

# Innovations

## Ethiopia's Political Challenges and Sports Participation in Colleges and Universities in Tigray

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**Abstract:** *A recent study indicates that Ethiopia frequently faces serious political communal conflicts. The purpose of this study was to assess the impact of these political issues on sports participation in colleges and universities in Tigray. A descriptive research design was employed, utilizing a sample of 147 sports management bodies from various colleges and universities in Tigray. A cross-sectional approach was applied to compare the impact of political issues on sports participation among four universities and two colleges. Data were collected using a standardized 5-point Likert scale questionnaire and structured interviews, which were analyzed using SPSS (version 20). Specifically, cross-tabulation descriptive statistics and the Kruskal-Wallis test were utilized to analyze and compare the collected data. Additionally, the Spearman rank-order correlation test assessed the association between political issues and sports participation. Findings show Ethiopia's political issues negatively affect sports participation in Tigray's institutions. Many respondents reported high negative impacts: Aksum University (88.5%), Adigrat University (82.4%), Mekelle University (95.6%), Raya University (86.6%), Adwa College (87.5%), and Abyi-adi College (80%). No significant differences in impacts across institutions were found ( $P$ -value 0.462). There was a strong negative correlation between political issues and sports participation (correlation coefficient 0.238, significant at 0.001). In conclusion, Ethiopia's political system and its resulting conflicts have profoundly hindered sports participation in Tigray's colleges and universities. Additionally, Ethiopia's political system had a strong negative association with the sport participation at Higher institutions.*

**Keywords:** *political issues, conflict, correlation, sports participation, sports management*

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### Introduction

Sports play a significant role in politics and can foster peace among conflicted nations. However, in Africa, sports can also lead to discord and violence. The game has the power to deeply intertwine ethnicity and politics. Anyone initiating a project in Africa should

understand that football is not solely played for its own sake; ethnic factors heavily influence the sport (Pannenberg, 2010). In Ethiopia, there is a lack of recognition of sports as a critical subject in the national school curriculum (Chappell & Seifu, 2000). The policies, regulations, and funding priorities established by government officials and agencies often reflect the political struggles among various groups within society, which can even result in civilian casualties. Government interference in sports typically favors the groups with the most resources. In recent years, international sports have become grounds for political dispute (Coakley, 2008).

In every country, sports have become such an integral part of cultural tradition that they serve as a means to promote regions, assert dominance, and affirm the identities of national or regional groups (Nevill et al., 2002).

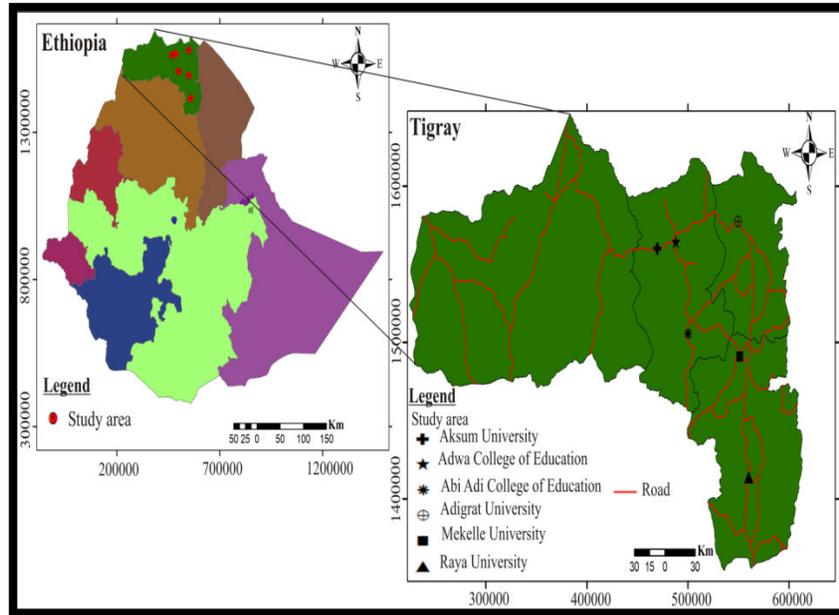
While building facilities and hosting events show some success, effective sports policies boost participation primarily among moderately active individuals (Volf et al., 2022). Stakeholders in event legacy should adopt a more proactive and thoughtful approach to understanding the complexities involved in achieving sustained benefits from mass sport participation (Thomson et al., 2021). As the Olympics become larger, more luxurious, and increasingly widespread, sports seem to take a back seat to political agendas. They are also influenced by the interests of multinational corporations and the conditions set by the International Olympic Committee (IOC) based in Switzerland (Grix, 2013). Sports can reflect both positive and negative political trends. This was demonstrated during the 2016 Rio Olympics when an Egyptian judo athlete refused to shake hands with an Israeli competitor (Gift & Miner, 2017). Sports policies should address the exclusionary nature of athletics in a democratic context and promote health and physical activity within the population (Österlind, 2016). According to the IOC, sports should remain free from political interference (Hao, 2015). However, politicians may utilize sports as a means of pressure or punishment in international relations (Cha, 2008). To date, no study has examined how Ethiopia's political situation affects sports participation in colleges and universities in Tigray. Thus, this study aims to investigate the impact of political issues on sports participation among these institutions. We hypothesize a significant negative correlation between Ethiopia's political challenges and sports participation in Tigray's colleges and universities. Furthermore, we aim to compare the effects of these political issues across colleges and universities in Tigray, hypothesizing no significant differences in their impact.

