THE INFLUENCE OF POLITICAL INTEREST ON SPORTS INTERVENTIONS IN NIGER STATE: CONCISE REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper aims to articulate rationales for state intervention in sport as a way of providing a background for analysing the relationship between sport and state politics. Extensive literature on political interest and sports intervention were made, and has been conceptualized as the driver forces that motivate actions by political actors. Political interests have also been categorized into four, personal, public, national, and International interests. It further highlighted that the level of sports intervention is influenced by the nature and extent of people's interest. Sports is used as a tool for achieving both positive and negative political interest. This means that sports as a diplomacy can be used as a tool to heighten confrontation when relations between the two are poor; the connection between political interests' economy, sports intervention and its effect on national development was also deliberated. Political intervention in sports is therefore, aimed at enhancing quality sports performance bearing in mind that winning and losing tournaments scenario helps leaders accept their faith as the case may be during election processes. The study concluded that Nigerian politicians should invest more in sports so as to turn our green pasture into golden opportunity for people.

Keywords: Sports, political interest, Intervention, National Development

Introduction

For a long time, sports and politics have been reciprocating with one another, which have been used to achieve local, national, and indeed international political goals; while politics which brought in the act of governance has played a key role in ensuring the development of sports. According to Kaur & Kaur (2019), the connection between sport and politics has a long historical background and relationship is one of the most enduring examples of society's effects on sport. Although there may still be some people who consider sport and politics to be completely separate entities, evidence suggests that it is no longer possible for any serious social commentator to posit a separation between the worlds of sport and politics. Houlihan, (2000) noted that

sports provide politically usable resources; and promote nation-building and international image-making. The modern sport has seldom been free of politics, in other words, there is very little current evidence to support the view that sport and politics exist separately.

Sports is used as a tool for achieving both positive and negative political interests. This means that sports such as diplomacy can heighten confrontation when relations between two nations are poor (Dahiru 2022). In Niger state the grassroots politicians have always used sport to draw the public attention to their election campaign, they spent a reasonable amount of their money to organize one form of tournament or the other. There are some competitions that were politically motivated and they serve the political objectives of individuals. These type of competitions according to Nikita (2023) besides having the positive effect of uniting people, can also have a clear dividing trait. In addition, the mixing of sport and politics tends to be driven by the pursuit of selfish interests of countries that are not beneficial to world peace at all. Some of the examples where sport is used negatively, include the actions of the German Nazis and Italian Fascists, who used international sports competitions to promote the domination of their new political systems and ideologies. The aim of this paper is, therefore, to articulate rationales for state intervention in sport as a way of providing a background for analysing the relationship between sport and state politics

Conceptualizing Political Interest and Sport Intervention

The understanding of the key concepts; political interest' and sports intervention' as used operationally in this study will help to clarify the complexity associated with any scholarly definition of any given word or sentence. It is very much a difficult task to proffer a unique and acceptable explanation of the concept of Political interest, this is because there are different types of political interest, just as there are political actors both within and outside the public service. There are also political actors within the tenancy of the state institutions, those that are in charge of acts of governance, at all levels of government (federal state, and local government). Furthermore, in this article, political interests can be categorized into personal, public, domestic, and international interests. The nature of political interest to a large extent will depend on the operational level of political actors, Political interest therefore refers to the driving forces that motivate action or inaction by political officeholders Broadly speaking, political interest may arise from the attempt to advance a personal cause, like the case of politicians at the local level who may be interested in how to become popular to gain supporters and win an election. There is also important public or national interest that has to do with development defense or diplomacy, in each of these respects sports have been used as a tool for achieving these interests. It should be noted also that any discussion on political interest and sports intervention can never be conclusive therefore this article cannot claim to be so

Sports have been discovered as a powerful catalyst for promoting peace, Healthy living, freedom, and cooperation among sports consumers. This way it is a key interest area for government and Political actors, they want to provide services to people, they want to maintain peace and security, enhance economic development, and provide employment to portray the image of their respective domains within and outside their boundaries (Dahiru, Abdul, and Sunday, 2023)

