

Integration of Politics and Sports in Lebanon

A Thesis

presented

to

the Faculty of Humanities

at Notre Dame University-
Louaize

In Partial
Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the
Degree

Master of Arts in
Media Studies

by

Ahmad Nasrallah

July 2020

© COPYRIGHT

By

Ahmad Nasrallah

2020

All Rights Reserved

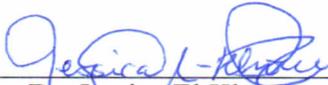
Notre Dame University - Louaize
Faculty of Humanities

Department of Media Studies

We hereby approve the thesis of

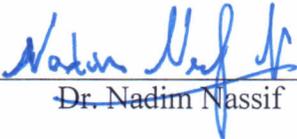
Ahmad Nasrallah

Candidate for the degree of Master of Arts in Media Studies



Dr. Jessica El Khoury

Supervisor



Dr. Nadim Nassif

Committee Member



Dr. Christy Mady

Committee Member



Dr. Maria Bou Zeid

Chair

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I want to express my sincere gratitude to my advisor, Dr. Jessica El Khoury, for her time, support, and patience throughout the whole process. Her comments and dedication to help me with my thesis is highly appreciated.

I would also like to thank my thesis committee: Dr. Nadim Nassif and Dr. Christy Mady, for their time and beneficial comments. I would also like to thank Dr. Mady for her continuous support throughout my MA journey.

I am also grateful to Dr. Maria Abou Zeid, for assisting me in various administrative tasks.

Finally, I would like to thank my very good friend, Gacia Danaoghlian, for her continuous support and help with my thesis.

Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	5
Context of Lebanon and Lebanese Sports	5
Sports Culture in Lebanon	9
<i>Presences of Sports Federations</i>	12
<i>Football and Basketball Funding</i>	13
Impact of Politics on Sports.....	14
The Case of Egypt.....	19
European Context.....	21
<i>Spain</i>	21
<i>United Kingdom: Glasgow, Scotland.</i>	23
<i>Italy</i>	24
Theoretical Framework.....	27
Spiral of Silence Theory	27
Two-Step Flow Theory	31
Research Questions.....	36
Methodology.....	37
Research Philosophy.....	37
Research Design.....	37
Sample and Procedure.....	37

Interview	37
Survey	40
Variables	42
<i>Demographics</i>	42
<i>Political and Religious Impact</i>	42
<i>Level of Engagement with Sports Team</i>	42
<i>Team Players' Perceptions about the Club</i>	42
<i>The Opinion of Fans towards any Game: Two-step Flow</i>	43
<i>Influence of Opinion Leaders: Spiral of Silence</i>	43
Data Analysis Process.....	43
Ethical Consideration.....	44
Results.....	45
Demographic Analysis.....	45
RQ1: What is the impact of politics and religion on Lebanese sports, specifically football and basketball?.....	51
Politically	51
Religiously	52
RQ2: Do fans feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?	61
RQ3: Do the opinion leaders transfer their thoughts to the followers on how to behave and act in relation to football and basketball?	63
<i>Fans as opinion leaders or followers</i>	63

<i>Communication with Fans</i>	64
<i>Owners as opinion leaders or followers</i>	67
Discussion	68
The Impact of Politics and Religion on Sports	68
Influence of Political and Religious Leader on Fans and Players	72
Team Players' Perception of Team Status	74
The Influence of Politics on Fans in Sports	76
Opinion Leaders' Influence on Followers	76
Limitations	77
Implications and Future Research.....	78
Appendix A: Questionnaire	81
Appendix B: Interview Questions.....	91
Appendix C: Transcribed Interviews (Football).....	93
Appendix D: Transcribed Interviews (Basketball)	102
Appendix E: Tables and Charts of Results	114
References.....	132

Abstract

Throughout history, politics has played a major role in exerting its power into other domains, especially sports. In Lebanon, sports has been heavily linked to politics and religion as Lebanon's history is known for its political and religious conflicts. The purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of politics on Lebanese sports in the two most prominent sports fields, football and basketball, using the Spiral of Silence and the Two-Step theories. The final sample of 295 participants filled a questionnaire that targeted their fandom and attitudes towards political intervention in sports. Also, five professional basketball and five professional football players from first division teams were interviewed. Results showed that politics and religion play a major role in sports, especially through funding, and fans are affected by this former integration. Results also show mostly a negative attitude towards this interference, and many have noted being affected by opinions related to teams and decision which circulate social media. The results pave the way to understanding how the sports-religion system intertwines in Lebanon, provides an assessment of fans' and players' behavior, and emphasizes the need for financial support for the teams' and fans' sustainability, as a recommendation to reduce this interference in a healthy manner.

Keywords: Politics, Religion, Lebanon, Spiral of Silence Theory, Two-Step-Flow Theory

Introduction

From the ancient times of the Roman Colosseum to the present times of the Yankee Stadium, Super Bowl, and Olympics, sports have played a pivotal role in societies across the globe. Taking into consideration that there is a lot at stake including power, money as well as pride, sports is heavily linked with politics (Dunning, 2013). In Lebanon, the case is not different. In fact, both religion and politics influence sports (Nassif & Amara, 2015). In Lebanon, the major political parties have distinct religious affiliations and are tied to their own sports teams. The Al Mustakbal or Future political party, for instance, is a political party predominantly associated with Sunna Muslims and the Al Riyadi team in basketball and Al Ansar team in football. Likewise, the Lebanese Forces, another Lebanese political party mainly associated with Christians is a supporter of Saggesse basketball team. Similarly, the Progressive Socialist Party is predominantly Druz and is associated with Al-Safa football team. These are few examples of teams and their political affiliations; however, the greater concern lies in attempting to answer the following questions: Why is there a dominance of politics and religion in sports in Lebanon, and where did these types of divisions originate? How do they influence the Lebanese sports field?

To help answer these questions, a historical overview is needed about the Lebanese political system. As World War I ended in 1920, the League of Nations placed Lebanon under the French mandate upon the partition of the Ottoman Empire. Lebanon was the sub-unit of the French authority for Syria and Lebanon and managed from Damascus (Traboulsi, 2012). In May 1926, a Lebanese constitution was introduced by the French. Even after independence was declared in November of 1943, French forces continued to exert their influence (Hakim, 2019). In 1943, the foundation of a new state was declared in

an unwritten National Covenant. In November 1943, French Free Forces arrested the members of appointed Lebanese administration before releasing them on 22 November, under British and American pressure. This date became the Independence Day.

In 1943, Lebanon formed a sectarian government that distributed the seats in parliament on a ratio of 6 to 5 in favor of Christians, based on a census taken in 1932. It was also agreed that the president of the Lebanese Republic would be a Christian Maronite, the prime minister would be Muslim Sunna, and the president of the parliament would be a Muslim Shiaaa. This method of dividing government between dominant sects still continues today (Minorities at Risk, 2004). The form of confessional government in place in Lebanon gave rise to many conflicts; while a short-lived civil war erupted in 1958 between Christians and Muslims, a major one followed from 1975 to 1990. The war ended with The Taif Accord in 1991. The accord explicitly placed the aim of “eradicating political sectarianism” as an essential national objective (The Taif Agreement, 1989, p. 5) While unable to abolish confessionals in 1989, the Taif Accord introduced some reforms to end sectarianism: suggesting that the post in the civil service will be merit-based. Confessional focus tended to support greater commitment to one’s cultural group. Accordingly, to equalize between the Muslims and Christians, the Taif Accord divided the seats of the parliament equally between Christians and Muslims while also transferring much of the authority of the president to the cabinet. This became known as the governing of the Troika. (The Taif Agreement, 1989).

The succeeding foreign powers that occupied the nation and a large group of people with various religious communities that have coexisted inside Lebanon have not just contributed to the development of a modern state that revels in very rich cultural and religious

diversities but also established a republic administered by a delicate balance of power (Salibi 1993). This delicate balance based on religious division or distribution has permeated itself into different forms and discourses in the country, including but not limited to geopolitics, education, media, and sports.

The need for this study is to identify how this integration influences the sports industry, with a specific focus on basketball and football. This is necessary to determine the ways in which these different sports can grow and develop. Lebanon offers a thought-provoking perspective on the study of sport and politics. While previous literature has looked into politics and religion in sports in Lebanon, no study has tackled this integration in details, particularly taking into consideration fan attitude and behavior. This study is valuable in that it bridges that gap as it describes this integration in relation to the fans of basketball and football teams in Lebanon.

While the influence of politics on sports is obvious, the objective of this study is to investigate the details of this influence on football and basketball and its effect on fans and their opinion making process. In doing so, the Spiral of Silence theory was used to investigate whether political figures and/or religious leaders impose a direct or indirect Spiral of Silence on the team and fans, given that the political/religious leader is the owner of the team or has strong political affiliations with certain political parties who sponsor (give financial help) those teams. From this perspective, this study will try to understand whether the teams and fans avoid expressing their actual opinions in fear of losing the support of the religious/political figures who offer financial assistance to the team. In investigating these intertwined perspectives, the researcher will be able to also understand, through the two-step flow model, whether the opinion leaders transfer their thoughts to the

followers on how to behave concerning football and basketball and at which point one becomes the opinion leader or the follower. These types of connections are vital in aiming at offering solutions to combat political and religious power over sports. Therefore, using the theories of the spiral of silence and the two-step flow, this thesis seeks to understand how politics and religion influence and integrate with sports in Lebanon, mainly in basketball and football, as well as how the fans of these sports are impacted by this politics/religion sports relationship.

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to carry out a comprehensive review of existing literature related to the impact of politics on sports and specifically in the Lebanese context, as well as provide a comprehensive understanding of the functionality of football and basketball in Lebanon. This chapter will, also, include examples of how sports and politics are related in popular sports teams both in the Arab world (e.g., Egypt) and in the European context (e.g., England and Spain) in order to draw comparisons and models of what Lebanese sports should attempt to follow or divert from.