## **Material and Methods**

### **Participants:**

In this study, the researcher utilized a total of 147 subjects; specifically, 129 respondents were selected from universities in the Tigray region, and 18 respondents were drawn from colleges within the same area, using a purposive sampling technique. The subjects were individuals who had either a direct or indirect role in the management of sports at the selected universities and colleges in the Tigray region.

This study was conducted in the colleges and universities of the Tigray. In Tigray, there are four universities and two colleges of education. The investigation specifically included Aksum University, Adwa College, Adigrat University, Abi-Adi College, Mekelle University, and Raya University (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1** Location Map of the Study area

This survey study was conducted with the subjects who hold managerial roles within colleges and universities in Tigray and stakeholders, aged between 20 and 60 years, including 16 women and 131 men. The educational levels of the subjects ranged from diploma to PhD.

This study has been approved by the Institutional Review Board at xxx University College of Health Sciences and the Specialized Referral Hospital Ethical Review Committee, with the IRB number 011/2023. The researchers obtained written informed consent from all selected participants.

**Procedures**

In this study, the researcher utilized a descriptive research design to gather information on human resource management practices and leadership styles in sports at colleges and universities in Tigray. The aim was to describe the current status of these variables. A cross-sectional design was also employed to investigate differences in political impacts among four universities and two colleges (Wang & Cheng, 2020).

A purposive sampling technique was used to select the six institutions, resulting in a total of 147 respondents, which included participants from the colleges, five Woreda sports offices, and one sports commission office. This sampling provided a comprehensive view of sports management in the region.

The researcher selected study variables based on insights from various sources, including articles and books, focusing on the impact of political issues on sports participation. A total of 28 items were included in a 5-point Likert scale questionnaire: ten items assessed political issues, and ten evaluated sports participation. Additionally, eight items related to both political issues and sports participation were used to gather triangulated data from stakeholders. Further data were collected through structured interviews designed by the researcher to validate findings related to these variables.

The questionnaires were developed and standardized by experts in sports science, management, and language to ensure validity. A pilot test was conducted, and the collected data were analyzed using SPSS version 20. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each variable ranged from 0.924 to 0.991, indicating high reliability of the instruments.

### **Data Analysis**

Based on the nature of the data, the researcher utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20) for data analysis. Initially, descriptive statistics with cross-tabulation were employed to analyze and compare the data collected regarding the identified problems from the subjects.

Additionally, the researcher conducted the Kruskal-Wallis Test to assess whether the differences in the impact of political issues on sports participation among the four universities and two colleges in the Tigray region were statistically significant. Furthermore, the Spearman rank-order correlation test was performed to examine the association between political issues and sports participation. A p-value of less than 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Moreover, a qualitative analysis method was employed to analyze the data collected through interviews. Ultimately, the researcher presented the findings of this study using both tables and descriptive language to enhance clarity and understanding.

