study adopts a qualitative, comparative, and case-study-based design. The approach enabled an in-depth assessment of both tangible and intangible outcomes, including urban transformation, economic impact, sports culture development, and legacy effects, rather than focusing solely on immediate financial returns. Methodologically, the analysis draws on (i) historical precedents and outputs from previous host nations, (ii) India's past experiences with mega-events and national infrastructure and policy frameworks, and (iii) comparative lessons for planning, sustainability, and public-private collaboration.

The analysis relies exclusively on secondary research. Peer-reviewed literature on mega-event governance, sports diplomacy, urban planning, and economic development provides the theoretical foundation; case studies of both Global North hosts (e.g., London 2012, Sydney 2000, Barcelona 1992) and emerging economy hosts (e.g., Beijing 2008, Rio 2016, Sochi 2014) and empirical studies of infrastructure use, tourism, and social impact. These are examined to identify patterns of success and failure. Independent evaluations, investigative media reporting, and scholarly assessments of tourism, infrastructure utilisation, and post-Games legacy are used to cross-verify claims made in official documents and highlight recurring challenges such as opportunity costs and budget overruns. This multi-source approach allowed cross-verification, trend identification, and assessment of patterns of success and failure relevant to India.

A thematic comparative framework was applied to synthesise insights across finance, infrastructure, urban development, and socio-cultural legacy. By integrating lessons from international precedents with India-specific contexts, including federal governance, urban disparities, and institutional capacity, the study formulated the "Indian Olympic Games Model," emphasising sustainable planning, public-private partnerships, technological integration, and post-Games adaptability.

3.1. Key Challenges

The main methodological challenges included (i) source bias, as official IOC and host-country publications often emphasize achievements while downplaying risks; (ii) attribution, as it is difficult to isolate Olympic-specific impacts from broader economic or social trends; (iii) measurement inconsistency, since economic, social, and environmental effects were reported using different metrics across countries; and (iv) temporal incompleteness, given that the full legacy of mega-events often unfolds over decades.

3.2 Adjustments to Research

To address these challenges, claims from official sources were cross-checked against multiple independent studies, media reports, and post-event evaluations. Comparative lessons were contextualised for India's institutional, infrastructural, and socio-economic realities rather than applied wholesale. The analysis emphasised mechanisms, processes, and legacy pathways rather than purely quantitative projections, ensuring that conclusions and recommendations were evidence-based, context-sensitive, and grounded in the research conducted.

4. *The Case for India as an Olympics Host Nation*

For much of the modern era, the privilege of hosting the world's largest sporting events, particularly the Olympics, was concentrated in North America and Europe. The 2008 Beijing Olympics marked a turning point. As Cornelissen (2010) notes, this event signalled a new phase in international sport, with emerging economies in the Global South positioning themselves as credible hosts [13]. Success factors included centralised governance, long-term planning, and leveraging national narratives, while failures in other nations often resulted from fragmented institutional oversight and unrealistic budgets [8;14]. Since then, Brazil (Rio 2016) and China (2022 Winter Olympics) have used the Olympics not only to showcase athletic performance but also to drive infrastructure development, expand diplomatic capital, and reposition themselves within the global order.

India, despite being the world's most populous country and the fourth-largest economy [16], remains the only BRICS² nation that has never hosted either the Olympics or the FIFA³ World Cup. This absence, coupled with governance challenges and variable state-level capacity, represents both a risk and an opportunity. Effective coordination between central and state governments, clear funding strategies, and robust institutional oversight will be key determinants of success. India is now seeking to change this trajectory. At the 141st IOC Session in October 2023, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi formally declared the country's ambition to host the 2036 Summer Olympics. The proposed bid centres on Ahmedabad, Gujarat, with an estimated budget of USD 7.5 billion [17], exceeding even the projected costs of the Los Angeles 2028 Games.

Over the past two decades, India has steadily accumulated experience in staging large-scale international events. The Commonwealth Games (CWG) (Delhi, 2010) and the G20 Summit (2023) demonstrated logistical and organisational capability, while other events such as the FIFA U-17 World Cup (2017), ICC⁴ Cricket World Cups (1987, 1996, 2011), and the Asian Games (1951, 1982) highlighted the country's capacity to attract global attention. However, analysis shows mixed outcomes: while the Delhi CWG 2010 Games delivered infrastructure improvements, it was marred by delayed projects and cost overruns, underscoring the need for disciplined governance, transparent budgeting, and clear post-event planning [13].

Most recently, India has submitted a formal bid to host the 2030 Commonwealth Games in Ahmedabad, a move viewed by government and sports officials alike as a strategic precursor to the 2036 Olympic bid. In their bid presentation, Indian officials explicitly linked the CWG bid with long-term national ambitions, emphasising sustainability, inclusivity, and infrastructural readiness as foundational for future Olympic-scale events [40]. The Indian Olympic Association's unanimous approval and government guarantees reinforce the interpretation that the CWG bid is not just a standalone ambition but

² BRICS: An association of five major emerging national economies: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa.