Context of Lebanon and Lebanese Sports

Lebanon is a country that has more than 18 religious sects. Since the formation of Lebanon, many political parties existed. In fact, many of them who participated in the Civil War back in 1975 still exist today, and they are active members of the current government or participating members within the Lebanese parliaments. As previously mentioned, politics is highly integrated with religion and vice versa. The political parties each represent a certain religious sect in Lebanon. The most prominent parties include:

- Tayyar el Mostakbal (or Future Party) representing Muslim Sunnas
- Hezbollah (literally Party of God) and Haraket Amal (or Amal Movement – Amal literally means hope and in Arabic, it is an abbreviation for Lebanese Resistance Regiments –Afwaj Al Muqawama Al Lubnaniya) representing Muslim Shiaa
- Al Hezb Al Taqadomi Al Ishtiraki (Progressive Socialist Party) representing Druze

- Al Quwwat Al Lubnaniya (Lebanese Forces) representing mainly Christian Maronites, and Al Tayyar El Watani el Hor (Free Patriotic Movement) representing other Christians from other geographical areas.

These politico-religious divisions have also been portrayed in sports, as each sports team is somehow a representative of one of the aforementioned political parties/religions.

Since each geographical area in Lebanon is occupied by a specific religious group, it seems that the common ordeal is to have the sports teams of this geographical area that is occupied by a specific religion support the political party that represents the religion. For example, in basketball, Al Riyade Basketball team is the team of Central Beirut. Central Beirut is occupied by Muslim Sunnas mainly, who are represented by Tayyar El Mostakbal (Future Movement), and therefore fans of Riyade Club are Muslim Sunnas who support Tayyar el Mostakbal (Yee, 2019). Football and basketball are seemingly considered to be the most followed sports in Lebanon. Both basketball and football leagues have teams from different areas.

Table 1:

Football Teams in Lebanon and Their Affiliations

Football Team	Political Affiliation	Religious Affiliation	Owner	Number of Fans (Facebook Groups)
AlAhed	Hezbollah	Muslim Shiaaa	Tamim Solayman	8,400
Nejmeh	Tayyar Al Mostakbal	Muslim Sunna/Shiaaa	Asaad Sakal	129,000
Shabab Alsahel	No Political Affiliation	Muslim Shiaaa	Samir Dbouk	18,000
Tadamon Sour	Haraket Amal	Muslim Shiaaa	Samir Baweb	13,000
Ansar	Tayyar Mostsakbal	Muslim Sunna	Nabil Bader	10,000
Tripoli	Najib Mikatti	Muslim Sunna	Ghassan Yakan	13,000

Table 2:

Basketball Teams in Lebanon and Their Affiliations

Basketball Team)	Political Affiliation	Religious Affiliation	Owner	Number of Fans (Facebook)
Riyadi	Tayyar Al Mostakbal	Muslim Sunna	Mazen Tabarra	165,000
Champville	Tayyar Alwatani	Christian Maronite	Akram Safa	12,300
Sagesse	Lebanese Forces	Christian Maronite	Elie Yahchouchi	61,000
Moutahed	Mohammad Al Safadi	Muslim Sunna	Ahmad ALSafadi	12,000
Hoops			Jassem Kansa	4,500
Byblos	Tayyar Alwatani	Christian	John Khaled	7,700
Homentmen	Tashnak	Christian Armenian Orthodox	Raffi Mometechilian	33,000

Sports Culture in Lebanon

In Lebanon, football and basketball leagues are considered the two most popular sports in the country (Sharif, 2017). Many of the teams, whether in football or basketball, have reached a degree of fame that has attracted many fans. Some of the teams have also gained international recognition. As a result, fans have become invested in these sports and have followed them and attended many of their games.

In football, for example, The Classico, the game between Ansar and Nejmeh attracts the most fans and is considered the highlight event of the season. This match is usually played in the Camille Chamoun Stadium (known as Madine Reyadiyeh or literally Sports City). The number of seats in the stadium amounts to 45,000, and during such matches, the stadium welcomes the audience in full capacity. Most of the fans prefer to physically attend the match because it is at the heart of Beirut and very close to the areas where the fans reside (Maugendre, 2018). Only a few prefer to watch it from home or go to cafes. Other matches that strike an interest to the fans are games between Nejmeh and Alahed due to hidden political tensions that spark a competitive status from the teams as they are represented by Haraket Amal and Hezbollah respectively, both from the Muslim Shiaa sect (Maugendre, 2018).

Basketball leagues have recently climbed up the ranks as one of the most-watched sports in Lebanon, especially in the last decade (Sharif, 2017). One of the most popular matches in the numerous seasons is those between Sagesse and Riyadi, which are considered to be the most successful teams in the history of Lebanese basketball. These matches take place in either Manara (home stadium of Riyadi) or Ghazir (home stadium of Sagesse). The stadiums for these matches are usually full house (more than 7,500 fans will

be present), and there are often verbal or physical clashes take place as a result of religious and political tensions between the fans of the two teams (Maugendre, 2018). Recently, a new match is receiving an increase in popularity: Homentmen versus Riyadi, since they are subject to political and religious clashes with one another. Another reason would be the advancement of the former to higher ranks due to the financial support it is receiving from an Armenian sponsor, Guy Manoukian (Naharnet Newsdesk, 2018). The fans usually get heated up in these matches, which either take place in Aghpalian Club (Home Stadium for Homentmen) or the Riyadi Stadium (Manara). The political and religious tensions between the fans are often highlighted during those games, especially due to the former's affiliation to the Tashnag Armenian party and their zealous support to the Armenian Genocide against the Turks, and the latter's alliance with the Turkish government (MTV, 2017). The games, on multiple occasions, have turned into verbal, emotional, and physical disturbances as Riyadi fans tend to provoke Homentmen fans by raising and waving the flags of Turkey in the stadium and cause violent physical clashes among the fans (MTV, 2017).

Such games are rather intense and violent. In some cases, the fans often carry flags of their political parties and chant the name of their leaders "Zaiims" of their political party. Other times, the chants are religious. In Riyadi versus Homentmen games, for example, Homentmen fans tend to carry the Lebanese, Armenian, Tashnag flags and sing Tashnag party chants. Sometimes, during the games, such chants get intensified, and become verbal attacks on other parties, such as the use of insults, offensive language, and provocative actions (such as the raise of the Turkish flag) which sparks verbal violence, and this often leads to physical violence during the game. An attack on the player, team, or the political

party or religious sect is an attack on the identity of the fan, an identity that fans most often seek to protect no matter the cost.

Figure 1:

A Facebook Post of a Riyadi Fan during a Homentmen vs. Riyadi Game



The Facebook post above with the caption “It is not a story of commission nor trophy nor triumph. Our passion is Al Riyadi, a passion since childhood (sic).” The extreme loyalty is evident in the picture as Riyadi fans, who most likely belong to Al Mostakbal political party, are Muslim Sunna. The Turkish flag they are carrying has multiple connotations. On one hand, it represents their Turkish dispositions since their affiliated political party has a strong alliance with Turkey. On the other hand, the Turkish flag is insulting to Homentmen fans, who belong to the Tashnag party and are of Armenian origins. Their Armenian-Turkish heavy rivalry dates back to the times of the 1915 Genocide, and relations between them are severed and personal, so up till today, any association with Turkey is intolerable

and sensitive to most of the Armenian community. The Turkish flag, therefore, carried by Riyadi fans, is only a means to provoke Tashnag Armenian flags and challenge their identity.

Presences of Sports Federations

The Lebanese Basketball Federation and the Lebanese Football Association are presided by Akram Halabi (Christian Maronite) and Hachem Haidar (Muslim Shiite) respectively and divided based on political and religious agendas. For example, it is commonly known that the presidency of the Lebanese Basketball Federation is always given to a Christian Maronite whereas the Lebanese Football Association is always given to a Muslim Shiaaa. The federations include members from all the religions, but the main decisions are usually taken by the presidents and general secretaries. It is known that basketball is part of the Christian share, and the football is for the Muslim Shiaa. This issue is also present during the matches of the national team. For example, the national football team sets its matches in Beirut (considered predominately as a Muslim Area) whereas the Basketball National team plays in Zouk Mousbeh (a predominately Christian area). This distribution in the unions is also reflected in the decisions taken throughout the season.

In both football and basketball leagues, politics plays a crucial role. For example, since Classico games in football are played between two Shiaaa teams, such games most likely attract Shiaaa fans and/or fans that belong to either Hezbollah or Haraket Amal and are played in Shiaaa dominated areas. In basketball, the popular basketball leagues are popular among Christian Maronites, Armenian, and Muslim Sunnas. The games usually take place in Christian areas or in Muslim Sunna areas and attract like-fans. This

phenomenon has allowed some sort of segregation between the two sports, their potential players and fans for logistic reasons.

Football and Basketball Funding

Football is considered one of the most popular sports in Lebanon, and for years, no other sport was able to outshine its popularity. However, in the past years, basketball has started gaining popularity in Lebanon, and today, the number of followers has increased and almost surpassed that of football (Sharif, 2017). This is due to the investment and the enormous financial support from businessmen, sponsors, and banks it has been receiving compared to football. The financial support, nonetheless, had underlying political agendas in most cases. However, the result of this support was the drastic increase in the number of spectators during games in the course of the last few years. (Attieh, personal communication, June 5, 2020).

In the early nineties, the departed Antonie Shweiry who is the owner of the greatest advertising agency in the Middle East aimed to transfer football from an amateur league to a professional one. Nevertheless, the suggestion was not welcomed by many, so he switched to basketball. Shweiry invested money on basketball, became the President of Sagesse Team, and lead the team to win three Asian Championship. This motivated other businessmen and companies to support other basketball teams (Attieh, personal communication, June 5, 2020).