### **Results**

To assess the impact of political issues in Ethiopia on sports participation and determine any significant differences among the four universities and two colleges in the Tigray region, the researcher employed Cross-Tabulation (Tables 1 and 2), as well as the Kruskal-Wallis Test (Table 3). Additionally, the Spearman rank-order correlation test (Table 4) was used to examine the association between political issues and sports participation. The results are presented as follows:

**Table 1: Cross-Tabulation of Sports Participation across Universities and Colleges in Tigray**

Organization of the respondents		Sport Participation					Total
		Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High	
University	Aksum university	18	12	2	2	1	35
		51.4%	34.3%	5.7%	5.7%	2.9%	100.0%
	Adigrat university	16	10	3	4	1	34
		47.1%	29.4%	8.8%	11.8%	2.9%	100.0%
	Mekelle university	11	17	4	11	2	45
		24.4%	37.8%	8.9%	24.4%	4.4%	100.0%
Raya university	4	7	3	1	0	15	
Total	49	46	12	18	4	129	
	38.0%	35.7%	9.3%	14.0%	3.1%	100.0%	
College	Adwa college	3	5		0		8
		37.5%	62.5%		0.0%		100.0%
	Abi-ady college	7	2	0	1		10
		70.0%	20.0%	0.0%	10.0%		100.0%
Total	10	7		1		18	
	55.6%	38.9%		5.6%		100.0%	
Total		59	53	12	19	4	147
		40.1%	36.1%	8.2%	12.9%	2.7%	100.0%

The cross-tabulation (Table 1) indicates that sports participation at the universities and colleges in the Tigray region is perceived as low, with a majority of respondents reporting a low (36.1%) and very low (40.1%) level of sports participation in their institutions.

Additionally, qualitative data collected through interviews revealed that 100% of interviewees from all universities and colleges in the Tigray region reported a low level of sports participation. Furthermore, they noted that political issues in Ethiopia have negatively impacted their sports participation.

**Table 2: Cross-Tabulation Analysis of the Impact of Ethiopia’s Political Issues on Sports Participation at Universities and Colleges in Tigray**

Organization of the respondents		Political impact					Total
		Very Low	Low	Average	High	Very High	
University	Aksum university	1	1	2	13	18	35
		2.9%	2.9%	5.7%	37.1%	51.4%	100.0 %
	Adigrat university	0	3	3	9	19	34
		0.0%	8.8%	8.8%	26.5%	55.9%	100.0 %
	Mekelle university	0	2	0	16	27	45
		0.0%	4.4%	0.0%	35.6%	60.0%	100.0 %
	Raya university	0	1	1	8	5	15
		0.0%	6.7%	6.7%	53.3%	33.3%	100.0 %
	Total	1	7	6	46	69	129
		0.8%	5.4%	4.7%	35.7%	53.5%	100.0 %
	College	Adwa college	0	1	4	3	8
			0.0%	12.5%	50.0%	37.5%	100.0 %
Abyi-adi college		1	1	4	4	10	
		10.0%	10.0%	40.0%	40.0%	100.0 %	
Total		1	2	8	7	18	
		5.6%	11.1%	44.4%	38.9%	100.0 %	
Total	1	8	8	54	76	147	
	0.7%	5.4%	5.4%	36.7%	51.7%	100.0 %	

The cross-tabulation table (2) indicates that Ethiopia’s political situation negatively affects sports participation in universities and colleges in Tigray. A significant majority of respondents from various institutions reported that the political situation has a high or very high negative impact on sports participation: Aksum University (37.1% and 51.4%), Adigrat University (26.5% and 55.9%), Mekelle University (35.6% and 60.0%), Raya University (53.3% and 33.3%), Adwa College (50.0% and 37.5%), and Abi-adi College (40.0% and 40.0%).

Additionally, 100% of interviewees from Aksum University, Adigrat University, Mekelle University, Raya University, Adwa College, and Abi-adi College indicated that the impact of Ethiopia’s political situation on sports participation in the Tigray region was very high. Consequently, this political turmoil has led to a devastating war, resulting in the loss of many lives and rendering sports participation impossible.