Concept of Sports Intervention

Sports intervention may be viewed as the involvement of any kind, in sports programs by an individual or group, because of the belief that Sports can help in achieving dreams and goals. Intervention is all-inclusive as an act of inserting one thing between others, like a person trying to help. You could be the subject of a school intervention if your teachers call your parents about the bad grades you've been hiding. The intervention comes from the Latin intervenire, meaning "to come between, interrupt." Often an intervention is intended to make things better, like the US government's intervention to give food and aid to Haiti after the earthquake. One common use of the word refers to a specific type of meeting, or intervention, that happens with the family and friends of a drug addict; they join together to try to convince the drug user to change their ways and live a healthier life

One of the main reasons why there is political intervention in sports according to USAID (2022) is that sports can transform the lives of individuals. It bolsters physical, psychological, emotional, and social well-being and development. At the same time, sport plays a significant role in cultures and communities around the world. These factors alone justify investment in sports programming, but there is also a growing understanding that, sports programs merit support because they are powerful vehicles for achieving broader goals, particularly in advancing development and peace agendas. Also, Suvra &. Nita (2022) stressed that Sports have a unique power to attract, mobilize and inspire. By its very nature, sport is about participation. It is about inclusion and citizenship. In 1978, UNESCO described sport and physical education as a "fundamental right for all". But till today, the right to play and sport has too often been ignored or disrespected and politics plays a key role in this.

Relationships between Political Interest and invention in Sports

If ever there was a perfect marriage, one would be hard-pressed to find a more compatible couple than sport and politics. State intervention in sports has been evidenced in many countries throughout history. Sport and politics are still inextricably intertwined and often work to demonstrate social, economic, or political supremacy over another nation (Chien-Yu Lin, Ping & Hui-Fang. 2008). Throughout history, State intervention in sport has been evidenced in many countries, such as the government of the city-states in ancient Greece used sport to enhance the fitness of their citizens for war and to demonstrate their superiority over other city-states and the early part of the Roman era, sport was used for military fitness; in the later years the ruling elites produced sport-like events to entertain and thereby control the masses (McPherson, Curtis, and Loy, J 1989).

It is worth noting that the importance of sport has varied over time, for example, the growth of nationalism in the late 18th and early 19th centuries revived the idea of using sports and games for promoting fitness and national integration (i.e., patriotism). Ostensibly, McPherson et al. (1989) explained that the main reason for reviving the Olympic Games in 1896 was to stimulate improved physical fitness among children. The Games and other international sports events soon became mechanisms for propaganda and vicarious war (A term used by George Orwell meaning 'a war minus the shooting.

Today, sports and politics are inextricably intertwined and often work to demonstrate social, economic, or political supremacy over another nation. It is the

elusive yet frequently influential role of sport in national, international, and transnational politics (Suvra &. Nita 2022 especially why and how states manipulate sports to achieve their political intentions and to maintain their political power that initially attracted the researcher's attention to this subject. To explore the issues and questions that arise from any examination of the relationship between sport and politics it is necessary to find an effective way of organizing the discussion.

National political interest and intervention in sports

Political interest and intervention in sports differ between one level and another. The extent of intervention is influenced by the degree and level of interest as follows:

National Peace, Security, and Defense

Security is a basic need of human beings and societies; it is worth noting that the political, economic, and social systems of a country create the conditions for security and insecurity. According to Etannibi (2015), security is a first-order or necessary precondition for the development of human beings and society. Maintenance of peace and security of a nation is thus, one of the front-line legitimate functions of a state, and any government that fails to protect its citizens will lose its respect and legitimacy (Dahiru., Abdul, . Sunday, 2023).

Only able people will provide defense for their nation. Onifade (2001), said that sport empowers people by inculcating life-long skills and know-how thereby giving the individual the capacity to liberate self from poverty and want. We can use sports participation as a means of curbing our security problems in the nation. Insecurity is always there in the state of the minds of the perpetrators. "Sport as an agent of change can be used to infiltrate their minds to help them develop the skills that will override their weaknesses. Participation in sports has a way of diverting the attention of youth away from social vices thereby reducing the chance of youth involvement in acts that will be detrimental to the peace of society (Dahiru, Mohammed & Jonathan 2022).