This begs the question of why football in Lebanon is receding in popularity. In 2009, no political parties funded football teams, yet up until the economic crisis, almost all football teams were being funded by various political parties (Maugendre, 2018). As a result of Lebanon's economic crisis, companies preferred not to invest in sports. Moreover,

the pandemic has also affected the advancement of football as this year's league has been canceled due to the Coronavirus pandemic. While media attention and interest have subsided in both football and basketball, especially that the latter has also been bankrupted economically and the leagues are in a frantic search for supporters, the chances for boosting football in Lebanon are aggravated (Attieh, personal communication, June 5, 2020).

The issue of sectarian divisions that permeate sports may appear directly in discussions among fans and announcements, but it is mostly subtle. Direct manifestations of such divisions include issues between team fans because of sectarianism. A good example is what occurred during the 2012-2013 season as the Lebanese Basketball Association canceled the championship because of the fights that were breaking out between fans in the field and outside it (such as fans attacking opponents' bus). On the other hand, subtle sectarian division or partition can appear, for instance, in the uniform. The Sagesse team shows its affiliation to the Lebanese forces through the color of the Jerseys. The colors of the jersey (olive green and white) are also the representative flag of the Lebanese Forces. Moreover, their refusal to allow the interference of other sponsors also highlights this fact. In 2019, one of the investors who belong to the Free Patriotic Movement offered support to the Sagesse team who was almost going to accept the offer, but the Lebanese Forces refused and claimed that they will solely support the team (Attieh, personal communication, June 5, 2020).

Impact of Politics on Sports

Nassif and Amara (2015) conducted a research study on sports, policy, and politics in Lebanon. According to the authors, the over-representation of religious communities in the sports industry within the nation to the detriment of developing a clear and functional

structure is strongly existent in the national sport movement. In other words, there is a clear political and religious representation, whether regarding ownership, management, and team members, in each sports club or academy, and in the political and religious affiliation of the fans that support it. The national sport movement encompasses the numerous fans and spectators in the country that are in support of the various sports played. Also, the authors (Nassif & Amara, 2015) indicated that all governmental establishments in the nation follow the same rule in the sense that there is no properly outlined and functional structure. For this reason, numerous individuals within the sports industry end up landing into particular positions within certain federations since they are supported by a political party. The study indicated that 90% of the individuals working in sports organizations are not qualified for their jobs and were recruited because of political considerations (Nassif & Amara, 2015). This only further proves the manifestation of politics and religion in the sports industry as an indirect form of power struggle.

Karami (2013) detailed how politics and sectarianism among sports administrations damaged the sports of basketball in Lebanon. The author discussed a prospective ban of the Lebanese Basketball Association from being a member of FIBA (Federation International de Basket-ball). This would result in the barring of the country's basketball national team from playing a part in any international competitions or tournaments; in fact, the ban happened after the article was written, between the years 2013 and 2014. This was the result of the influence of politics on Lebanese basketball. Notably, this influence was turned into physical and verbal abuse through the fans, players, and club officials, especially during the playoff games between Sagesse and Riyadi (Karami, 2013). The consequence of this influence was the weakening of international and local competitions.

Karami (2013) demonstrated the consequence of political integration in basketball. Basketball in Lebanon has always taken a political direction. Riyadi is the team supported by Sunnas represented by Tayyar el Mostakbal and Saggesse is the team supported by Christians represented by Lebanese forces and Tayyar Al Watani El Hor. These parties have always been in political conflict. This political conflict promoted hatred between the fans (Karami, 2013; Yee, 2019). During the games, fans from both parties could not tolerate each other and tended towards physically and verbally abusing each other. Such behavior that stems from political disharmony ruined the basketball league (Karami, 2013). As a result of serious conflicts that have become repetitive, FIBA decided to ban Lebanon from participating in international competitions and thus causing Lebanese basketball to decline internationally. This ban was the result of deep political and religious intervention in sports, mostly among fans and administration, a heavy price the sports industry paid as a consequence of the integration.

Nassif (2014) indicates that there is a great deal of corruption in the nation's sports industry as a result of the meddling and intrusion by the political figures in the club administrations; thus, politicization of sports in Lebanon has been unavoidable. Political influence is predominantly linked to the administrators and fans and less so for the players. The Lebanese sports industry is becoming a sector where there is constant clashing between political parties, thereby going against the actual objectives of sports which is meant to unite people, bring them closer and generate happiness and entertainment (Rieche, 2011). The objectives are, instead, being replaced with hatred, division and aggressive competition; especially in a country in which politics cannot be separated from religion due to the construction of the Lebanese system.

Corruption is a very debauched practice which damages all sectors of government including the sports sector (Nassif, 2014). Due to Lebanon's multi confessional political system, the sports sector has suffered from corruption, and the presence of the different political groups has led to corruptive political affairs and nepotistic behavior (Brill, 2014). The confessional system is one of the major contributors to the corruptive sports sector in Lebanon (Nassif, 2014). Due to corruption, many other negative aspects had been raised, such as the organizational system, the funding, the hierarchy and selection process. For instance, there are three main religious groups in Lebanon: Muslims, Christians and other non-recognized minorities such as Jews (Nassif, 2014). However, the overall dominant ones, based on the National Pact in 1943, are the Christian Maronites, Muslim Shiaas and Muslim Sunnis. Because two main religious have the authority in the Lebanese political system, there were conflicts raised among different federations of football as the tensions between those two main religious were portrayed in the games (Jean et al., 2002). Moreover, this has paved way in establishing power cliques in sports by selecting owners, sponsors and in certain instances, team players that harmonize with the agenda of the many politicians.

Due to different religious authorities and their persistent interference in the sports sector, many were assigned in unfitting positions (Salame, 2011, as cited in Nassif & Amara, 2015). For example, many sponsors from a certain political party tend to set conditions regarding who will be assigned positions in order for the team to be sponsored or financially supported. The lack of transparency in the funding system and nepotism were common in this sector and lack of transparency in allocation of money to associations and different federations were expected (Rice et al., 1952). Common funding was the

main issue because of insufficient budget (Nassif, 2010). Since the sports sector is desperate for financial support, many are submitted to those who are willing to provide funds. This perhaps was one of the main reasons Lebanon was not able to disentangle the involvement of politics in sports. The need for a financial sponsor or supporter seems to be a vital need, and when it comes to funding, a price is always paid. For example, Ahed FC team is aided and financed by Hezbollah political party. This party represents a large portion of the Shiaa in Lebanon. Their fans that support this team are also mostly Shiaa.

Just like football, basketball teams in Lebanon predominately select their players based on political and religious considerations with some exceptions depending on the players like Jean Abdel Noor in Riyade and Fadi El Khatib in Saggesse. For example, Saggesse is a basketball team aided and financed by Maronite archdiocese of Beirut. Basically, almost all team members and fans, for that matter, are Christians, and they mostly support the Lebanese Forces Party. Also, Champ Ville, as the researcher perceives is a basketball team aided and financed by Champville school alumni and parliament member Ibrahim Kanaan, and almost all team members support Tayyar Al Watani El Hor and are Christians. The majority of their fans are also Christians.

In relation to fan participation in the game time, the cheer up process plays a major role in encouraging a team to win during the sports matches. In both games' fans cheer up their favorite respective teams with great zeal and integrity. The local spirit increases the confidence level. The game of basketball provides a basic medium for the reflection of Lebanon's truly cooperative mentality.

The Case of Egypt

The integration of politics in sports is not only exclusive to Lebanon but is a worldwide phenomenon and can be seen in Middle Eastern countries. A good example is the case of Egypt where the interference has been nothing but intense. In 2007, the football fans in Egypt started organizing demonstrations against the government under the global and official banner of the Ultra-actions, statements and actions taken by the Ultras. This all started from the fans of Egypt's two main sports/political groups: Ahly Ultras Ahalawy and Zamalek- Ultra White knights (Ennarah, 2017). The Ultra Ahlawy group supports the Cairo-based Egyptian Premier League football club Al Ahly. The group was founded in 2007 by former members of the first Ahly support group, Ahly Fans Club (AFC). Ultras were introduced to the public in Egypt in 2011 as a political force rather than a fandom. Unexpectedly, the Ultras occupied a great space of the public, and the performance of the groups was becoming more vocal and their existence more important. The interference of the Ultras in politics was so strong that scholars and the commentators now remember the year as start of the politicization of the Ultras (Ennarah, 2017).

The politicization of the Ultras did not go without consequences. The Ultra Ahlawy and Ultra White knights, an Egyptian Ultras group that supports Zamalek SC in every sport and also founded on 17 March 2007, were labeled as the new players in political countryside of Egypt in 2011, and the members seemed young, passionate, and authentically nationalistic Egyptian, but after four years, they were labeled as terrorists and vandals. They used their fandom in order to vocalize about various political and social issues in the country. The events of the 2011 Arab Spring further politicized the Ultras and transformed them into revolutionary figures by giving them the opportunity to discredit the

authoritarian state's entire presence in public space. However, the social and political activism got stigmatized. (Ennarah, 2017). Such stigmatization was basically due to the exploitive strategy regarding the challengers of the country who implemented the passing of the repressive protest law confining actions in streets and arresting known personalities. The Ultras were among the ones who were most influenced by this strategy because they had less exposure towards media, were homogenous and a large group of youth, protesting for their rights by chanting anti-regime catchphrase. Because of this, the actions of the Ultras were often misunderstood and misinterpreted. The demonstrations were pressuring the government, and the latter responded by banning fans to attend football matches in the stadium, leading the Ultras to lose their main space of expression.