**Table 3: Kruskal-Wallis Test Showing Significant Differences in the Impact of Ethiopia’s Political Issues on Sports Participation among Colleges and Universities in Tigray**

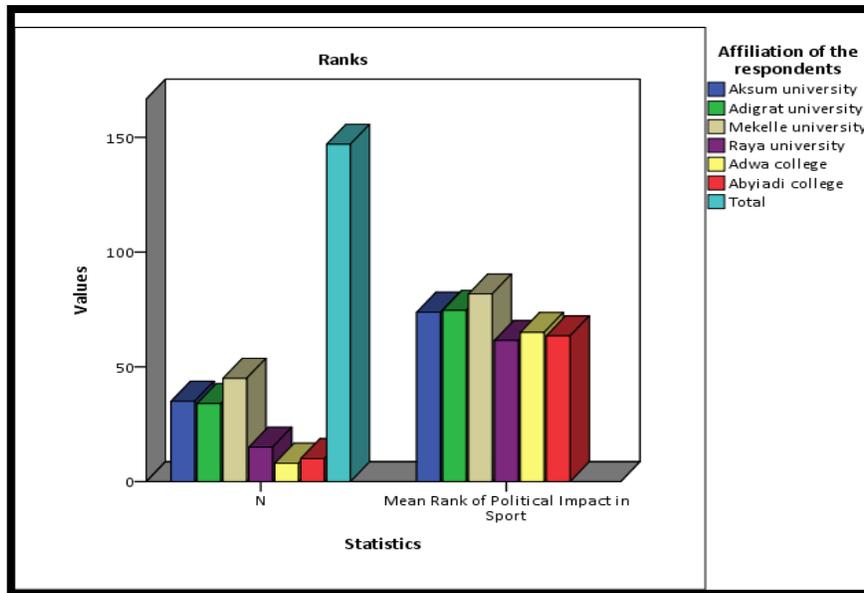
Ranks				Test Statistics <sup>a,b</sup>		
	Affiliation of the respondents	N	Mean Rank	Chi-Square	df	Asymp . Sig
Political impact in sport	Aksum university	35	73.80	4.636	5	0.462
	Adigrat university	34	74.65			
	Mekelle university	45	81.77			
	Raya university	15	61.50			
	Adwa college	8	65.00			
	Abyiadi college	10	63.50			
	Total	147				

a Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Affiliation of the respondents

The Kruskal-Wallis Test results presented in Table 3 indicate that there is no significant difference in the political impacts on sports participation among the four universities and two colleges in the Tigray region, as evidenced by a p-value of 0.462, which is greater than the 0.05 level of significance.

However, when comparing the effects of political issues on sports participation, Mekelle University was notably more affected than Aksum University, Adigrat University, Raya University, Adwa College, and Abi-ady College, with a mean rank of 81.77. In comparison, the mean ranks for the other institutions were as follows: Aksum University (73.80), Adigrat University (74.65), Adwa College (65.00), Abi-ady College (63.50), and Raya University, which had the lowest mean rank at 61.50. For a more comprehensive understanding, please refer to the bar chart presented below as Figure 2.



**Figure 2: Impact of Ethiopia's Political Problems on Sports Participation in Universities and Colleges in Tigray**

**Table 4: Spearman Correlation Test to Assess the Association between Political Problems and Sports Participation**

			Political impact	Sport participation
Spearman's rho	Political impact	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.238**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.001
		N	147	147

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman Correlation Test presented in Table 4 shows a strong and statistically significant negative correlation between political problems and sports participation. The correlation coefficient of -0.238 is significant at the 0.001 level, which is less than the 0.01 threshold for statistical significance. This indicates that a higher level of political problems is associated with lower sports participation among the participants in this study. Therefore, we can conclude that the effects of political problems in Ethiopia have negatively impacted the sports participation of universities and colleges in Tigray.

**Discussion**

The realm of sports can both reflect and influence political inclinations, highlighting both positive and negative aspects. It is essential to acknowledge that sports are influenced by political contexts (Gift & Miner, 2017). This study reveals that Ethiopia’s political situation adversely affects sports participation in universities and colleges in the Tigray region.

Unfortunately, the findings indicate no significant differences between the four universities and two colleges regarding the impact of Ethiopia's political issues on sports participation.