³ FIFA: The Fédération Internationale de Football Association, the global governing body for international football (soccer).

⁴ ICC: The International Cricket Council, the global governing body for cricket.

a deliberate platform to build credibility, test logistics, and initiate infrastructure development aligned with India's Olympic vision.

Beyond these large-scale bids, India has also shown a willingness to experiment in less popular sports, such as American football. The Elite Football League of India (ELFI), launched in 2013, sought to introduce a U.S.-style professional league. Despite initial media interest, it faltered due to high infrastructural costs, weak grassroots engagement, and minimal cultural traction [13]. Thus, it offered valuable lessons that large-scale sporting ventures in India must reflect local sporting culture, and that long-term audience engagement requires grassroots development rather than reliance on imported entertainment models.

Hosting the Olympics presents India with five strategic opportunities, each with corresponding risks: (refer to Appendix A)

1. **Infrastructure and urban transformation:** Opportunity for sustainable urban planning; risk of underutilised venues if planning ignores post-Games usage.
2. **Economic growth and employment generation:** Potential for short- and long-term jobs; risk of inflated visitor projections and misallocation of funds.
3. **Diplomatic capital and global branding:** Strengthens India's soft power; risk of reputational damage if the Games fail to meet international standards.
4. **Public-private investment synergies:** Can reduce fiscal burden through PPPs; risk arises if contracts are poorly managed or lack accountability mechanisms.
5. **Strengthening of sports culture and national legacy:** An opportunity to enhance youth engagement and Olympic disciplines; a risk that investments are temporary and benefits do not trickle down to grassroots programs.

By explicitly weighing opportunities against these risks, India can design a more resilient bid. Lessons from past hosts show that countries like London (2012) and Sydney (2000) succeeded because they integrated risk mitigation into their planning, whereas Athens (2004) and Rio (2016) suffered from budget overruns, post-event debt, and underutilised infrastructure [1;15].

4.1 Infrastructure and Urban Transformation

India's infrastructural shortcomings, particularly in urban transportation, environmental sustainability, and sports facilities, are well-documented. Hosting the Olympics could catalyse systemic upgrades in these areas. In Ahmedabad and its surrounding regions, modernisation is likely to accelerate through metro and railway expansions, the creation of green public spaces, and the adoption of smart-city technologies. Equally important would be investments in sustainable architectural practices. Drawing on precedents such as Tokyo 2020, which incorporated hydrogen-powered transport and carbon-neutral planning [18], India could position the Olympics as a testing ground for climate-resilient and environmentally conscious design. Initiatives such as solar-powered venues, zero-waste stadiums, and the use of sustainable construction materials would not only serve the Games but also provide lasting assets for the urban landscape.

Olympic-driven development also tends to focus on underutilised or underdeveloped urban zones, offering opportunities to introduce social housing schemes, modern sanitation systems, and advanced digital connectivity. Experiences from previous host nations illustrate this transformative potential.

Table 2. Legacy Impacts of Olympic Host Cities

| Host City / Year | Legacy Impact |
|------------------|---|
| London 2012 | Revitalized East London's Stratford district; industrial land converted to mixed-use neighbourhoods; added housing, schools, parks; improved local quality of life [9]. |
| Rio 2016 | Expanded transportation infrastructure: bus rapid transit corridors and metro extensions; enhanced connectivity for underserved communities [8]. |
| Beijing 2022 | Environmental upgrades: water purification systems, expanded green spaces, and sustainable urban planning; long-term ecological benefits for the city [7]. |

In this light, the Olympics become more than a sporting spectacle: they represent an opportunity for inclusive urban transformation, embedding sustainability and social development within the broader legacy of the Games.

4.2 Economic Growth and Employment Generation

The economic impact of hosting the Olympics is multifaceted, with a demonstrated multiplier effect⁵ in several host nations. Revenues from broadcasting rights, sponsorship deals, ticket sales, and tourism collectively stimulate economic activity. In today's globalised and media-saturated environment, host countries enjoy broader international exposure and potentially higher financial returns than earlier generations of the Olympics.

For India, where youth unemployment remains a persistent challenge, the Olympics could serve as a significant driver of job creation. Preparation and execution would require large-scale labour in sectors including:

- Infrastructure construction (stadiums, transport, utilities)
- Hospitality and tourism services
- Transportation operations (metro, rail, road logistics)
- Security and public safety

Moreover, the Games would provide opportunities for skills development, including event management, multilingual communication, and operational logistics. Given India's youthful population and large labour pool, there is minimal risk of overreliance on foreign contractors; local employment and productivity could be substantially enhanced. Improvements in logistics and transport infrastructure are also likely to stimulate long-term regional economic growth, benefiting both the host city and surrounding areas. Additionally, media exposure and tourism can be leveraged to create a multiplier effect across various sectors.

