

# The role of sport in the development of international relations from the perspective of political and non-political figures in Jordanian sport

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to identify the role that sport plays in improving international relations from the perspective of Jordanian athletic political and non-political figures, and also to find the differences in the perception of the role of sport in developing international relations among status variables. The researchers used the descriptive approach due to its relevance to the nature of the study. A total of 122 individuals participated in this study: politicians (n = 33), non – politicians (n = 89). The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the data. It was designed through personal interviews and it surveys five fields: political field, media field, economic field, and the social and cultural field. For data analysis, we used the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). The findings showed that the role of sports in improving international relations in the five fields listed above was undeniable. There was no statistically significant difference in the total score of the role of sport in improving international relations when it comes to status ( $p > 0.05$ ). Furthermore, the results showed no statistically significant difference between the members of the controlled sample whether they were politicians or non-politicians ( $p > 0.05$ ). Jordanian politicians and non-politicians believe that sport is an important tool for improving international relations and could be a starting point for public diplomacy dialogue. The researchers strongly recommend the need to work on activating and supporting sport media as it has a big role in developing international relations, and to work on improving sport performance because of its great impact in showing countries at international level.

## KEYWORDS

International Relations; Political Sport Figures; Non- Political Sport Figures

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Globally, sport is considered a creator of beauty and an instrument of ethical values that brings peace, unity and understanding between people of all races. Sport is highly significant in national development through leisure and recreation, promoting a high degree of productivity and health as the quality of life that enables people to live and serve at their best. Sport is one of the greatest endeavors in human experience. It is a celebration of physical excellence that involves the ability to sustain and maintain physical health in such a situation that one would be able to walk, run, think and move the parts of the body as may be demanded. It is a medium through which competition, friendship, tolerance, unity, discipline, endurance and diplomacy are promoted (Awoyinfu & Adebayo, 2016).

Many individuals and organizations recognize that sport is more than a game (Kidd, 2008; Kay, 2009; Donnelly, 2008), and that it can be used as a platform to address many problems people face around the world. Beutler (2008) points out that sport is a universal language that has the capability to build bridges between people and that sport aids in overcoming differences, and spreads a spirit of forgiveness. Giulianotti (2011) also points out that sport can turn into a social tool to make positive changes when dealing with international humanitarian cases. Darnell & Hayhurst (2012) recommend using sport not only as a physical tool but also as a way to simplify social growth.

A study by Boyacıoğlu & Oğuz (2016) affirmed that sports has become and still is a major instrument in the field of international relations in a positive way. Therefore, the researcher conducted an analytical study for the time period before the Olympic Games, where sports competitions were previously carried out by minorities and had a great impact on the world, followed by organizations, especially in football. The results of this study showed that the political world is based on competition between two camps that established culture, arts, sports, literature, technology, military and politics. Sports play an important role in that period in testing strength and competition between two poles without war

Through displaying sport values of solidarity and peace, it contributes to political balance and stability in the world. It might be considered an effective means of achieving development and international cooperation. Political and cultural dimensions of sport are generally recognized and contribute to the development of international relations, therefore the dynamic character of sport has a significant impact on mutual relations among states. Sport plays an important role not only at national but also at international level, as it contributes to a greater involvement of national sports organizations in the policy-making processes (Stulajter & Stulajter, 2016).

A study by Bainvel (2005) aimed to understand and prove the link between sport and international relations and also to identify how football is mixed in particular with international relations at many levels revealed that governments participate in sports to enhance their position and also to encourage a sense of identity, belonging and unity, and sports as a diplomatic tool can be considered as public diplomacy to influence the public opinion.

Another study aimed at identifying the role of sport in the international relations between Jordan and some foreign countries showed that there is a role for sport in international relations between Jordan and some Arab and foreign countries in all social, political and economic fields (Al-Shadeeda, 2012).

It is not possible to talk about international relations without talking about the positive and influential role that the sport movement can play in this context. Many are the wars and crises that occurred and still occur between many countries of the world because of sport events, but on the other hand, there are many sport events that cast positive shadows on international relations. We see that sport is used by countries to create propaganda for their government systems, as well as by some countries as an opportunity to emerge globally as a new political and economic force through media exploitation.

The significance of this study stems from the meaning behind modern sport. Sport events have shaped a world of their own and by planning such events, it affects the nation's sectors; it is the only global event that involves participants and spectators alike. Furthermore, the significance of this study is derived from the importance of such impact events, as it shows sport as a global language followed by most nations. It links people to each other despite their ideological and social differences. The researchers believe that there are two points of view; the first one is that politics is far from sport, and the second one is that sport is linked to politics and is used as a tool to open doors for politicians.