Moreover, another two disagreements that played out violently also created a negative perception of the Ultras. The presence of such disagreements was linked to the violent conflict that was resulted, and the Ultras were blamed for stirring violence although they were the victims of the protest (Ennarah, 2017). In 2012, February, 74 Ultra Ahlway members were murdered, and various others were injured after the rival team members destroyed the pitch and attacked the Ultras without police intervention. In Cairo, on February 2015, 22 Ultra White Nights were murdered after the police were sent to overcrowded narrow entry sports ground to carry on an assassination plot. While some fans without tickets were attempting to enter the stadium, the Ultras were forced to enter a narrow entrance, where they were trapped and had tear gas thrown at them. This led to the death of many Ultras. However, despite this incident, the Ultras refused to back down and continued their mission with the same high level of solidarity (Ennarah, 2017).

This devotion was also observed recently when a disagreement between Ahly and Egyptian groups of football, the Ministry of Youth and Ministry of Interior occurred on the location of the match among Zamalek and Ahly. Ahly were denied from the match in Red Sea Gouna and advised to play in Cairo, Suex or Alexandria. The ministry of interior refused the proposal due to security reasons and was heavily criticized for it. As the issue escalated, Ahly's Ultras organized a huge protest, and around 10,000 people joined. The protest pressured the government into giving in, and a match eventually occurred in Alexandra (Ennarah, 2017). The case of Egypt is considered one of the few examples that highlight the effects of sports culture on other areas. In Egypt's case, fans, all made up of youth, were encouraged to use their fan base for political causes, which begs the question: If the entertainment industry such as sports has the power to integrate itself into a wider and more national and prominent matters, then it is possible that many governments and politicians have perhaps seen the effect and have sought after using such phenomena to their own advantage. Another possibility of the interference could be the desire to keep the mass under control, remain in power, and not have the authority questioned.

European Context

A more international approach to the world of politics in sports can also be seen in the context of European teams, specifically in Spain and England.

Spain

La Liga or the (Spanish League) is considered as one of the best and most popular football leagues around the world. This is clearly indicated in the revenues (4.479 billion euros in 2017-2018) these leagues make per year on both an international and national basis (Casinelli, 2019).

However, Spain is home for one of the biggest political clashes in sports, and that is evident between the two most popular teams that are not only well-known in Spain, but also worldwide: Real Madrid and Barcelona. The match between Real Madrid and Barcelona is considered as the most watched game internationally, but it is indeed significant to point out the role of politics in the Spanish League, especially among these two clubs.

The political tension between these two teams dates back to historical events. In fact, it is known that the Kings of Spain are known to be fans of Real Madrid throughout history whereas Barcelona team, who comes from another province called “Catalonia,” have always demanded independence from Spain and have expressed this through football. This has also been evident in both team’s statuses today, as Real Madrid is known to be supported by the government and are therefore excused from paying taxes while Barcelona, being “Catalonian,” is required to pay high taxes to the government (Wallace, 2013).

Politically, Catalans have always expressed their disagreement to be a part of Spain, and they accuse Real Madrid of cheating throughout history, and plenty of incidents seem to have a major influence on the results of the teams. One such incident is the case of Alfredo Di Stephano. This player was considered as one of the best in Spain during the 1950s, and he agreed to join Barcelona back then but turned down the deal at the last minute. Barcelona accused the Spanish Government of pressuring Di Stephano to stay in Real Madrid, and this affected the outcome of the overall performance for both clubs, a phenomenon that Barcelona found to be unfair (Vakulenko, 2013).

The latest political clash between the two teams occurred in November 2019 when the match was postponed due to protests in Catalonia. Fans were protesting the arrest of

certain political figures that support the Catalanian doctrine. Moreover, during national games, especially in the previous year, there had been several clashes between the players from both teams, and this affected the overall chemistry throughout their future games. The tension between the supporters of these two parties are also portrayed in basketball games.

The issue football and basketball in Spain undergoes is very similar to the situation in Lebanon. While the rivalry between Barcelona and Real Madrid has a different historical context, the interference of politics in the world of sports is clearly highlighted in the events, which makes the essence of this rivalry very similar to Lebanon. For example, the popularity of a Spain Classico as a means to express hidden political and/or historical rivalries is more or less similar to that of Lebanon. Also, the “fight” for prominent players is also a familiar issue in both countries. This shows that integration of sports and politics is an occurring phenomenon in different parts of the country. This study aims to find that connection and explore the different effects of this interference.

United Kingdom: Glasgow, Scotland.

The Scottish side of football is fierce, intense, and embedded in deep political and religious representations. Dating back to the time of reformation, the Catholic/Protestant rivalry was established as Catholics in Scotland witnessed the adoption of Protestantism as the national religion. This issue was escalated as more Catholic and Protestant immigrants flooded from the Northern Ireland. Even after hundreds of years, the Catholic-Protestant rivalry is portrayed though football between the Celtics, founded in 1887 by a Catholic brother, and the Rangers, founded in 1972 who became a team of Scottish Protestant working class (PA Team, 2018). While the teams were professional and peaceful in the beginning, they soon became fierce rivals as both clubs and their fans vocalized their

identities in direct opposition, with “Celtics being associated with socialism and Irish Republicanism while Rangers with conservatism and Northern Irish unionism” (PA Team, 2018, para. 10).

The rivalry sparked popularity during the Old Firm derby between the Celtics and Rangers (Farah, 2017). During these games, the intensity of the rivalry is portrayed through political chants (Celtics chanting the IRA anthem to vocalize their desire to separate from the UK; Rangers chanting sectarian rife in the Ibrox or Parkhead stands), raising of flags, and in some cases, violence. As Farah (2017) bluntly states, “a Celtic win is a victory for Catholicism and nationalism, while a Rangers victory is another step forward for the unionists and the Protestants” (para. 12). The heated rivalry and the events that often take place is no strange to the rivalries in Lebanon, that are also embedded in political and religious undertones. With fans also chanting political slogans or raising party flags, with the occasional physical violence between opposing teams, the resemblance with the two famous teams in Glasgow seems to be uncanny. The situation in both European as well as Middle Eastern countries shows how embedded the concept of politics and sports is, and this study will bring about these possible tensions in Lebanon.

Italy

Since the establishment of Fascism in 1922, football has since been used as a means to achieve order in the country. This was Mussolini’s vision as he invested in football in order to “distract the masses from their loss of civil liberties, to win their support and to prepare a fitter nation, capable of working hard, fighting and producing strong children” (Marathovouniotis, 2017, para.2). Mussolini interfered in many aspects, including but not limited to constructing stadiums whose fascist essence exists to today, striking deals with

referees in the World Cup, funding teams, and making big decisions (Marathovouniotis, 2017).

While Fascism was capable of using sports to enhance politics and national identity, it failed to understand how turning football into a truly national game would intensify Italians' attachment to their local teams and cities. Even after the unification of the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, the country was fragmented; a national consciousness was non-existent. During the Renaissance, states such as Florence, Venice, and Milan battled for supremacy on the peninsula. These divisions remain somewhat to this day and are reified by political parties such as Lega Nord, a federalist, separatist, right-wing party which has attacked the idea of Italian unity by claiming that the South is a burden on the nation. Its political program advocates greater regional autonomy and at times withdrawal of the North, which is often referred to as 'Padania' (Marathovouniotis, 2017). Traditionally, most of the big cities defined their rivalries by left and right: "Roma were reddish in inclination, Lazio conservative; in Turin, Juve leaned to the right, Torino to the left. Milan were once supposed to incline more to the side of the proletariat than Inter, although the 21st century - and the arch-conservative Milan president Silvio Berlusconi - has rather challenged that historic notion" (Hawkey, 2010, para.3).

The political clashes between the aforementioned are sometimes represented through violence, usually caused by the ultras, organized Italian football supporters who are also involved in politics. Their organization, their reputation, made them suitable for a role of intermediation between supporters, politics and clubs, and as a result, both politicians and football clubs use ultras for their purposes (Scalia, 2009).

The situation in Italian football is similar to that of Egypt and Lebanon. While Lebanon does not have any ultras like in Italy and in Egypt, violence portrayed by fans during games or on social media is common. Moreover, Italy has politics integrated in sports for political, financial or electoral gains (Scalia, 2009), much like Lebanon whose political leaders might sponsor clubs to gain popularity for elections or exert power.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is developed from the premise that theoretical framework is a necessary and important guide for an investigation in the matter at hand. In order to explore and correctly address some of the variables of this thesis, two theories were used: The Spiral of Silence and the Two-Step-Flow. The interference of politics in sports is mostly the influence of political and religious figures as club representative and/or funders on two parties: players and fans. To test this influence, the aforementioned theories are effective in determining the degree and independency of vocalization of opinions respectively.

Spiral of Silence Theory

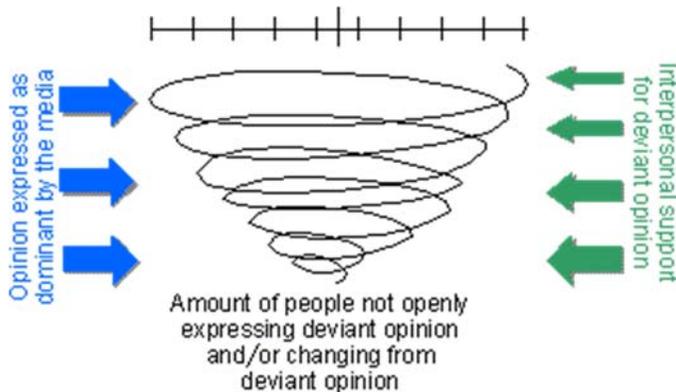
The Spiral of Silence theoretical framework was chosen for this thesis to account for the sports fans that might have herd mentality, which is moving with the crowd, or whose points of view, although might be dissimilar sometimes, will choose to conform to the overall trend of perspectives that link politics and religion to conditional fandom and support. It is important to note that spiral of silence is all about people who conform to the opinion of the majority in fear of isolation (Gearhart & Zhang, 2015).