Table 3. Economic and Employment Lessons from Past Olympic Games

| Host City / Year | Economic & Employment Impact |
|------------------|---|
| Sydney 2000 | Economic boost of USD 4.5–5.1 billion; 90,000–156,000 jobs, mainly in construction, tourism, and event management [19]. |

⁵ Multiplier effect: The process by which an initial injection of spending (e.g., investment, government expenditure, or event-related spending) generates a larger overall increase in national income and economic activity through subsequent rounds of consumption and production.

| | |
|--------------|--|
| Athens 2004 | Projected creation of up to 445,000 jobs across construction, tourism, and public services; economic impact estimated USD 10 –16 billion [10;20] |
| London 2012 | UK GDP gain £1.9 billion; London-specific gains £4.3 billion; employment and welfare concentrated in East London; emphasized sustainable urban economic growth [21]. |
| Beijing 2022 | Boosted domestic economic activity through venue construction, transport upgrades, and tourism; China’s per capita GDP increased by 8,382 yuan, which is approximately 10.35% from 2021 to 2023 [7]. |
| Rio 2016 | Short-term employment gains in construction and services; post-Games debt limited long-term benefits; highlighted need for sustainable planning [8]. |

4.3 Diplomatic Capital and Global Branding

Hosting the Olympic Games offers a unique opportunity to enhance India’s global visibility and cultural influence. Similar to Beijing’ Summer Olympics 2008, which was carefully designed to signal China’s emergence on the world stage [5], India could use the 2036 Games to project a narrative of diversity, resilience, and cultural richness. Highlighting the country’s multifaceted traditions, including music, languages, cuisine, and festivals, can form the thematic foundation of an Olympic identity that is both authentically Indian and internationally appealing.

This approach aligns with India’s broader efforts to strengthen its global brand. The tourism sector stands to gain directly and indirectly. Even with limited physical attendance at Tokyo 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Games’ digital reach generated record tourism in subsequent years [34]. For India, whose attractions include UNESCO World Heritage sites, ecotourism, and beach destinations, the Olympics could serve as a sustained promotional platform.

Increased international visitation would drive higher spending across hotels, restaurants, entertainment, and domestic transport. Expansion of hospitality infrastructure, transit hubs, and multilingual services would provide long-term benefits, strengthening India’s tourism ecosystem beyond the Games. Academic studies [22] demonstrate that major global events create a legacy effect⁶, sustaining elevated tourist flows for up to three years post-event. Such sustained interest would boost foreign exchange earnings and support small and medium enterprises in the travel and hospitality sectors.

Table 4. Key Lessons from Past Olympics on Branding & Diplomatic Capital

| Host City / Year | Impact on Global Visibility & Tourism |
|------------------|--|
| Beijing 2008 | Projected China as a modern, capable, and culturally rich nation; long-term gains in tourism and international perception. |
| Tokyo 2020 | Despite pandemic restrictions, digital exposure led to increased tourism in subsequent years; strengthened global brand. |
| London 2012 | Promoted UK as a hub of culture, innovation, and hospitality; legacy tourism boosted East London and wider city economy. |
| Rio 2016 | Increased global awareness of Brazil’s culture and cities; tourism spikes immediately post-Games, though long-term infrastructure challenges limited sustained benefits. |

⁶ Legacy effect: Long-term benefits left behind after a major event.

Therefore, India can utilise the Olympics as a platform to showcase its cultural diversity and modern capabilities, aligning event marketing with tourism promotion to achieve both short-term and long-term impacts. Additionally, investments in infrastructure and services will enhance the visitor experience and global perception. Lastly, media and digital channels can be leveraged to maximise reach and post-event tourism legacy.

4.4 Public-Private Investment Synergy

Financing a mega-event like the Olympics presents significant fiscal challenges. However, well-structured public-private partnerships (PPPs) can mitigate these risks and enhance financial sustainability. India is well-positioned in this regard, given the strength of its corporate sector. Major companies such as Reliance Industries, Tata Group, and Adani Group have already demonstrated substantial commitments to sports, infrastructure, entertainment, and community development through initiatives such as the Reliance Foundation Youth Sports, Tata Football Academy, and Adani Sports Infrastructure projects, which provide concrete evidence of capacity and interest [23;24;25].

Drawing inspiration from the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics, the first Games to turn a profit through aggressive corporate sponsorship, India can adopt a similar model. The IPL has already established a precedent for high-value sports marketing, where corporations willingly invest in title sponsorships, broadcasting rights, and merchandising [13]. The IPL model, combined with experience from Pro Kabaddi League (PKL) and Indian Super League (ISL), provides a systematic framework for leveraging private investment while ensuring accountability and economic sustainability.

Private investment in infrastructure, media production, and licensed merchandise can significantly reduce the burden on public finances. By promoting entrepreneurship and long-term stakeholder engagement, India can ensure that Olympic-related development is efficient, accountable, and economically sustainable.

