

Impact of Geo-Political Divisiveness on Sports Diplomacy

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| Received: 11.01.2026 | Accepted: 18.02.2026 | Published: 24.02.2026

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Abstract**Original Research Article**

This paper examines the impact of geopolitical divisiveness on sports diplomacy with specific focus on the 2025 Asia Cup, where Indian cricket players refused to shake hands with their Pakistani counterparts. Referring to historical background and present-day examples, the study analyzes how deep-rooted political stringencies have swept away the gentleman's game as a diplomatic instrument. A detailed case analysis reveals that boycott type of incidents not only demoralize sportsmanship but also aggravate mutual aggressions, limiting opportunities for genuine talents from either side. India versus Pakistan is the most watched cricketing tournament across the globe, but the nationalism narrative induces the public to back the political decisions of the respective governments. The main aim of this study is to appeal the lawmakers in power to consider sports as a diplomatic tool of harmony and peace, not a stage to prove their political supremacy. One significant observation is that the rights of players are violated by not allowing them to take part in the games. Political power is indispensable for any state to thrive amid worldwide competitive pressures. When the same is ill motivated, the repercussions severely affect the state's international relations. This study demands stronger reforms of depoliticization and SOPs for conducting the tournaments to encourage the sporting community participate without any fear. Although geopolitical issues have become the new norm, nations must devise sustainable solutions to reach a mutual consensus that serves the interests of all, and players voices matter the most to usher in a new phase of sports diplomacy.

Keywords: consensus, harmony, nationalism, participation, sportsmanship, supremacy.

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INTRODUCTION

Sport events set the stage for diplomacy to demonstrate how countries sustain a respectable relationship with each other, promote sociability, and ease political tugs. Historical precedents attest that sports acted as a link between hostile nations, as evinced by landmark "Ping-Pong diplomacy" between the United States and China in the 1970s, which facilitated the establishment of stabilized relations. Similarly, cricket is one such sports to have higher craze and fan following than any other. Any tournament between India-Pakistan in particular, attracts maximum crowd at the venue with massive TRP's for the media. The cricketing spectators has spread across the globe irrespective of nationality and religion. This clearly implies that the game has the pulling force to unite the people. There have been high-stakes games between the two countries that have drawn attention from all over the world. These games have been both competitive and peaceful. Unfortunately, India and Pakistan are always at the loggerheads in the areas concerning security of the nation. Despite several

instances of terror incidents, the resilience in the spirit of the game constantly won the hearts of cricket fans from both the countries.

However, the present day geo-political divisiveness has evaded the diplomacy stage where power and position dominate the sporting interests. A distressing example is the 2025 Asia Cup, where Indian players, purportedly with directions from the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI), refused to shake hands with Pakistani players across multiple matches, including the final. This incident, knotted with the recent attacks like the Pahalgam terror incident, highlighted how political rhetoric can predominate sports diplomacy. This paper attempt to clarify the readers about the patterns of divisiveness that affects sports diplomacy in a larger context. The researcher argues that sports unite people to participate and interact, but constant political wrangle amplify spaces for propaganda and boycotts, which makes it harder to build cordial relations. This study considers cricket matches between India and Pakistan in specific, using the 2025 Asia Cup as the focal

example to understand the severity of divisive politics on sports diplomacy.

2. Geo-Political Background of India-Pakistan Relations

The Indo-Pak rivalry traces back to the partition phase of 1947, and their political interactions turned antagonistic during the war years in 1947, 1965, 1971, and 1999. The 2008 terror attack in Mumbai exacerbated sports diplomacy between two nations. Considering the fact that the terror groups from Pakistan were involved in the attacks, this study solely focus on the consequences of such incidents on sporting relationship between the sates. Indian government announced an official boycott playing cricket against Pakistan, a tactical action against terrorism. India hasn't played a two-way series in Pakistan since 2008, citing safety reasons. Subsequently, Pakistan refused take part in events hosted by India. This forced the ICC to host cricket matches at neutral sites. All these situations compel the states to strengthen their geopolitical standing regardless of sporting requirements or diplomatic exchanges. The Pahalgam terror attack in 2024 and recurrent border clashes heightened the political tensions between the two nations. As mentioned earlier, India versus Pakistan is the most viewed cricketing tournament across the globe but when things turn political the audience at the either side has no other choice than to support the states action. The youngsters in Pakistan admire and follow Virat Kohli, the Indian cricketer for his vivid batting style. There are several instances where the audience from either giving a standing ovation to have witnessed an outstanding performance. So, it's quite clear that problem starts when things turn political. The players are supported and celebrated not for their nationality, but for their performance on field. There are instances of off -field gestures from players from either side with their fans, approves the power of sports diplomacy. When politics is kept aside, you can see only the sports, with people being fully immersed in the game just to support their favorites at the ground. In the aforementioned context, it's evident that political pressures exclusively determine the players' actions, while the spirit of the game remains uncompromised.