German political scientist Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann introduced the Spiral of Silence Theory in 1974. The theory asserts that in each society, there is a view or opinion that is dominant within the public scene, which will overpower other opinions and dissolve them into silence. According to Neumann (1974), the more a person's opinion is backed by the majority's point of view, the greater the likelihood that they are prepared to communicate it in the public arena. As a result, individuals observe other people's mannerisms and conduct to ascertain which opinions and behaviors they ought to select to

match the public. Consequently, individuals who are identified to be in the minority tend to continue being silent and keep opinions to themselves owing to the fear that if they shared their point of view, they will experience isolation.

Figure 2:

The Spiral of Silence



the Spiral of Silence model can be applied within the setting of social media. Gearhart and Zhang (2015) investigated whether the utilization of social media will facilitate a rise in individuals' motivation to voice out their opinions regarding political issues that are existent. The outcomes of the study conducted on a sample of U.S. adult Facebook users, using the Pew 2012 Search, Social Networks, and Politics survey, suggest that social media users who have obtained a strong and negative response to their politically linked posts have a greater likelihood of censoring themselves, demonstrating the impact of the Spiral of Silence model.

In the Lebanese sports context, this theory would help investigate whether the minority are able to voice their opinion about the Lebanese sports teams, especially when these sports teams are controlled by a majority with specific political and religious affiliations. Furthermore, it is essential to mention that so far, no study, known to the

researcher, on sports has utilized this theory to explain different factors related to the functionality of sports in Lebanon. However, studies in the West have been conducted to explore the implementation of Spiral of Silence theory on young people and athletes (Hayes, 2007; Druckman, Gilli, Klar, & Robison, 2014).

A study using the Spiral of Silence theory was conducted by Hayes (2007). The study targeted 815 students, aged 18 to 44, enrolled in courses in communication at a large university in the Midwestern United States. Participants were given different hypothetical scenarios (different controversial topics) and asked to respond to them in order to explore which forms of opinion expression avoidance would be more or less likely to be used when a person is asked to express his or her opinion to a hostile audience. The results showed that when presented with a series of possible response options and forced to choose among them, some forms of opinion expression avoidance were judged more likely than others, with reflecting the question and expressing ambivalence or uncertainty reported most likely. The results also revealed that the participants were more likely to voice their opinions in a friendly environment than in a hostile environment (Hayes, 2007). The hostile atmosphere that surrounds Lebanese politics and sports can be linked to the above study and will be linked to fans' reactions to opinion leaders and to the opinion of other fans. The result that involves avoiding questions or feigning ignorance is most likely to be the case in a hostile atmosphere in Lebanon as many would claim that they are not involved in politics when they indeed are.

In Druckman, Gilli, Klar, and Robison's (2014) study, student-athletes' opinions on ongoing debates about whether student-athletes should be paid and/or allowed to unionize were studied in relation to the spiral of silence theory on ten athletes of the NCAA

Big Ten conference, which is located primarily in the Midwest, with Nebraska as the western-most point and Penn State to the east and included twelve universities (within ten schools) that were competing in the Division I NCAA Athletics. These results showed that the majority of the athletes vocalized their opinion in favor of the pay for play and unionization at universities after their senior year (post career as a student-athlete). This suggests that a shift in social environment, as predicted by the spiral of silence theory, causes individuals to engage in post-career reflection and recognize the importance of rules regulating their playing careers. The spiral of silence theory thus suggests that since the central frame of reference for current student-athletes consists of individuals who oppose pay for play and unionization, these players should tend to hold the same opinion, i.e. opposition (Druckman et al., 2014).

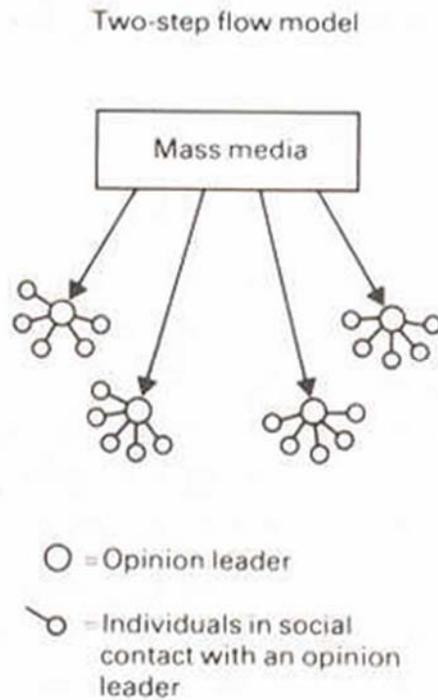
Relating the theory of the spiral of silence, specifically to sports integration with politics and religion, different outputs may be recognized, and this thesis investigates such outputs to identify whether or not the spiral actually applies. Nonetheless, it is fair to say that in Lebanon, religious and political parties fund and organize sports teams in football and basketball. The political leader is the owner of the team or has strong political affiliations with certain political parties who sponsor or at least give financial help to the team. Indirectly, the political leader will have an influence on the team as a whole and the fans' behaviors.

If a person (a fan) is criticizing the team, then that means they are indirectly criticizing the political party that the sports team is affiliated with. This means that the fans may also be impacted by the spiral of silence, and although they are the majority in number, they end up being the minority or victims of the political system. The reality about

this integration is the automatic affiliation of sports teams with political or religious parties. This is why people belonging to these parties for the most part might not possibly criticize or disobey these teams.

Two-Step Flow Theory

This particular theory was selected to represent the social influences that delineate the identity of the dominating opinion in every segment of the Lebanese sports community. It deals with the role of the mainstream media in addition to the present day's social media influence. The Two-Step Flow theory was introduced by sociologists Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarsfeld (cited in Katz, 1955). The theory makes the argument that notions and ideas will emanate from the mainstream media to leaders who are opinionated and thereafter from opinionated leaders to the segments of the populations that are less active and are less knowledgeable (Katz, 1955). An opinionated leader is delineated as a renowned individual or entity that can influence or sway public opinion on the topic, subject matter, or notion that the opinionated leader is known for. Often, opinionated leaders comprise of business leaders, journalists, as well as celebrities and sports superstars and lately, bloggers (Uzunoglu & Misci Kip, 2013).

Figure 3:*The Two-Step Flow Theory*

In the context of sports, the two-step flow of communication model delineates that information flows from the media to the general public are intermediated and facilitated by opinion leaders who tend to be more exposed to media messages and who exercise personal influence on the attitudes and the opinions of close others (Choi, 2015). The over-representation of political parties and religious communities in the sports sector in Lebanon has limited the development of transparent and properly functioning structures. Most of the people within the Lebanese sports federations have obtained particular positions simply because they are representatives or supporters of a political party (Nassif & Amara, 2015). Consequently, almost 90 percent of individuals working at sports federations are not the

appropriate or suitable individuals at suitable places but instead are there because of deals made under the table by politicians (Nassif & Amara, 2015). This perhaps can negatively influence the further advancement of the team.

One of the recent major studies that have been conducted upon the Spiral of Silence is about the use of Facebook among the two opposite genders. The key phenomenon observed was that the males and females from the age level from 18 to 24 years use Facebook for different purposes. Males use Facebook mainly to connect with close friends and explore their interest. Whereas the females use Facebook to increase their circle of friends. when it comes to the assessment of the climate opportunity, males are in majority and the females are in minority. It showed that males are more likely to speak out even if they were not in the majority while females are usually more hesitant and prefer to remain silent (Ku-Chen, 2011).

Similarly, many studies (Bastos, Raimundo, & Travitzki, 2013; Bumi, Widyakirana, & Haroen 2019; Ku-Chen, 2011) use the spiral of silence to discuss how opinion leaders can influence their surroundings in issues such as:

- 1- Political Issues
- 2- Social Networking

Ku-Chen (2011), however, used two other main concepts to illustrate the spiral of the silence theory:

- 1- The climate opinions
- 2- Controversialist opinions

This theory is based on the opinions of the people who are influenced by people's opinions are directly influenced by the mass media (Ku-Chen, 2011). In the Two-Step

theory, the information flows downwards from the mass media to the opinion leaders and finally to the wider population. This theory also states that the thoughts of the opinion leaders are directly affected by the media. The majority of the people build their opinions according to the ones decided first by the leaders and second by the media. According to the Davis (2014) most people choose to believe their opinion leaders and are not directly influenced by the mass media. Opinion leaders are mostly inspired by the media which then infiltrate their ideas to the local bodies and to the general population which becomes the opinion followers. Katz (1955) proposed that these opinion leaders tend to follow the elite media and not the mainstream mass media.

Sāmbhar (2009) proposed that the engagement of opinions on social media known as “social percussion” has a great influence on the leading opinion. This Two-Step theory was firstly proposed by a sociologist Paul Lazarsfeld (1944) and further elaborated by Elhiu Katz in 1955. The people who have more access to the media are more powerful and can make their opinions accepted by the majority and have a literate content and can make their concept diffuse in the population. Social media serves as a powerful social platform for the spread of mass opinion, and it is one of the objectives of the study to explore the influence of opinion leaders on fan base in sports as well as the reaction of the latter on popular opinions set by former.

Bastos, Raimundo, and Travitzki (2013) explored the structure of gatekeeping in Twitter by means of a statistical analysis of the political hashtags #FreeIran, #FreeVenezuela and #Jan25, each of which reached the top position in Twitter Trending Topics. They performed a statistical correlation to test whether the Twitter Political Hashtags were correlated with network topology. Results showed that instead of the

domination of hubs that act as gatekeepers, the intense activity of individuals who have fewer connections were still able to replicate more retweets on such trending topics than user hubs, which suggests that opinion leaders may be generated from committed minorities rather than powerful influencers. This suggested that a prevailing majority opinion in a population can be rapidly reversed by a small fraction of randomly distributed committed agents (Bastos et al., 2013).