Table 5. Lessons from Past Events on Public-Private Investment

| Host City / Year | Public-Private Approach & Impact |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Los Angeles 1984 | Fully funded by private sponsors; generated a profit; demonstrated the potential of corporate involvement in mega-events. |
| Tokyo 2020 | Extensive corporate partnerships helped finance venues, media coverage, and merchandising; reduced reliance on public funds. |
| Indian Premier League (2008–present) | High-value corporate sponsorships and broadcasting deals created a profitable sports ecosystem; demonstrates India's capacity for large-scale private engagement. |
| Proposed India 2036 Olympics | Potential to leverage corporate capital, media rights, and merchandise sales; PPPs could finance infrastructure, services, and event management efficiently. |

By utilising private sector funding, India can reduce the fiscal burden on the government. It can encourage corporate sponsorship in infrastructure, media, and merchandising as well as foster long-term partnerships for accountability and sustainable development. Existing sports marketing models (e.g., IPL, PKL, ISL) can be leveraged as proof of concept.

4.5 Sports Culture, National Legacy, and Youth Empowerment

India's sporting identity has been historically dominated by cricket, with comparatively limited success in Olympic disciplines. The opportunity to host the Olympics could assist in recalibrating the

nation's approach to sports. By elevating Olympic disciplines to the forefront of public discourse, India can stimulate a cultural shift towards more athletic engagement and youth empowerment.

Moreso, the Olympics would promote underrepresented sports, further incentivise investment in coaching and sports science, and provide elite athletes with access to world-class training facilities. Post-Games, the Olympic venues could be repurposed as community centres and training academies, particularly in regions that currently lack quality sports infrastructure. Sydney 2000, for example, successfully built a long-term sporting culture through youth participation programs and facility development [3]. Moreover, India's recent successes in the Asian Games, combined with increasing visibility in global competitions, suggest that a broader Olympic focus could consolidate and amplify these achievements.

Table 6. Lessons from Past Olympics on Sports Culture & Legacy

| Host City / Year | Impact on Sporting Culture & Legacy |
|------------------|--|
| Sydney 2000 | Increased youth participation; facilities converted to community and training centers; long-term boost to national sports culture. |
| London 2012 | Legacy programs encouraged grassroots sports participation; repurposed venues strengthened community engagement and athlete development. |
| Beijing 2008 | Promoted national investment in underrepresented sports; development of training facilities with post-Olympic utility. |

India can therefore promote underrepresented sports through media exposure and public engagement. Using the Olympics' infrastructure for post-event community and training purposes, as well as strengthening coaching, sports science, and youth development programs, it can leverage the Olympics to embed a sustainable, inclusive sports culture nationally.

Ultimately, India's 2036 Olympic bid is more than a logistical or symbolic endeavour, but a strategic investment in the nation's future. By advancing infrastructure, employment, global branding, public-private investment, and sports culture, India can generate transformational benefits that extend well beyond the Games themselves. Where emerging economies often derive greater financial and reputational dividends from hosting mega-events than developed nations [26;29], with transparency, foresight, and inclusive planning, the 2036 Olympics could become a defining milestone, celebrating athletic excellence while projecting the pluralistic, dynamic identity of the world's largest democracy.

5. The Indian Olympic Games Model

The proposed model translates international lessons into a five-dimensional framework tailored to India's federal structure, demographic scale, and long-term developmental priorities:

1. Post-Olympic Adaptability
2. Multi-City Hosting
3. Public-Private Partnership Frameworks
4. Sustainability Planning
5. Technological Innovation ('Smart Olympics')

It is crucial to move the debate beyond whether India can host the Olympics, toward how it should host them to maximise developmental benefits while minimising fiscal, environmental, and social risks.

5.1 Post-Olympic Adaptability

A persistent challenge in Olympic planning globally has been monumentalism, the tendency to pursue iconic infrastructure projects that prioritise symbolism over utility. Past host cities, including Athens (2004) and Rio de Janeiro (2016), illustrate the consequences of this approach, where high-cost venues fell into disuse, became financially burdensome, and left lasting public dissatisfaction [10;8]. India must avoid repeating such mistakes by adopting a modular and sustainability-focused model. The Games should be treated not as a stand-alone spectacle but as an integrated component of broader urban development agendas. This entails prioritising existing facilities where feasible, while ensuring that any new infrastructure is designed for post-Olympic adaptability, such as conversion into residential housing, educational campuses, community sports complexes, or public recreation centres. International precedents support this approach: London 2012's Olympic Village was converted into thousands of residential units, while Sydney 2000 and Vancouver 2010 successfully repurposed Olympic Parks⁷ and Athlete Villages⁸ for community and municipal use [21]. Similarly, Barcelona's 1992 urban waterfront transformation created lasting multipurpose public spaces, demonstrating the potential of foresight in Olympic infrastructure planning [36].

