Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), the international governing body of football/soccer, is guided by eight operating objectives including, but not limited to: promoting the game of football and its social benefits, organizing international competitions, development and enforcement of regulations, promotion of integrity, ethics, and fair play (FIFA Statues, 2019). FIFA's statues explicitly identify “promote[ing] the development of women's football and the full participation of women at all levels of football governance” (FIFA Statues, 2019, p. 10). In accordance with FIFA's operating statues, FIFA has developed a “Women's Football Strategy” (2018), which seeks to “grow participation”, “enhance commercial value”, and “build foundations”. The Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football (CONCACAF, 2019), and Union of European Football Associations (UEFA)(UEFA, 2019), have also released strategic plans around the development of the women's game.

While FIFA and its governing bodies have publicly focused on growing the women’s game, in practice, several instances have taken place that suggest this position has not been fully internalized by all member associations. For example, despite the fact that UEFA developed a strategic plan for the women’s game, the inaugural winner of the women’s Ballon d’Or award, Ada Hegerberg, has stepped away from her national team and did not participate in the 2019 Women’s World Cup due to frustration with how the women’s game is treated within Norway (Lewis & Davies, 2018). During the 2019 Women’s World Cup, a ticketing mishap forced fans that purchased group tickets to be split up and dispersed throughout the stadium (Bogage, 2019). Several public statements expressed dismay around the ticketing blunder and questioned FIFA's handling of the matter. FIFA’s glacial response to Iran’s ban of women in soccer stadiums further suggests that their strategy towards women has yet to be a cemented normative within the FIFA organization.

In light of these incidents, a critical examination of FIFA’s “Women’s Football Strategy” is being conducted using new institutionalism. New institutionalism combines historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism, and sociological institutionalism, and posits that institutions matter in the explanation of political behaviour (Reid, 2014). New institutionalism recognizes that organizations do not exist in silos, and as such they “are often either reflections of or responses to rules, beliefs, and conventions built into the wider environment” (Powell, 2007, p. 1). New institutionalism also recognizes patterns that establish normative behaviour, or the ‘taken for granted’. As such, this analysis includes institutional historical documents (i.e., strategic plans, public statements, governing documents) and publicly documented actions by FIFA pertaining to the women’s game and examines them to better understand the prevailing social order of FIFA, and account for their organizational transformation (Ventresca & Mohr, 2002). The development of a historical understanding of FIFA’s evolution towards the women’s game may provide insight as to why institutional resistance occurs and help to better understand the development and diffusion of institutional strategies, relative to how historical patterns may act as antecedents that propel or obstruct organizations from achieving their desired strategies.