The results of this study is dueled in Bumi, Widyakirana, and Haroen (2019), who analyzed the reaction of the youth towards a campaign designed by the Indonesian Public Relation and in assigning celebrity and known influencer, Danny Sumargo, as the face of this campaign. The campaign was deemed a failure as the youth were not affected by the campaign. There were no reports that showed any increase of physical exercise as a result of the campaign. While the limitations of this campaign might have been poor organization and planning, but Bumi et al. (2019) claim that opinion leaders do not necessarily step from a prevailing majority or a leading figure or celebrity in all cases. These studies might challenge the theory at hand, but in both cases, the political gatekeeping and the campaign took on Twitter and Instagram respectively, both of which are use dominated social platforms that encourage the freedom of expression. Moreover, the first study has a worldwide effect, and controlling it is difficult while the campaign in the second study is just a failed attempt of the government to encourage the youth to exercise more. These results could be replicated in Lebanon and have the Two-Step theory disproved in that matter, but one needs to take into consideration the context of Lebanese sports in Lebanon and the extent of control political parties have on the teams, the players and the fans.

Each of the theories described above has a unique feature and deals with the behavior and mass communication differently. The reaction of the media content varies according to the reaction and response of the audience. The fans' decisions to accept or reject a given message and their values, options, and beliefs are the most important and influential elements that affect the acceptability of the theories. People tend to react to messages or opinions about matters that interest them but tend to avoid expressing their opinions about topics that might spark conflict or speak against their collective ideologies.

Research Questions

If the two theories proposed earlier are compared, the Spiral of Silence theory directs the public opinion towards the direction of the majority, such as opinion leaders, rather than the individual minority. Contrasted opinions tend to play out in a form of a power struggle that allow the more dominant to overpower the weaker, and that is entirely dependent on the statuses of those who voice the opinion so that it is established as the dominant one and thereby silencing those who would consider opposing it. In dealing with the Lebanese sports scene using the Spiral of Silence and the Two-Step Flow theories, the research study will be guided by the following research questions:

RQ1: What is the impact of politics and religion on Lebanese sports, specifically football and basketball?

RQ2: Do teams and fans feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?

RQ3: Do the opinion leaders transfer their thoughts to the followers on how to behave and act in relation to football and basketball?

Methodology

Research Philosophy

Also referred to as research paradigm, research philosophy denotes the set of principles, beliefs, and assumptions that inform scholarly inquiry (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). It determines the relationship between the researcher and the subjects and how the researcher interprets findings. In general, research may be conducted within the positivist paradigm or the interpretivist paradigm. For many researchers, choosing between the two philosophies can usually be difficult, especially due to the strengths and weaknesses of each philosophy (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). Researchers often desire to achieve conclusions that are both generalizable and comprehensive. Nonetheless, reaching such conclusions can only be achieved by employing more than one paradigm in one study – mixed methods research. All in all, the research philosophy is largely dictated by the research question. The aim of the present research is to examine the impact of politics on Lebanese sports. Taking into account the research aim, both the interpretivist and positivist philosophies were deemed appropriate.

Research Design

This research study will make use of the mixed methods research design, which will include both quantitative (survey) and qualitative (semi-structured interviews) research approaches to depict the relation between politics/religion and sports in Lebanon. Quantitative research utilizes a fixed design that arranges beforehand the research question and a comprehensive technique of data gathering and analysis (Bryman, 2008).

Sample and Procedure

Interview

The research instrument is the tool the researcher uses to collect the required data (Wimmer & Dominick, 2013). In order to gain one-on-one insight that is comprehensive from the respondents regarding the subject matter in question, semi-structured interviews were conducted with various football and basketball players. These interviewees included ten professional players (1st division players), five football and five basketball players from different basketball and football clubs across Lebanon. All interviewees were male except for one female (football). Due to the limited number of female football and basketball teams in Lebanon and the lack of their popularity compared to men's teams, only one female football player was interviewed to get an overview of the perspective of a female's point of view and the influence of politics in female' teams. The interviewees' names are represented in letters and numbers in order to protect the privacy of the players. The basketball players were identified with the letter "B" along with a number while the football players were identified with the letter "F" along with a corresponding number in accordance with the order they were interviewed (example: B1 is the first player interviewed in basketball; F4 is the fourth player interviewed in football etc.). The fifth player of each category (basketball and football) are captains of their teams. In the results and discussion section, the players will be identified as their labels, as in "player F3" to refer to F3, third football player that was interviewed. Table 3 below specifies the player, along with their club affiliations.

Table 3:*Players' Club Affiliations (Both Football and Basketball)*

Player	Club Affiliation
F1	Ansar
F2	Al Ahed
F3	Nejmeh
F4	Safah
F5	Hoops (Captain)
B1	Riyadi
B2	Homentmen
B3	Byblos
B4	Beirut
B5	Homentmen (Captain)

The players were interviewed via Whatsapp application or Skype. The players were individually contacted and asked for willingness and availability to participate in the interview. The players all accepted to be interviewed and sent their responses in writing or through voice notes. Most of the answers were in Arabic, so they needed to be translated.

Due to the Corona pandemic, face-to-face meetings did not occur, and the interviews took place via Skype or Whatsapp call. The selection of the players was mostly

done through common contact, and the researcher attempted to select at least one player from each of the prominent teams in Lebanon.

The questions for the interviews were comprised of eight closed-ended questions and seven open-ended questions. Each of the interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes. The interviews aimed to identify the team players' opinions, attitudes and actual behavior concerning the team that they play for, specifically if these opinions, attitudes and behavior are influenced by politics and/or religion (see Appendix B for Interview questions). Some players, throughout the interview, refused to answer some of the questions, mostly part of the eight closed-ended questions. This was taken into consideration when analyzing the results.

Survey

On the other hand, in quantitative research, questionnaires are considered to be suitable for this study. The key advantage of using this research instrument is that data can be gathered comparatively fast on a larger scale than any other qualitative instrument. This is convenient for huge and/or scattered populations (Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2015). The questionnaires were completed at the same time as interviews. The survey aimed at investigating how fans from different political backgrounds behave and support specific sports teams. The questionnaire enables the researcher to identify how politics integrates with sports and how this integration affects fans' behavior.

The sample consisted of 301 fans, out of which six were removed, so overall, the sample was cut to 295 respondents who support numerous teams in Lebanon and consist of different religions and political affiliations. 188 respondents (63.7%) were between 18

to 27 years old ($M = 26.63$, $SD = 6.70$). Out of the 295 respondents, 68.13% were male, and 31.86% were female.

The questionnaire included questions related to fans' opinions, attitudes, and actual behavior towards sports and specifically the team they support. Then, the questions shifted towards questions that target their political and religious affiliation, which was followed by how these political and religious affiliations impact or influence their behaviors and attitudes as fans. Engagement questions were also included such as questions that identify whether their opinions matter; whether they feel they are heard, and how they are heard (through social media, fan groups, or actual games). Other questions aimed at how fans express their opinion and how they communicate with other members of the club. The online questionnaire also aimed to identify whether they consider themselves to be opinion leaders or followers and how that impacts their views and/or involvement with the team which they support as a fan within the fan community. Finally, demographic questions were asked to identify their gender, age, and favorite teams (See appendix A).

The survey was carried out by using an online link sent out to the target population. Questions were uploaded to Google Forms and an accessible link was sent to the different fan club presidents to post on fan pages or send to known contacts. Moreover, the link to the survey was sent to Whatsapp groups and the researcher's contacts to ensure a wider sample. All the participants who chose to open the link were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they could stop the survey at any time. They were also ensured that their replies will remain anonymous and that filling the questionnaire poses minimal risk.

Variables

Based on the literature review and theoretical framework, variables were selected.

The variables tested in this research are detailed below.

Demographics

Aside from age and gender, it was important for this study to ask the participants to specify their political and religious affiliation.

Fan behavior and perception and engagement with sports teams. Participants were asked to identify which sports team they are a fan of, their fan behavior (e.g., supporting the team), as well as their attitude about the sports team that they support (e.g., the best team) and if the team is affiliated with a certain political party.

Political and Religious Impact.

Participants in the survey were asked a series of eight questions related to their attitudes towards politics' influence on sports specifically on the sports team that they are a fan of. These sets of statements, such as "politics changes the way a game is played" and "politics impacts sports in Lebanon positively" which were measured on a Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Four additional questions were asked about religion's influence on sports such as "religion impacts the way people participate in sports" and "religion impacts sports positively in Lebanon."

Level of Engagement with Sports Team

This variable simply measures the teams' player level of support to the club and dedication in both football and basketball. It also measures their willingness to blindly support their team, attend games, and support the team players in victory and loss.

Team Players' Perceptions about the Club

This variable measures how team players view their clubs and whether they are fully engaged and whether that affects their behavior with their fans.

The Opinion of Fans towards any Game: Two-step Flow

Inspired by the Two-Step theory, the research aims to consider fans' attitudes towards games and whether owners of sports teams communicate with fans and affect their opinions, and whether fans feel their opinion matters. A total of 11 statements were used, four statements directly related to the fan's behavior such as "people ask my opinion about any game related to my favorite team," and seven statements related to the fan's perceptions of the owners such as "the owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon tell their fans how to behave/act." All statements were measured using a Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree (Fans: $\alpha = .800$, $M = 3.561$ $SD = .770$; Owners: $\alpha = .779$, $M = 3.345$ $SD = .570$).