5.2 Multi-City Hosting Model

Given India's federal democracy, geographic diversity, and logistical complexity, a multi-city hosting model emerges as a particularly viable strategy. By distributing sporting events across multiple urban centres, India can spread financial investment, mitigate logistical bottlenecks, and ensure that the benefits of hosting accrue to a wider set of regions. While Ahmedabad, with its Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel Sports Enclave, could serve as the central hub, other cities, including Mumbai, Delhi, Bengaluru, and Kolkata, could host complementary sports clusters based on existing facilities and regional expertise. Such a federated model aligns with evolving IOC preferences, as observed in the regional hosting strategy considered for Milan-Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics [35], and allows India to leverage local governance mechanisms, existing infrastructure, and urban capacities while reducing the need for large-scale construction projects.

5.3 Public-Private Partnership (Ppp) Framework

A central concern in Olympic hosting remains cost management. Historical examples, from Montreal's 1976 decades-long debt to Rio's 2016 post-Games financial strain, underscore the risk of unsustainable public expenditure [8]. India can mitigate these risks through a robust PPP framework, wherein state agencies focus on regulatory oversight, and private consortia design, build, and manage infrastructure with explicit post-Games use agreements. Build-operate-transfer (BOT) arrangements could ensure that Olympic villages are converted into university hostels or mid-income housing. London 2012 provides a successful example, with 60% of the Olympic Village privately funded and subsequently repurposed for residential use [21]. Moreover, establishing special-purpose vehicles (SPVs), such as a Gujarat Olympic Planning and Infrastructure Corporation, could streamline coordination across multiple levels of government, attract foreign investment, and insulate decision-making from short-term political pressures.

5.4 Sustainability

Fiscal discipline must be reinforced through comprehensive budgeting that separates operating costs, infrastructure investments, and public service expenditures, drawing on models such as Tokyo 2020

⁷ Olympic parks: Venues hosting multiple Olympic sports and events.

⁸ Athlete villages: Residential complexes for athletes during the Games.

[34]. Contingency buffers, independent audits, and transparent procurement procedures are critical to minimising risks of corruption or financial mismanagement, lessons drawn from India's 2010 Commonwealth Games [33]. Cost efficiency can be further improved by leveraging existing transportation networks, prioritising sustainability, and avoiding vanity projects. Investments should embed eco-conscious and climate-resilient design, including solar-powered facilities, carbon-neutral operations, and smart energy management systems, which align with India's broader sustainable development objectives.

5.5 Smart Olympics

India's technological ecosystem offers an opportunity to deliver a "smart Olympics," where artificial intelligence (AI), real-time analytics, and digital platforms enhance everything from security and crowd management to athlete performance and fan engagement. Existing platforms, such as Aadhaar⁹ and CoWIN¹⁰, demonstrate the country's capacity for mass coordination and verification, which can be adapted for Olympic accreditation, ticketing, and logistical management. Partnerships with domestic and global technology firms could enable AI-powered surveillance, real-time crowd monitoring, and predictive analytics for traffic and venue management. These innovations would not only improve operational efficiency but also position India as a leader in technologically advanced and sustainable mega-events.

Beyond infrastructure and economics, the Olympics present an opportunity to reshape India's sports culture and civic identity. The Games could, on an estimate, generate over 100,000 temporary and permanent jobs across sectors such as construction, transportation, hospitality, and security, while also expanding access to sports facilities and training at the grassroots level. Post-Games venues could be transferred to municipal governments, educational institutions, or sports academies, democratizing access to high-quality infrastructure. Inclusive programs in host cities could focus on employment, skill development, and community engagement, ensuring that the Olympic legacy extends beyond physical assets into lasting social transformation. Historical evidence, such as Sydney 2000 and London 2012, demonstrates that integrating youth participation and community engagement into Olympic planning can substantially enhance a host nation's sporting culture [21].

Measuring success must extend beyond short-term metrics such as medal tallies or tourism spikes. A comprehensive evaluation framework should encompass long-term economic impact, employment generation, infrastructural durability, civic engagement, and the sustainability of social programs. Barcelona 1992 exemplifies the potential for lasting positive impact, with sustained tourism growth and urban revitalisation, whereas Athens 2004 illustrates the perils of unrealistic expectations, fiscal overreach, and weak post-Games planning. India must ground its Olympic vision in evidence-based projections, realistic targets, and continuous policy feedback mechanisms to ensure that the Games function as a catalyst for inclusive national development rather than a short-lived spectacle.

Ultimately, India's potential bid for the 2036 Summer Olympics offers a historic opportunity to redefine how mega-events are conceptualised and executed in the Global South. By adopting a decentralised, sustainable, and inclusive strategy, leveraging public-private partnerships, existing infrastructure, and technological innovation, India can design a hosting model that maximises national benefit while minimising financial and social risks. With careful planning, rigorous institutional frameworks, and an emphasis on legacy, the Games could leave behind a transformative imprint of regeneration, opportunity, and national pride, positioning India as a global leader not only in sports but in sustainable development and civic innovation.

⁹ Aadhaar: India's national digital identity system for residents.