Our research aligns with the findings of (Glaser et al., 2023), which pointed out that the ethno-political conflict between local authorities and the federal government of Ethiopia has resulted in severe humanitarian impacts, including widespread loss of life and displacement since November 2020. The historical patterns of Ethiopian regime change demonstrate a persistent cycle of political disorder, civil warfare, and ethnic conflicts, which have undermined the nation's sporting culture (Assefa, 2022). Furthermore, the banning of Tigray's football leagues from participating in the Ethiopian Super League and Premier League since 2019 exemplifies how political strife directly restricts sports opportunities. This mirrors the findings of (Boniface, 1998), who noted that football was used as a tool of punishment in Yugoslavia when the national team was barred from the 1992 European Championship due to the war, serving as a symbolic gesture by the international community against Belgrade. Moreover, (Meeuwssen & Kreft, 2023) noted that sports governance independence stifles individual political expression, forcing compliance with regulations.

Conversely, some scholars emphasize the potential of sports to contribute positively to civil society. A study by (Ekholm, 2016) argues that sports can serve as a response to social problems, connecting individuals with a shared identity and fostering community engagement. However, (Spaaij, 2015) highlights that clubs and players often engage with political matters, illustrating a contemporary context where football is intertwined with significant political events and social movements, such as the migration crisis in Europe. Supporting this findings, (Giulianotti et al., 2016) revealed that sport is utilized as an intervention tool to achieve broader social objectives beyond just sports. Similarly, (Donovan et al., 2004) observed that participation in sports and other social groups is linked to increased levels of political engagement. Moreover, (Coalter, 2010) noted that aid-dependent sport-for-development organizations may abandon their original mission due to ambitious agendas.

Our findings indicate a statistically significant negative correlation between political problems in Ethiopia and sports participation in universities and colleges in Tigray. This result resonates with (Lin et al., 2008), who demonstrated the intricate relationship between politics and sports in Taiwan, showcasing how internal social and cultural issues can escalate into critical political matters within divided societies. (Österlind, 2016) further suggests that sports policies often lead to exclusion rather than inclusivity, complicating the landscape for athletes. Moreover, (Darnell, 2010) points out that while sports can align with developmental goals, they often adhere to the dominant framework of neoliberal philosophy. Consistent with our findings, (Mizrahi et al., 2008) observe that the absence of a comprehensive sports policy during the early centralized years of Israel's statehood has had a lasting impact on citizens' attitudes toward sports. (Pavlovna et al., 2019) stated that suggesting the proposed solutions to issues such as racism and the

influence of politics may not completely eliminate these problems. However, they can contribute significantly to fostering fair and honest competition in sports. In addition, (Kobierecki, 2013) noted that a country's policies significantly impact sports, highlighting the reciprocal influence between sporting events and governmental actions. This reinforces our conclusion that the interplay between political contexts and sports participation is intricate and profound.

### **Limitations**

This study's sample size was relatively small and geographically restricted to one regional state, which may limit the generalizability of the results to broader populations. Future research should aim for larger, more diverse samples and incorporate objective measures to enhance validity

### **Conclusion**

Based on the empirical evidence gathered, this study concludes that the political instability in Ethiopia, which led to the devastating war in Tigray, has had a profound impact on sports participation in colleges and universities in the region.

Additionally, the political issues in Ethiopia have similarly affected sports participation across the four universities and two colleges in Tigray. Furthermore, higher levels of political instability are significantly associated with lower sports participation within these institutions.

### **Practical Implications**

The study's findings reveal that the political instability in Ethiopia has severe negative impact on sports participation at higher education institutions in Tigray. The political leaders of the Tigray region and Ethiopia should resolve the political instability in the country and address the factors leading to conflict by promoting national dialogue. Additionally, the sports management bodies in the universities and colleges of the Tigray region should develop contingency plans for handling disruptions caused by political instability. Furthermore, this study underscores the urgent need for stakeholders in Ethiopia to recognize how political dynamics can either facilitate or hinder sports participation. To foster a more inclusive and vibrant sporting culture, it is essential to develop policies that prioritize equity and access, particularly in regions like Tigray that face unique political challenges. Future research should explore pathways to mitigate these political barriers and enhance sports development as a means of promoting social cohesion and community resilience.

The study's data were collected from only four universities and two colleges, suggesting that the effects of political instability in Ethiopia on sports participation at higher education institutions with different cultural and demographic groups should be examined in future studies. While this study focused on the effects of political issues in

Ethiopia on sport participation, future research should explore additional factors such as effect of religion, ethnic factor, awareness, and culture.

### **Acknowledgments**

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