Influence of Opinion Leaders: Spiral of Silence

The study aims to determine the impact of opinion leaders on the mass fan base and whether their political and religious status, along with their financial investment in the team, influence the fans in either way, positively, by providing them a sense of solidarity and loyalty, or negatively, by silencing the fans vocal expression. Three statements measured on a Likert-type scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree included: "If I have an opinion different than the majority of fans I tend to keep my opinion to myself" ($\alpha = .758$, $M = 3.300$, $SD = .819$).

Data Analysis Process

From a qualitative research perspective, all interviews were transcribed and then thematically analyzed, then they were compared and contrasted to the results of the

questionnaire. The responses from the questionnaire were entered into Microsoft Excel. The research questions were analyzed through descriptive statistics. The statistics were calculated through the “count-if” formula by calculating the independent variables as well as the frequency variables (count-if// agree; count-if//disagree, etc.). Then the counts were divided by the total number of respondents after that total was stabilized. This was later changed to a percentage by using the following formula: “Cntrl + Shift+ %”. This was the repeated formula process whenever a statistical test was being run.

Ethical Consideration

It is essential to abide by the general code of ethics when conducting any thesis. First of all, respondents should be aware of the purpose of the study and that they have the freedom of participation. Ethical considerations were taken into account when conducting the study. Also, the respondent’s responses will remain confidential. The respondent’s identities will not be known. The interviewees were also given anonymity, and thus their names were replaced with pseudonyms.

Results

The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of politics and religion on Lebanese sports. Both the questionnaire targeting the fans and the interviews targeting the players aim to explore that impact, especially the repercussions of politics and religion on teams, players, and fans in general. The results will be divided into two parts: demographic analysis followed by survey and interview results.

Demographic Analysis

Participants (N = 295) were asked to specify their political and religious affiliations. Politically, 44% stated that they were independent; 17% stated that they supported Hezbollah party, 12% Tayyar El Mostakbal, 7% Lebanese Forces, 5% Civil Society and Haraket Amal, 4% Tayyar el Watani El Hor, and the rest were divided amongst Kataeb, El Ishterakiyye and those who did not answer the question (2% each) (See Table 4). However, the majority of the respondents' religious affiliation were divided amongst Muslim Shiaa (46%), Maronite (20%), and Muslim Sunna (19%). The results are summarized in Tables 4 and 5.

As mentioned, 44% consider themselves independent politically. However, they are religiously affiliated. 42.3% and 23% of respondents identify themselves as Muslim Shiaa and Maronites respectively. All of the respondents (100%) who chose Hezbollah as their affiliated political party identified themselves as Muslim Shiaa. 62.7% stated that they supported Al-Ahd football team. 28% stated that they support other football teams whose religious affiliation is also Muslim Shiaa. Only 3.92% support Ansar while the remaining 5.88% stated that they do not support any football team.

Similarly, out of the 12% who stated that they support Tayyar el Moustakbal, 91.43% were Muslim Sunna, and all support Al-Ansar football team. Moreover, out of the 23.39% of respondents who claimed they did not support any basketball team, 84% were Muslim Shiaa . Also, out of the 17.29% who support Al-Ansar team, 94.12% support Al-Riyadi basketball team, which is also affiliated with Tayyar El Moustakbal. 91% of those are Muslim Sunna.

Among the 61 respondents who support Sagesse, 59% are Christians (72% Maronites) and 36% are Muslims (95% Shiaa). Out of 87 respondents who stated that they do not support any football team, 72% were Christians. Out of 72%, 79% were Maronites. Finally, there was a variety of football and basketball teams that the 130 politically independent respondents supported. The intersection between the participants' religious and political affiliation is shown in Table 6, and Tables 7 and 8 intersect the respondents' religious affiliation with the football and basketball team they support respectively.

The researcher identifies high dedication to the team being a rate between 8 and 10. More than half of the participants (51.7%) consider themselves a big fan of the team that they support, and 62.5% of those either belong to Hezbollah or the Independent party while roughly 30% consider themselves regular fans (ratings 6 and 7). Only 12% do not consider themselves as dedicated fans to the teams they selected (ratings 1 to 4). Those who stated that they did not support any football teams were 72.6% Christians. Moreover, 44.09% consider themselves as dedicated fans to their basketball teams, with the majority being political parties that have Christian affiliations rather than Muslim ones (refer to Table 11a and b). 81.4% of those who stated that they did not support any basketball team were Muslim Shiaa.

Table 4

Respondents' Political Affiliation

POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Total Result	Percentage	
Independent	130	44%	
Hezbollah	51	17%	
Tayar Moustakbal	35	12%	
Lebanese Forces	21	7%	
Haraket Amal	15	5%	
Civil Society	14	5%	
Tayar El Watani	13	4%	
Did not answer	6	2%	
Kataeb	5	2%	
Eshtirakeye	5	2%	
TOTAL	295	100%	

Table 5

Respondents' Religious Affiliation

RELIGION	Total Result	Percentage	
Muslim Shiaa	134	46%	
Maronite	58	20%	
Muslim Sunni	55	19%	
Agnostic	9	3%	
Druz	9	3%	
Atheist	8	3%	
Roman Catholic	7	2%	
Other	0	0%	
Orthodox	5	2%	
Latin Catholic	3	1%	
Evangelical	1	0%	
ToTAL	289	100%	289

Table 6

The Intersection of Participants' Political and Religious Affiliation

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Other
Independent	2.4%	1.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	10.4%	19.0%	8.0%	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%
Hezbollah	-	-	-	-	-	-	17.6%	-	-	-	-
Tayar Moustakbal	-	-	-	-	-	1.0%	-	11.1%	-	-	-
Lebanese Forces	-	-	-	-	0.3%	4.2%	0.3%	-	1.0%	1.4%	-
Haraket Amal	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.2%	-	-	-	-
Civil Society	0.3%	1.0%	0.7%	-	-	-	2.8%	-	-	-	-
Tayar El Watani	-	-	-	-	0.3%	4.2%	-	-	-	-	-
Did not answer	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	1.4%	-	-	-	0.3%
Eshtrakeye	-	-	1.7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kataeb	-	-	-	-	-	0.3%	-	-	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%

Table 7

The Intersection of Participants' Religious Affiliation and Favorite Basketball Team

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	Orthodo
Riyadi	0.34%	1.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.83%	15.93%	0.00%
I dont support any	1.69%	0.34%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	19.66%	0.34%	0.00%
Sagesse	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	8.81%	7.12%	0.34%	1.36%
Champville	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.14%	3.73%	0.00%	0.00%
Homentmen	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	0.34%	0.00%	1.02%	2.71%	0.68%	0.00%
Hoops	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	1.36%	1.69%	0.34%	0.34%
Mouttahed	0.68%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	1.02%	0.00%
Byblos	0.00%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%
Grand Total	3.05%	2.71%	3.05%	0.34%	1.02%	19.66%	45.42%	18.64%	1.69%

Table 8

The Intersection of Participants' Religious Affiliation and Favorite Football Team

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	Orthod
I dont support any	0.34%	1.02%	0.68%	0.00%	0.68%	16.95%	3.39%	1.36%	1.36%
Nejmeh	1.02%	1.36%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	1.36%	18.31%	1.36%	0.34%
Ansar	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.36%	14.92%	0.00%
Ahed	0.68%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	14.58%	0.00%	0.00%
Other	0.34%	0.34%	1.69%	0.34%	0.00%	1.02%	1.69%	0.00%	0.00%
Sahel	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.75%	0.00%	0.00%
Tadamon Sour	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	1.36%	0.00%	0.00%
Tripoli	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	0.00%
Grand Total	3.05%	2.71%	3.05%	0.34%	1.02%	19.66%	45.42%	18.64%	1.69%

Table 11a:

The Intersection of Level of Fandom in Football Teams with Political Affiliation

	8 to 10	5 to 7	1 to 4
Civil Society	1.3%	1.7%	1.3%
Eshtirakeye	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Haraket Amal	4.8%	1.7%	0%
Hezbollah	14.1%	5.7%	2.2%
Independent	18%	19.3%	4.8%
Kataeb	0%	1.3%	0.4%

Tayyar EL Watani	0%	0.4%	0.4%
Lebanese Forces	0.8%	1.3%	1.3%
Tayyar El Mustakbal	11%	2.2%	0.4%
Others	0.4%	2.2%	0.8%
Total	51.7%	36.2%	12%

Table 11b

The Intersection of Level of Fandom in Basketball Teams with Political Affiliation

	8 to 10	5 to 7	1 to 4
Civil Society	1.14%	2.28%	1.14%
Eshtirakeye	0.38%	0.38%	0.38%
Haraket Amal	0.38%	2.28%	1.14%
Hezbollah	1.14%	3.8%	6.4%
Independent	17.49%	22.8%	7.98%
Kataeb	1.9%	0%	0%
Tayyar El Watani	4.94%	0.76%	0.38%
Lebanese Forces	6.84%	1.14%	0.38%
Tayyar El Mustakbal	9.5%	3.42%	0.38%
Others	0.38%	0.76%	0.38%
Total	44.09%	37.52	18.51%

RQ1: What is the impact of politics and religion on Lebanese sports, specifically football and basketball?

Participants did not deny that sports in Lebanon, specifically football and basketball, is highly affected by politics and religion. The majority have portrayed a more negative perspective on the influence of politics and religion on sports and after stating that their favorite team is funded by political or religious groups.

Politically

More than half of the participants agreed that the team they support belongs to the political party they support, and roughly 50% stated that the political party they belong to funds the team they support. Participants who identified themselves as independent politically (44%) were an exception, with more than 50% stating that there is no political party funding their favorite team. This might suggest that the funding of their favorite team might come from independent donors or is funded by a religious figure or sect. While religion and politics are inseparable in most cases, there are teams funded by certain religious figures or are more known to have religious affiliations rather than political although the latter might still be interfering subtly. However, the fans might be unaware of that, and many fans tend to have a more positive attitude towards religion than politics, hence separating the former from the latter.