From this, the problem of the study is that there are different opinions and a lack of clarity and definition when it comes to the role of sport in the development of international relations. It has become clear that many sporting events are wrapped in a political framework and vice versa, as well as there are events corrupted by politics and reformed by sport. Thus, the aim of this study was to identify the role that sport plays in improving international relations from the perspective of Jordanian athletic political and non-political figures, and also to find the differences in the perception of the role of sport in developing international relations among status variables.

## 2. METHODS

### 2.1. Study Design and Participants

The researchers used the descriptive approach due to its relevance to the nature of the study. The sample was pre-determined and preselected. A total of 122 individuals participated in this study: politicians (n = 33), non – politicians (n = 89) (Table 1).

**Table 1.** Description of the study sample according to demographic variables

| <b>Variables</b>             | <b>Categories</b>                              | <b>Number</b> | <b>Ratio</b> |
|------------------------------|--|---------------|--------------|
| <b>Non-political figures</b> | Sport reporters                                | 30            | 33.71        |
|                              | Sport scientists                               | 25            | 28.09        |
|                              | Sports federations                             | 24            | 26.97        |
|                              | Olympic committee                              | 5             | 5.62         |
|                              | Generation of peace                            | 5             | 5.62         |
|                              | <b>Total</b>                                   | 89            | 100.00       |
| <b>Political figures</b>     | Ministers                                      | 8             | 24.24        |
|                              | Members of the Jordanian representatives house | 6             | 18.18        |
|                              | Senates  | 5             | 15.15        |
|                              | Parties  | 14            | 42.42        |
|                              | <b>Total</b>                                   | 33            | 100.00       |
| <b>Total</b>                 |  | 122           |              |

### 2.2. Instrument

The questionnaire was used as a data collection tool and was created through personal interviews. It covers five areas: the political area, the media area, the economic area and the social and cultural area. The interviews started in September /2020 and lasted until March /2020. It took a prolonged period of time to build the tool and the fields due to the COVID -19 pandemic. Legalization of the questionnaire in terms of validity and reliability was performed.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

For data analysis, we used the Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics (mean and SD) and t-tests were used. A p value of < 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

We begin this section of the study by presenting the role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian athletic politicians and non-

politicians, Jordanian athletic politicians only, sports scientists, sports reporters and sports organization staff.

**Table 2.** The role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian athletic politicians and non-politicians (ranked in descending order)

| No. | Field           | M           | SD          | MI           | Level       | Rank |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| 2   | Media Field     | 4.11        | 0.37        | 82.20        | High        | 1    |
| 3   | Economic Field  | 4.06        | 0.58        | 81.20        | High        | 2    |
| 5   | Cultural Field  | 3.99        | 0.55        | 79.80        | High        | 3    |
| 4   | Social Field    | 3.91        | 0.42        | 78.20        | High        | 4    |
| 1   | Political Field | 3.17        | 0.57        | 63.40        | Moderate    | 5    |
|     | <b>Total</b>    | <b>3.85</b> | <b>0.38</b> | <b>77.00</b> | <b>High</b> |      |

Table 2 indicates that sports play a major role in the development of international relations from the perspective of Jordanian politicians and non-politicians. These fields (as a whole) were given a mean score of 3.85, with a percentage of 77.00%. It is also noted that the sub-fields were estimated between medium and high, and the mean values ranged between 4.11 - 3.17, whereas the media field came in first place as it was estimated with an arithmetic mean of 4.11 and a percentage of 82.20%. The political field came in last place, with an estimated mean of 3.17 and a percentage of 63.40%.

This result is consistent with a study by Boyacıoğlu & Oğuz (2016), which confirms that sport has become an important tool in international relations, as well as with the study by Kobierecki (2013), which proves the importance of sport as a tool for international relations. The researchers attribute the importance of the media in promoting the image of the state at all levels and in all sectors for all countries and in creating an image of this state in the first place, with an average score of 4.11, and it has the greatest importance in the field of international relations. The researchers attribute also the last ranking for the political field to the fact that the sample sees that the rest of the fields have greater importance than the political field in international relations development. The reason for this could be that part of the sample does not deal in depth with the political aspect and the political details in relation to other countries. This confirms that the political aspect is not the only aspect through which relations between states are developed, but other international fields have an important role in this arena.