Achieving national defense may be influenced by social integration through sports; this is one of the important aspects of social control. Houlihan [2000)] points out that social integration is a loose term that can cover a diverse range of policy objectives including combating juvenile delinquency, establishing a sense of community during periods of rapid urbanization, and the integration of diverse ethnic groups. The motive for state involvement in sport (and one of the most common) is the belief that sport imbues the populace with the right type of values and norms – obedience, self-discipline, and teamwork (Riordan, 1980). Sports prepare the youth for the challenges in the future. Thus youth who achieve a reasonable level of physical fitness tend to adopt and adjust very well. There are many areas they can be of advantage in life. For example, recruitment into the army, police force, and other paramilitary involve some level of physical test, youth who are engaged in human kinetics and sports find it very easy to succeed in such training test. (Dahiru, Mohammed, and Jonathan 2022).

As a tool for national defense, Governments have long supported physical education and sport as a means of fostering a militarily effective populace in times of war. Riordan (1980). Points out that the link between sport and military combat was particularly evident during the period of rising nationalism and imperialism in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Gymnastics were introduced as the core of school

physical education in many Western countries, such as Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Russia, and England during this period. For instance, in England, the purpose of the introduction of gymnastics into elementary schools by the 1870 Education Bill was to increase work output, increase military power, and save money by diminution of the Poor Rates, the Police Rates, and the expenses of criminal machinery.

Political interests are the driving forces that governments throughout the world intervene in sports affairs to assist their political intentions. Literature shows that states intervene in sports as they attempt to develop the physical fitness and health of the citizens for national defence; maintain public order; promote national prestige; promote social solidarity; promote political ideology; to increase and maintain the legitimacy of the government and to promote public moral status as a part of welfare provision or to achieve its foreign policy objectives [Gratton, 1991). -These intentions may derive from domestic or international perspectives. However, it should be noted that the distinctions between domestic and international functions of sport as mentioned above are by no means tightly bounded. (Houlihan, 2000)

Political Interest, National Economic Development, and Sports Intervention

For any nation to be self-sufficient there must be great economic development, this is a forefront reason why the government is highly interested in economic development, and intervention in sport is aimed at encouraging sports participation and winning. There is a guaranteed relationship between the sports economy and national development. Therefore a more recent motive for government involvement in sport is to support economic development. Gratton, (1991) explained that the relationship between sport and the economy can be discussed in two ways. Firstly, the relationship between elite sports and economics, and secondly, mass sports. During the 1980s and 1990s, elite sports, such as professional leagues of baseball, basketball, and American football in the US; and cricket, football, and rugby leagues in the UK, have become more and more heavily promoted as a commercial product. Moreover, hosting megasports events in many countries has also become a desire, although the economics of such events are now being questioned. For instance, the summer and Winter Olympic Games or the Football World Cup are perceived as generating financial gains for the host country or city along with the heightening of its national image, prestige, legitimacy of the government, or as an international tourist destination.

For example Riordan J. (1991). Points out that the economic impact of Euro 96 in Sheffield was to generate £5.83 million in additional visitor expenditure in Sheffield and the creation of 154 extra full-time equivalent (FTE) jobs. There were £3.59 million additional visitor expenditure and 99 FTE jobs created in the 1996 4th FINA World Masters Swimming Championship, also in Sheffield. The total economic impact of both events was: 67,000 visiting spectators, an average stay for all visitors of 3 nights, 70,842 commercial bed nights generated, and £9.42 million additional visitor expenditure. Houlihan [12] also points out that at a national strategic level Mexico, Japan, and South Korea used the hosting of the Olympic Games as opportunities to project images of modern technological and organizationally sophisticated societies and economies. Some doubt has recently been cast on the validity of figures produced for such mega events (Roche, 2000) and the whole issue of the validity of Economic Impact Studies (EIS) is currently being debated [Lee Soon, 2001]. Thus political intervention in sports is aimed at enhancing quality sports performance bearing in mind that Winning

tournaments helps leaders do well- Nigerian politicians should invest more in turning our green, golden (Afolabi, 2019).