¹⁰ CoWIN: India's digital platform for COVID-19 vaccination registration and tracking.

Integrating Lessons and Strategic Planning

A critical and systematic analysis must inform India's ambition to host the Olympic Games, as past host countries have faced substantial financial, environmental, and socio-political consequences as a result of their Olympic ventures. The legacy of these Games is often mixed, ranging from transformative urban regeneration, as in the case of Barcelona (1992), to long-term debt burdens and infrastructural decay, as seen in Athens (2004), Rio (2016), and Sochi (2014). By closely examining these case studies, India can anticipate potential challenges and design a hosting model that is resilient, efficient, and development-focused.

One of the most consistent lessons across past Olympics is the issue of opportunity cost. Barrios et al. emphasise that resources devoted to Olympic infrastructure and event management are often diverted from other critical developmental priorities such as healthcare, education, or public housing [27]. The sheer magnitude of these investments frequently overshadows the long-term social utility of the assets they create. In India's context, where development disparities persist across states, an Olympic bid must be scrutinised not just in terms of direct cost but also in terms of the alternative value that expenditure might have produced. The post-Games economic burden is another recurring concern. Müller's (2014) study of the Sochi Winter Olympics 2014 reveals staggering ongoing costs, with annual maintenance, foregone tax revenue, and interest payments estimated at \$1.2 billion [28]. Sochi's lavish construction, much of which was undertaken in a region lacking pre-existing sports infrastructure, created a legacy of expensive underutilization. To avoid similar outcomes, India must integrate post-Olympic usage into the early planning stages, ensuring that venues are not only economically viable but also socially beneficial. Infrastructure must be designed for adaptability and repurposing, with clear mandates for long-term maintenance and functionality. Lessons from the London (2012) Olympics [21] reinforce this point, where proactive post-Games conversion of venues into housing and educational facilities ensured a more sustainable legacy, an approach India would do well to emulate. Moreover, these risks are amplified when governance and funding structures are weak or fragmented. Budget overruns and post-event debt are consistently higher when institutional responsibility is unclear. In India, where cooperation between federal and state governments varies, transparent multi-tiered budgeting, rigorous audits, and legally mandated cost ceilings can help balance these risks with possible benefits, ensuring expenditures are carefully targeted for long-term development.

Environmental degradation is another often-overlooked dimension of Olympic hosting. Large-scale international events increase air pollution, fuel consumption, and waste generation, particularly in cities already grappling with poor air quality. Congestion caused by construction activities, increased vehicle traffic, and energy use compounds local and global environmental costs. In the Indian context, where cities like Delhi and Mumbai already rank among the most polluted in the world, stringent green planning policies must be adopted. A low-carbon Olympics, powered by renewable energy sources and emphasising mass transit, sustainable architecture, and smart mobility systems, could present an opportunity for India to demonstrate leadership in environmentally responsible development.

Additionally, the economic displacement effects associated with Olympic hosting are frequently underrepresented in cost-benefit analyses. The presence of Olympic tourists often discourages regular international visitors, who are deterred by anticipated congestion and inflated prices. Moreover, residents are also known to leave host cities during the Games, leading to reductions in typical local spending. Input-output models commonly used to predict economic benefits often fail to account for this expenditure switching [37], whereby spending during the Games, economic activity does not represent new growth but rather a reallocation of existing spending patterns [30]. Empirical evidence from the Los Angeles (1984) and Atlanta (1996) Olympics indicates that while certain sectors like tourism see increased demand, local restaurants and entertainment venues often report decreased revenue as regular customers avoid crowded areas or change their habits during the event [19; 31]. During the Olympic

period, due to this phenomenon. Furthermore, reports reveal that visitor projections are often significantly overestimated. Ex post analysis showed international visitor forecasts were 100% too high for Tokyo 1964, and 56% too high for Los Angeles 1984 [32], highlighting a consistent trend of inflated estimates that can distort expected economic benefits.

Another critical lesson is that Olympic visitors exhibit distinct spending behaviours when compared to ordinary tourists. Their expenditure is more narrowly focused on tickets, travel, and accommodation, with less emphasis on entertainment, dining, and leisure, which traditionally generate significant tax revenue [38]. Governments relying on Olympic tourism to boost fiscal intake may find actual returns falling short of expectations. This highlights the need for conservative and evidence-based forecasting in India's planning models, including realistic assumptions about international visitor behaviour and local economic stimulation.