**Table 3.** The role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian athletic politicians (ranked in descending order)

| No. | Fields          | M           | SD          | MI           | Level       | Rank |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| 2   | Media field     | 4.03        | 0.41        | 80.60        | High        | 1    |
| 5   | Cultural field  | 3.99        | 0.54        | 79.80        | High        | 2    |
| 3   | Economic field  | 3.94        | 0.56        | 78.80        | High        | 3    |
| 4   | Social field    | 3.87        | 0.40        | 77.40        | High        | 4    |
| 1   | Political field | 3.30        | 0.59        | 66.00        | Moderate    | 5    |
|     | <b>Total</b>    | <b>3.82</b> | <b>0.39</b> | <b>76.40</b> | <b>High</b> |      |

The role of sports in the development of international relations was high in the view of Jordanian politicians. The arithmetic means ranged from 4.03 - 3.30, where the media field ranked first as it was estimated with an arithmetic mean of 4.03 and a percentage of 80.60%, while the political sector ranked last as it was estimated with an arithmetic mean of 3.30 and a percentage of 66.00%.

The researchers explain this result by the fact that politicians see sport as a tool for developing international relations and as a soft power. The media field occupied the first place, as politicians are aware of the importance of the media and its role in international relations because it reaches the largest number of viewers and followers in a shortest period of time and able to influence more than other domains. They considered the role of the political field to a moderate degree in the development of international relations, and the researcher attributes this to the fact that the political field is purely political, and that the rest of the fields are able to influence the nature of relations in a way equals the political field and even more importantly.

**Table 4.** The role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian sports scientists (ranked in descending order)

| No. | Fields          | M           | SD          | MI           | Level       | Rank |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| 3   | Economic field  | 4.22        | 0.51        | 84.40        | High        | 1    |
| 2   | Media field     | 4.13        | 0.29        | 82.60        | High        | 2    |
| 5   | Cultural field  | 4.12        | 0.42        | 82.40        | High        | 3    |
| 4   | Social field    | 3.95        | 0.32        | 79.00        | High        | 4    |
| 1   | Political field | 3.28        | 0.42        | 65.60        | Moderate    | 5    |
|     | <b>Total</b>    | <b>3.94</b> | <b>0.27</b> | <b>78.80</b> | <b>High</b> |      |

Table 4 showed that the role of sport in the development of international relations was considered high from the point of view of sport scientists, as these areas (as a whole) were evaluated with a mean value of 3.94 and a percentage of 78.80%. The sub-areas were evaluated with a degree between medium and high, and the mean values were between 4.22 - 3.28.

The researchers explain the reason for the high level by the fact that the sample, due to its specialization, believes that sport could be a real tool for the development and consolidation of international relations and that it is a good opportunity for the restart of relations with new countries. The first field that affects the role of sport in developing international relations from their point of view was the economic field. The sport academics usually deal with material capabilities such as stadiums and private assets in stadiums, fully aware of the extent of the impact of the presence of good stadiums and what follows them for sport competitions. The lack of sport capabilities of stadiums, tools and equipment and the ability to pay the salaries for professional coaches weaken foreign sports participations, also the lack of external support or direct it in a way that does not serve sports may negatively reflect on the participation of any country at the international level. The researchers attribute the delay in the political field to the academic's conviction of the need to separate politics from sport and not to politicize sport, since players have nothing to do with the foreign affairs of the state.

**Table 5.** The role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian sports reporters (ranked in descending order)

| No. | Fields          | M           | SD          | MI           | Level       | Rank |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| 2   | Media field     | 4.20        | 0.37        | 84.00        | High        | 1    |
| 3   | Economic field  | 4.06        | 0.70        | 81.20        | High        | 2    |
| 4   | Social field    | 3.94        | 0.49        | 78.80        | High        | 3    |
| 5   | Cultural field  | 3.91        | 0.64        | 78.20        | High        | 4    |
| 1   | Political field | 3.07        | 0.54        | 61.40        | Moderate    | 5    |
|     | <b>Total</b>    | <b>3.84</b> | <b>0.44</b> | <b>76.80</b> | <b>High</b> |      |

Table 5 shows that the role of sports in the development of international relations is high from the perspective of Jordanian sports reporters, as these areas (as a whole) were assessed with a mean value of 3.84 and a percentage of 76.80%. It is found that the sub-areas are assessed between medium and high, and the mean values are between 4.20 - 3.07.