3. Case Study: The 2025 Asia Cup Handshake Refusal

The UAE hosted the 2025 Men's T20 Asia Cup, in which Indian players avoided the handshakes with their Pakistani counterparts for specific reasons discussed above. The sports enthusiasts witnessed an unusual gesture at the ground, right from the toss until the final ball. The spirit of the gentlemen's game seemed amateurish when the Indian team refused to accept the winner trophy from ACC President Mohsin Naqvi, a Pakistani official in the final game. The fans who had gathered to see their favorite team lift the trophy were left confused about the valedictory ceremony. Later, the

Indian team captain, Suryakumar Yadav, opined that the victory was dedicated to the victims of the Pahalgam attack, and the refusal to receive the trophy from a Pakistani official was obvious. The media's reporting on Indo-Pak relations reached an unprecedented low, exacerbating the animosity between the cricketing fans of both nations. They did much damage to the sporting environment with seldom constructive discussions that might have lessened the hatred between the fans of both the countries. While Indian media headline the incident, a victory of nationalism, the Pakistani press on the other end criticized Indian cricketers' sportsmanship. Political thinkers across the world believed it was the end of "cricket diplomacy." Sporting communities across the globe refrained from interference in this matter because of political ramifications. This incident is a classic case of state supremacy to overturn the sporting decisions for political reasons.

4. Impact on Sports Diplomacy

The consequences from degenerated political relations have an overarching impact on sports diplomacy. With diversified opportunities, sporting events ascend as a progressive tool in the development of a nation. A small damage will dishearten the spirit of the game and instill hatred in partakers, resulting in a negative diplomacy.

Following are a few observations in relation to the negative impacts on sports diplomacy:

1. **Trust deficit:** The sporting community loses trust on account of unfriendly environment to compete and participate in the near future.
2. **Intensifying Nationalism:** A new political tactic in place where countries confronted by geopolitical issues plant nationalism narratives, and amplify them through varied media sources to seek public support in their favor.
3. **Economic Impacts:** It's obvious that cricket, particularly the Indo-Pak clashes, generates maximum revenue for the International Cricket Council (ICC). The outcomes of any kind of boycott will certainly impact the economic infrastructure, including transportation (airways and railways), TV viewership, sponsorship, and other revenues for local authorities through taxes.
4. **Global effect:** The rapid growth of social media facilitates the exchange and deliberation of political messages across the global audience. When things turn political with typical boycotts in place, will further increase divisiveness among global audience losing interest on sports.

5. DISCUSSION

The 2025 India-Pak cricketing event is a classic case of bad sports diplomacy with states using boycott mechanisms to pursue their political agendas. With boycotts, a country like India has nothing to lose considering the economic standing. On the contrary,

Pakistan faces severe economic hardships considering the revenue generated from multiple sources. Finally, it's the sport enthusiasts' and players' rights that are violated despite their non-involvement in the political tussle. Political sovereignty is an administrative subject and onus lies on the state to settle and resolve the disputes concerning. One significant observation after referring to news articles on boycott incident is the silence of former cricketers. Their voices mattered the most and a smallest of intervention might have ushered in a new phase of diplomacy. Unfortunately, the political repercussions often target the dissents with an Anti-National tag attached to them. If people with strong socio-economic status turn still, just imagine the plight of the common public who barely speak. The limitation in the study is the absence of relevant data to analyze the sentiments of the cricket fans since there's a fear of supposed legal actions imposed on those who have participated in any survey against the political will of the concerned states. This case is a classic example of players victimized for political maladministration.

6. CONCLUSION

Geopolitical differences limit sports discourse. The sporting authorities and institutions should devise the rules for fair play, encourage players to talk to each other, and hire unbiased diplomats to ease out the political tensions. With stronger reforms of depoliticization and detailed SOPs for conducting the tournaments, the sporting community is encouraged to participate without any fear. There are similar cases of India-Pakistan clashes before 2025 with precedents of positive sports diplomacy despite their political standings. The solution is simple: if sports want to be fully diplomatic, they need to be more than just politics. Future research should focus on analyzing players sentiment to comprehend their viewpoints.

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