The risk of budget overruns is arguably the most ubiquitous issue plaguing Olympic hosts. Historical analysis shows that every Olympics since 1960 has exceeded its original budget. The Montreal (1976) Olympics became a symbol of fiscal mismanagement, saddling the city with debt repayments that lasted three decades [21]. Even more recent and technologically advanced nations, such as Japan, saw the cost of the Tokyo (2020) Olympics balloon from an initial \$7.3 billion to over \$15 billion [18]. India must therefore implement a multi-tiered budgeting framework with robust accountability mechanisms, third-party audits, and contingency allocations. Institutional safeguards, such as legally binding cost ceilings and transparency protocols, must be embedded into the governance architecture from the outset. The COVID-19 pandemic also underscored the need for crisis-responsive planning. The unprecedented postponement of the Tokyo (2020) Olympics demonstrated the vulnerability of large-scale events to global disruptions. For India, this means incorporating adaptive planning scenarios that can account for pandemic risks, geopolitical volatility, or climate-related emergencies. Flexible contracts, insurance schemes, and scalable infrastructure development plans should be built into the bid architecture, ensuring that the event can adapt to changing circumstances without endangering public finances or stakeholder trust.

Beyond material lessons, the Olympics also offer soft power and nation-branding opportunities. China's (2008) Olympics, for example, were as much about athletic excellence as about projecting China's emergence as a global superpower [5]. Similarly, India can leverage the Olympics as a strategic tool of global repositioning. As the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)¹¹ did for China, hosting the Olympics could help reframe India's international image, from that of a developing country to an emerging global hub of innovation, democracy, and youthful energy. A successful Games could also catalyse the expansion of India's global business networks, attract foreign investment, and inspire greater engagement from the Indian diaspora and expatriate professionals. The Olympics, in this framing, become not just a sports event but a platform for diplomatic capital and international integration. Finally, India's hosting strategy must be deeply rooted in the social and human capital dimensions of Olympic legacy. Investments must prioritise public accessibility, job creation, and civic participation. A dedicated workforce for post-Games venue maintenance, active youth engagement initiatives, and partnerships with schools and universities can transform Olympic infrastructure into long-term engines of social development. The emphasis must shift from short-term spectacle to enduring transformation.

¹¹ Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): China's global infrastructure and investment strategy, launched in 2013, aimed at enhancing trade, connectivity, and economic integration across Asia, Europe, Africa, and beyond.

Conclusion

This study has assessed India's readiness to host the 2036 Olympic Games, evaluating the potential socio-economic, infrastructural, and cultural impacts, alongside the associated risks. By systematically examining historical evidence from past host nations, including Athens (2004), Rio (2016), Sochi (2014), London (2012), and Sydney (2000), the analysis identified why some countries succeeded while others faced fiscal, environmental, and social challenges. The research shows that success is closely linked to governance frameworks, financial management, legacy planning, and adaptive infrastructure strategies.

India's opportunities were evaluated across multiple dimensions. Hosting the Olympics could enhance international visibility, strengthen diplomatic capital, stimulate tourism, and accelerate urban transformation, including transport networks, public amenities, and sustainable infrastructure. Economic and employment impacts were similarly examined, with historical examples demonstrating that construction, hospitality, transport, and event management sectors stand to gain if projects are planned strategically. The study also highlights the potential for long-term sports development, youth engagement, and community access to facilities, drawing on precedents such as the Sydney 2000 and London 2012 Games, where post-Games legacy programs strengthened national sporting culture.

At the same time, the research weighed these benefits against the inherent risks. Cost overruns, underutilised infrastructure, and environmental degradation are recurring challenges in Olympic planning, particularly when governance is weak or accountability mechanisms are unclear. By analysing India's federal and state coordination, urban capacity, and private sector potential, the study demonstrates that risks can be mitigated through multi-city hosting, sustainable and adaptable infrastructure, and public-private partnerships. Historical patterns further underscore the importance of evidence-based projections, realistic visitor expectations, and robust fiscal oversight to prevent "white elephant" outcomes.

Overall, the study concludes that India can host the Olympics successfully if planning integrates governance, financial prudence, sustainability, and legacy considerations from the outset. The research questions, on India's readiness, the balance of opportunities and risks, and strategies to maximise long-term national benefits, are addressed through a combination of comparative historical analysis and context-specific evaluation. The 2036 Olympics, approached strategically, could therefore serve not merely as a sporting spectacle but as a transformative national initiative, leaving a legacy in infrastructure, economy, sports culture, and global perception.

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Appendix A: Strategic Opportunities for India in Hosting Olympics from the Perspective of Past Lessons

Building on the preceding analysis, India's potential to host the 2036 Olympic Games can be assessed across five interrelated strategic domains: infrastructure and urban transformation, economic growth and employment, diplomatic capital and global branding, public-private investment, and sports culture and national legacy. International experiences demonstrate that the benefits of hosting extend far beyond the immediate spectacle of competition, encompassing lasting urban, economic, social, and cultural gains.