The researchers explain that what distinguishes the sports reporter is that he is at the center of local and international sporting events, able to analyze the details of what is happening, and considers

this an important tool in the development of international relations. Sport reporters see that media field was high, because they are aware of its importance in highlighting the event in the way the state wants, and the media is able to exaggerate or simplify the event and is able to deliver a certain international message. This is consistent with a study by Barnett et al. (2017), which confirmed that the relations are associated with the amount of news coverage and public attention a country receives. The sport reporter differs in his appreciation of political matters as the political reporter, thus the political field occupied the last rank.

**Table 6.** The role of sport in the development of international relations according to the perspective of Jordanian sports organization staff (ranked in descending order)

| No. | Fields          | M           | SD          | MI           | Level       | Rank |
|-----|-----------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-------------|------|
| 2   | Media field     | 4.09        | 0.38        | 81.80        | High        | 1    |
| 3   | Economic field  | 4.06        | 0.51        | 81.20        | High        | 2    |
| 5   | Cultural field  | 3.95        | 0.54        | 79.00        | High        | 3    |
| 4   | Social field    | 3.88        | 0.45        | 77.60        | High        | 4    |
| 1   | Political field | 3.06        | 0.66        | 61.20        | Moderate    | 5    |
|     | <b>Total</b>    | <b>3.81</b> | <b>0.38</b> | <b>76.20</b> | <b>High</b> |      |

The role of sports in the development of international relations is high from the point of view of the employees of Jordanian sports organizations, as Table 6 showed. This area (as a whole) was evaluated with a mean value of 3.81 and a percentage of 76.20%. It can be noted that the sub-fields have estimated at a degree between medium and high, the mean values ranged between 4.09 - 3.06, with the media field ranked first as it was estimated with an arithmetic average of 4.09 and a percentage of 81.80%. The political field came in the last place, which was estimated with a mean of 3.06 and a percentage of 61.20%.

Researchers attribute this level to the fact that these organizations work for this goal and for peace. All these organizations (Olympic Committee, sports federations and Generations for Peace) work under one roof and one goal, which is peace between nations and people and under the slogan of Olympic values. The researchers believe that the area of media has a high value. The researchers attribute this to the fact that this sample depends on the media to broadcast competitions, highlighting their role as organizations.



**Table 7.** Differences in the areas for the role of sports in the development of international relations according to the different Jordanian athletic politicians and non-politicians

| <b>Fields</b>   | <b>Politicians/ Non-politicians</b> | <b>No.</b> | <b>M</b> | <b>SD</b> | <b>T</b> | <b>p</b> |
|-----------------|-------------------------------------|------------|----------|-----------|----------|----------|
| Political field | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 3.12     | 0.56      | 0.147    | 0.143    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 3.30     | 0.59      |          |          |
| Media field     | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 4.14     | 0.35      | 1.400    | 0.164    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 4.03     | 0.41      |          |          |
| Economic field  | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 4.11     | 0.58      | 1.417    | 0.159    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 3.94     | 0.56      |          |          |
| Social field    | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 3.92     | 0.43      | 0.636    | 0.526    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 3.87     | 0.40      |          |          |
| Cultural field  | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 3.98     | 0.55      | 0.037    | 0.971    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 3.99     | 0.54      |          |          |
| Total           | Non-politicians                     | 89         | 3.85     | 0.38      | 0.389    | 0.698    |
|                 | Politicians                         | 33         | 3.82     | 0.38      |          |          |

*Note: Significance level at  $p < 0.05$*

There are no statistically significant differences between the mean scores of the areas of the role of sports in the development of international relations between the two perspectives of Jordanian athletic politicians and non-politicians, based on the total degree ( $t = 0.389$ ,  $p = 0.698$ ).

The researchers attribute this result to the fact that the sample consists of a single texture, which is athletic, and that some politicians, including sports scientists, and some of them were sports reporters. The sample is seen by the researchers in different professional positions, but they work under one roof with the same goals and values, and they reflect the policies of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, which is based on moderation, even if their views are related to international relations in general, without specifying them, but they reflect the point.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Jordanian politicians and non-politicians believe that sport is an important tool for improving international relations and could be a starting point for public diplomacy dialogue. Moreover, politicians have witnessed some situations in sports events that play a great role in improving international relations, and non-politicians also believe that sports mega-events play an important role in promoting international relations by providing good facilities and opportunities for improving

educational standards and for international competition. In this context, sports are capable of improving national relations and should be used as soft power.

We recommend the need to work on activating and supporting sport media as it has a big role in developing international relations, and to work on improving sport performance because of its great impact in showing countries at international level.

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#### **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

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