Sports help to achieve diplomatic interest

Governments sometimes use sport for negative objectives, but it is increasingly being used to pursue improved relations between countries. Diplomacy is a way of interaction between states in which they seek to influence each other's national interests without resorting to military force. The main function of diplomacy is to resolve disputed issues by peaceful means through negotiations and agreements. In the twentieth century public diplomacy, or so-called people-to-people diplomacy, became widespread. Public diplomacy includes aspects of international relations that go beyond its traditional sphere - the diplomacy of public organizations, informal groups, and individuals representing various spheres of public life. One of these spheres is sports and by extension sports diplomacy, which today is an essential part of public diplomacy (Nikita, 2023)

Sports diplomacy represents the official and unofficial activities of states, governments, and special foreign policy agencies, aimed at implementing the foreign policy objectives of a state by organizing, conducting, and participating in international sporting events. According to Murray (2013), sports diplomacy is the act of diplomacy and representation, carried out by representatives of sports institutions on behalf of and with the consent of the state. If diplomacy is seen as a means of achieving a state's foreign policy goals, sports diplomacy is one of several tools of such a toolbox. Such type of diplomacy uses the capabilities of athletes, sports officials, and sports competitions to create an attractive image of their country to the foreign public. The scope of participants in sports diplomacy is unusually wide: these are states, government agencies in the field of sport, international and national sports associations, athletes, coaches, sports professionals, the media, fan movements, etc. The activities of sports diplomacy can be divided into two directions, categorized as official and unofficial. The official dimension involves the use of sports competitions as a platform for informal political meetings, discussion of current problems, and development of agreements on certain issues.

For example, during the 2022 Beijing Olympics, Chinese President Xi Jinping was to hold bilateral meetings with numerous leaders who came to the event - Russia, Kazakhstan, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Poland, and many others. According to Nikita (2023), the unofficial dimension of sports diplomacy concerns the impact on foreign populations - sport serves as a psychological factor to illustrate the strength, power, and success of a particular state. In particular, France sees sport as one of the instruments of international influence, the most important task of which is to improve the image of the country in the international arena, reinforce the importance of French know-how, and promote the use of the French language. Today, sports diplomacy acts as a factor of integration, serves as an "ambassador of peace", and helps to establish friendly relations between different countries and societies. But on the other hand, sports are also frequently used for different purposes, far from the achievement of peace in the world. In the context of particular political circumstances, international relationships, and diplomatic objectives, sports diplomacy can be used both to resolve problematic issues and to serve as a trigger for conflicts or as an instrument of political pressure. This duality is the defining characteristic of sports as a political tool. For example, the football match between the national teams of Iran and the United States at the 1998

FIFA World Cup was symbolic in terms of diplomatic relations. There was already a great amount of turmoil before the match due to political disputes between the two states. Nevertheless, athletes from both countries gave each other gifts and flowers and were also photographed together before the match. The match was a symbol of the warm-up in Iran-US relations, which eventually led to the two countries playing each other in a friendly match in the United States in 2000.

However, major international competitions, besides having the positive effect of uniting people around the world, can also have a clear dividing trait. In addition, the mixing of sport and politics tends to be driven by the pursuit of selfish interests of countries that are not beneficial to world peace at all. Historically, the latter has been associated with the act of using sports for political manifestations via boycotting, athletes' isolation, or propaganda. This may well include the actions of the German Nazis and Italian Fascists, who used international sports competitions to promote the domination of their new political systems and ideologies. Nowadays, the practice of using sports as a tool of diplomacy is reflected not only in the hosting of competitions but also in the creation of programs, documents, and institutions that in one way or another coordinate these activities. Particularly, the U.S. Department of State has a special Sports Diplomacy Division, which is intended to establish a dialogue using sports with young people around the world. Meanwhile, in 2019 the Australian government adopted an ambitious "Sports Diplomacy 2030" strategy, which aims to enhance national attractiveness. Therefore, governments see sports as an effective method of promoting national interests and projecting values and identity.

Today we can talk about a new direction of diplomatic activity, which has its unique means, mechanisms of activity, and a special potential to develop dialogue between countries, both at multilateral and bilateral levels. It has acquired a definition in recent years and has become a full-fledged academic term within the framework of an extensive topic of public diplomacy. Governments see sport as an effective method of promoting national interests and projecting values and identity. Today we can talk about a new direction of diplomatic activity, which has its unique means, mechanisms of activity, and a special potential to develop dialogue between countries, both at multilateral and bilateral levels. It has acquired a definition in recent years and has become a full-fledged academic term within the framework of an extensive topic of public diplomacy.