Table 7. Synthesises of key lessons from previous Olympic host cities and comparable mega-events, providing actionable insights for India.

| Strategic Domain | Past Examples / Lessons | Implications for India |
|--|---|---|
| 1. Infrastructure & Urban Transformation | London 2012: Revitalized East London (Stratford) with mixed-use housing, parks, schools. Rio 2016: Expanded transport infrastructure for underserved communities. Beijing 2008: Environmental upgrades including water purification and green spaces. | Accelerate metro/rail expansions, green public spaces, smart-city technologies; implement climate-resilient and sustainable designs; focus on underdeveloped urban zones to improve quality of life. |
| 2. Economic Growth & Employment | Sydney 2000: USD 4.5–5.1B economic boost; 90,000–156,000 jobs in construction, tourism, and event management. Athens 2004: Up to 445,000 jobs; economic impact USD 10–16B. London 2012: UK GDP gain £1.9B; London-specific gains £4.3B. | Leverage India's youthful labor force; create jobs across infrastructure, hospitality, transport, and security; integrate skill development programs; stimulate long-term regional economic growth. |
| 3. Diplomatic Capital & Global Branding | Beijing 2008: Projected national capability and culture globally. Tokyo 2020: Digital exposure boosted tourism post-pandemic. London 2012: Enhanced UK's global image in culture and innovation. | Use Games to showcase cultural diversity and modern capabilities; align event marketing with tourism promotion; invest in infrastructure and services to enhance visitor experience and global perception; maximize digital exposure. |
| 4. Public-Private Investment & Financing | Los Angeles 1984: Fully private-funded; profitable Games. Tokyo 2020: Corporate partnerships financed venues, media, and merchandising. IPL (2008–present): Successful high-value corporate sponsorship model in India. | Leverage private capital to reduce public spending; encourage sponsorship in infrastructure, media, and merchandise; foster long-term corporate partnerships; apply IPL-style model for revenue generation and accountability. |
| 5. Sports Culture & National Legacy | Sydney 2000: Increased youth participation; facilities converted to training and community centers. London 2012: Grassroots programs and venue repurposing. Beijing 2008: Boosted investment in underrepresented sports; world-class training facilities developed. | Promote underrepresented sports; use infrastructure for long-term training and community programs; strengthen coaching, sports science, and youth development; embed a sustainable, inclusive sports culture nationwide. |

Appendix B: Key issues and potential pitfalls for India's Olympics Bid

While the potential benefits of hosting the Olympic Games for India are considerable, historical evidence from past host nations underscores that such mega-events carry substantial risks and challenges.

These challenges span financial, operational, social, and environmental dimensions, highlighting the need for strategic foresight, rigorous planning, and legacy-oriented infrastructure to ensure that the Games generate long-term national value rather than short-term burdens.

Table 8. Synthesis of key issues and potential pitfalls that India must consider in planning a successful 2036 Olympic bid.

| Key Issue | Description / Potential Pitfall | Implications for India |
|--|--|--|
| Monumentalism & White Elephants | Pursuit of iconic, large-scale infrastructure that prioritizes symbolism over utility can lead to underutilized venues post-Games. Historical examples include Athens 2004 and Rio 2016. | If India constructs facilities without clear post-Games use, it risks creating financial burdens and public dissatisfaction. Venues must be designed for adaptive reuse, e.g., residential housing, educational campuses, or community sports centers. |
| Cost Overruns & Fiscal Risk | Olympic hosting is historically prone to budget escalations due to underestimation of costs or inflation, as seen in Montreal 1976 and Rio 2016. | India must implement rigorous financial controls, transparent procurement, and contingency buffers to avoid unsustainable debt. Public-private partnerships can distribute financial risk. |
| Centralized Single-City Model | Concentrating all events in one city can lead to logistical strain, uneven regional development, and infrastructure bottlenecks. | India's federal structure and geographic diversity suggest that a multi-city or federated hosting model could spread economic benefits and reduce construction pressures. |
| Limited Post-Games Utility | Facilities built solely for the Olympics risk becoming abandoned or poorly integrated into local communities. | India must plan legacy-oriented infrastructure, ensuring that venues are repurposed for housing, education, or municipal and sports use, drawing lessons from London 2012, Sydney 2000, and Vancouver 2010. |
| Social Inclusion & Access | Mega-events can exacerbate inequities if planning favors elite infrastructure or specific urban zones. | Olympic planning should prioritize inclusive employment, skills development, and community engagement to ensure benefits reach a broad population. |
| Operational Complexity | Coordinating logistics, transportation, security, and services across multiple venues presents significant challenges. | Effective planning, use of smart technologies, and integration with existing urban systems are required to manage operational complexity efficiently. |
| Environmental Sustainability | Large-scale construction and high energy consumption can increase environmental impact. | India must adopt eco-conscious design, carbon-neutral operations, smart energy use, and climate-resilient infrastructure to align the Games with sustainable development goals. |
| Public Perception & Political Risk | Mismanagement or corruption can undermine public trust and lead to political backlash. | Establishing independent oversight bodies, transparent reporting, and institutional mechanisms like special-purpose vehicles (SPVs) can mitigate reputational and political risks. |
| Over-Reliance on Temporary Foreign Expertise | Excessive dependence on international contractors can reduce local skill development and economic participation. | India should leverage its youthful workforce, domestic expertise, and industrial capacity to maximize local employment and capability-building. |

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