Achieving political interest through sports victories the African experience

Afolabi (2019), asserted that Sport, can unify a country. Beyond that though, sporting success has often generated significant social and political rewards for those able to capitalise on it. Politicians, especially, have used sporting victories as platforms to dispense their message or leveraged them for a simple popularity boost. Given the potential of sport as a tool for socio-economic mobility for young Nigerians, it is worth exploring why investing in sports would also be a good idea for our leaders. On a purely selfish level, there is a lot to gain for Nigerian politicians from investing in sports. Fewer things cut across the political, religious, or ethnic divide than a nation succeeding in sports. Yet it is not just about winning, but about being involved in the *narrative* of the winning side. A clear example is the case of a young democracy; Cote D'Ivoire has fairly active citizen engagement. The ousting of Laurent Gbagbo, president for ten years, in favour of Alassane Ouattara was one result of this. But when the second term campaign came around in 2015, Ouattara was given the perfect boost: the Elephants

triumphed at the African Cup of Nations in Equatorial Guinea. This helped a troubled political climate that included planned protests from supporters of former President Gbagbo. While many agree that Ouattara performed credibly in his first term, the unity of the nation after their victory helped curb planned low turnout and gift him a second mandate (Afolabi. 2019).

Similarly, France has won the Men's World Cup twice: 1998 and 2018. On each occasion, the President enjoyed a massive jump in opinion poll ratings, as each of them turned on the style and charm to cultivate it. In 1998, Jacques Chirac was especially lucky. He led the pre-tournament optimism and post-tournament celebrations as France decimated holders Brazil in Paris. He saw a 14-point increase in his approval rating. Meanwhile, the victory of the multiracial team—nicknamed *Black Blanc Beur* (Black, White, and Arab)—helped smooth over tensions from riots the year before. His embrace of this French identity would also help him to re-election in 2002 over the farright candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen. More recently, embattled President Emmanuel Macron took the 2018 World Cup by storm. Pictures abound of Macron celebrating a goal in the Final by punching a fist in the air and receiving a welcome similar boost to his then-low popularity ratings. Macron embracing another multiracial team, led by prominent black players like Paul Pogba and Kylian Mbappe, helped abet the 'president of the rich' toga that he had been draped with as citizens responded to his cuts and taxes with strikes and protests. In all these examples, the leaders honed in on a message by tying their fortunes with that of the team and enjoyed

Conclusion and recommendation

In conclusion, Sport provides politically usable resources, and can promote nation-building and international image-making. During the Cold War era, sport's role in international relations was especially important. Nowadays international relations can be described as multilateral, with many centres of power and little desire for war. The world focuses on the scope of operation, and sport's political role will probably be limited. But it seems that the political significance of sport that was attained in the interwar period will be retained, and states will keep using it for the sake of political goals [Gratton and Taylor, (1991).

Sport and Politics always have an intimate relationship. Politics is using sport to support conservative values. Also, governments are using sport as a weapon for foreign policy, as boycotts of international competitions. Nowadays, no sport is free from interference of the politicians. Even many politicians are interested in getting to the top positions and also holding the same in national and international sports Association and Federation. It can easily be stated that once sport achieved a certain level of popularity, it became an important means of national and international politics, playing a significant role in propaganda and in changing the shape of international relations.

Political intervention in sports is aimed at enhancing quality sports performance bearing in mind that Winning tournaments help leaders do well-Nigerian politicians should invest more in turning our green, and golden (<u>Afolabi</u>, 2019). For this reason, it is hereby recommended that the government should spend a substantial part of its annual budget on sports development, through the enacting of sports development policy and intervention in terms of provision and maintenance of facilities and equipment. And the sponsor of sports programmes. This makes the relationship between sport and politics one of the most enduring and pervasive examples of society's

impact/influence on sport. Whilst there may still be some people who consider sport and politics to be completely separate entities, evidence suggests that it is no longer possible for any serious social commentator to posit a separation between the worlds of sport and politics.

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