72.54% of respondents claimed that the impact of politics on sports is not positive (disagreed or strongly disagreed), and 88% strongly agreed or agreed that politics affects sports negatively in Lebanon. Respondents agreed or strongly agreed that politics influences many factors including how a game is played (71%), how fans act (82%), how

players are selected (70%), and how teams behave (75%). Also, 79.6% of the respondents believe that the teams are financed by political parties. However, when it comes to winning games, around 50% believe that politics interfere in the games' outcomes.

Religiously

Mainly, 63% of respondents noted that the team they support is affiliated to the religious group they belong to, mainly Muslim Shiaa (26.5%), Maronites (15.9%), and Muslim Sunna (16.3%), considering that most of the respondents who are Muslim Shiaa support either Nejme or Al Ahed, both of which have a Muslim Shiaa affiliation. Similarly, Maronites mostly support Champville or Sagesse, both having Maronite affiliations. Finally, 86% of Maronites do not support any football team and roughly 50% of Muslim Shiaa do not support any basketball team. The rest are mostly divided amongst Riyadi and Sagesse. Finally, around 60% of respondents agreed that their religious affiliation determines which group they support.

Slightly less intense than the effect of political integration, 72% of the respondents either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the fact that religion has a positive impact on sports. While this is still a high number, the negative impact of religion on sports is less dramatic since many might regard politics as dirty while religion is considered noble. However, the high percentage can also contribute to the fact that many also believe that since religion is involved in politics, it has also become "dirty." Simultaneously, 83% agreed or strongly agreed that religion affects sports negatively. Also, 80% agreed that religion impacts the way people participate in sports, and 58% admitted that religious affiliation affects the team they select to support.

Similar to fan responses, team members, or all interviewees, football and basketball, admit that sports in Lebanon is highly influenced mostly by politics. The majority of the players stated that religion and politics have a negative impact on sports, and many emphasized that sports should not interfere with politics. However, three interviewees, all basketball players, highlighted the positive aspects of the influence of politics for different reasons. For instance, player B3 argued that the financial support of the political parties on the clubs has a positive effect on the game in general and on the financial aspect in particular:

The integration of politics in sports helped Lebanese Basketball in two ways. The first factor is the financial support for the teams; the second factor is attracting the fans. The money factor is because of political clashes and that led to the support of these political parties to these teams.

B4, on the other hand, also focused on the financial aspect but emphasized the importance of having a financial supporter of an overlooked domain in Lebanon. He views political interference “in a positive way because political parties tend to support the teams financially, and this helps a lot because there are times when there are no sponsors to pay a huge amount of money [sic]”

Similarly, B5 also highlighted another pragmatic aspect of interference of politics:

Yes, I hate politics’ interference with sports, but I don’t really hate politicians interfering with sports as sponsors. For example, if someone wants to declare his candidacy for his next election, like why not to choose a sports platform or a team as a sponsor (“*in order*”) to grab the attention of the fans... That’s not bad.

However, despite their statements, like the other players, both still agreed that this interference has its unfavorable outcomes. None of the football players expressed any positive aspects regarding this interference. A possible explanation could be that basketball is lately receiving much more support than football. Also, the funding showed great results. Perhaps the new fame of many players is one of the possible reasons why the funding system in basketball is more welcomed than football. When asked about how politics and religion are integrated with sports in Lebanon and what the impacts of this integration are (questions 7 and 8 of the interview), the answers varied, but they all pointed out the negative impact of this integration in the sports world.

Football. All football players recognized the negative impact of politics and religion in Lebanon, but there were various inputs regarding the issue. Some believed that the impact is not that detrimental. For example, F2 and F5 both argued that while the influence is present and disadvantageous, there are ways to overcome or at least ignore its involvement. In her interview, when asked about the results of the integration, F5 stated that “[she doesn’t] think this [the results of the integration] is a big deal as long as it does not affect the teammates,” yet did not fail to recognize how it is not often the case and how teammates can be caught in the political battle. F2 also provided a more progressive interpretation of the issue. While he also recalled the damaging effects, he believes that this issue can be mended if the “fans’ mentality” changes. F2 emphasized a more cultural and tolerant approach towards sports where political interference does not create a conflict of interest. At the end of the interviews, all interviewees, specifically F5 and F2’s, stressed the importance of removing this interference to create a better environment for both teammates and fans.

“Because of that [extremism], we hope these types of things go away... These issues [politics and religious intervention] are rarely found abroad and that positively impacts the game over there, so I am hoping this phenomenon disappears from our games (in Lebanon)”-F2

“When politics gets involved, things may become dirty, and in Lebanon, it usually does. We must work to ensure that this is no longer the case” -F5

Basketball. Basketball players were less determined to consider the interference of politics in Lebanon as negative. All interviewees agreed that each team is affiliated with a certain political and/or religious group, and player B5 even provided some examples. While most of the basketball interviewees had the same opinion as football interviewees, two did highlight some positive outcomes to this integration. For instance, B3 stated: “The clash between Riyadi and Sagesse helped basketball in one way and showed in the other way the problem that was present in Lebanon between Muslims and Christians.” In other words, B3 believes that the “cold war” between religions has been portrayed on the basketball pitch by fans who feel that their teams, that represent a certain religion or sect, are means to express their conflict towards the other by supporting their teams. A win for their teams means a win for their religion/political parties. Moreover, B5 stated that while interference is negative, any financial support from political candidates is welcome because they can use this as an advantage for their political campaigns and connection with the people. In such cases, the financial aspect was considered more of a positive point than a negative point among basketball players.

Player Political Status and Personal Goals. In questions 3 and 6, the basketball and football players interviewed were asked about their status within their teams in terms

of the nature of their affiliation and their career goals. When asked to evaluate their purpose of winning a game (patriotic vs. political), answers leaned mostly towards patriotism. Many found pride in winning for their country and not for their political party (F1, F2, F3, F4, F5, and B4), but B2 and B5 pointed out that since teams represent political parties, it is inevitable not to represent them, and this sometimes overshadows a national or patriotic spirit. However, they did not personalize these statements. However, other reasons were also highlighted. For example, F1, F5, B3, and B5 highlighted the importance of personal achievements and career growth in winning trophies while F2 only stressed on the financial aspect. Moreover, F2, F5, B1, and B2 also emphasized on the importance of sportsmanship and using sports to build an ethical environment. On the other hand, B1 and B3 did not give any national or political lens to the question and pointed out that playing or winning games was purely for financial or career-oriented reasons. This section clearly defined the conflict prioritizing one's loyalty to their country versus the political party of their teams, and it was observed that most were inclined to serve their country.

Question 6 targeted a sensitive subject and asked players to discuss or comment about the player's political affiliation concerning their team. None of the interviewees admitted their political affiliation except for B5, who pointed out that he belongs to the same political affiliation his team supports, but he also emphasized on the fact that his statement derives from a cultural perspective (Armenian bondage). He also stated that even if he is affiliated, he does not follow them blindly:

I support this party, if I am talking about myself... but not blindly, you know.

There is nothing wrong for people or athletes supporting political parties or

having religious philosophies, but extremism and blind following is something that I don't like and practice. So, I keep the balance between what is right and what is wrong, between what is best for me and my team. In the end, it is a sport, so it is not a place where I fight for the cause of the political party; it's not the case; definitely, it's not how I work at least. So, I proudly support because perhaps we as Armenians have a different approach to this idea.

All interviewees also highlighted the fact that one should not necessarily be affiliated to a certain political party in order to be part of that team. However, some did point out that there might be some favoritism and in certain cases, dismissal, if grave issues arose. For instance, B4 stressed on the fact that while one does not need to be affiliated with the team's politics, there are clubs who would favor some players over others because of their political affiliations. Additionally, F5 noted that sometimes, getting caught in politics is inevitable for players and might have dire consequences.

However, in Lebanon, it [political intervention] usually does [create issues], and sometimes, players, and good players, get caught in that wildfire battle of politics. Some players get kicked off a team. Fans intervene if a player ends up giving his opinion on a political party that contrasts his team's belief.

In brief, both fans and interviewees expressed an overall negative impact of politics and religion on sports in Lebanon although there were fans who agreed that politics may play a positive role and some of the interviewees pointed that out by stating that sponsorship and financial support from a political party help in the advancement of a team. However, many fans, as well as players, believed that the integration of politics and religion should be removed because it is causing more harm than benefits. However, while the

majority of the fans admitted that they choose their teams according to their religious or political affiliation; many of the players did not agree with the parallel statement of being on the team because of their affiliation to the team they play in. A possible reason could be that some of the players are selected because of their performance and not their affiliation because clubs need results despite loyalty to parties and religion. Ironically, political etiquette can also be a cause. To gain fans, some players choose not to reveal their political affiliation, and in some cases, clubs might even ask them to remain politically and religiously neutral in order to maintain a good reputation and avoid trouble.

Table 12

The Intersection of Politics and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the political party I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	0.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.7%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	8.8%	7.1%	2.0%	1.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	12.9%	13.6%	12.5%	3.7%	2.7%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.4%	7.5%	2.0%	2.0%	0.7%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	0.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 13

The Intersection of Religion and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the political party I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	0.3%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	1.4%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.7%	2.7%
Druz	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	1.0%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	9.2%	3.7%	2.0%	4.7%	0.0%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	9.2%	12.9%	13.6%	6.8%	3.1%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.8%	5.8%	1.7%	4.1%	0.3%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	27.1%	28.1%	20.3%	19.7%	4.7%	100.0%

Table 14

The Intersection of Politics and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the religious group I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%	0.0%	2.0%
Civil Society	1.0%	1.4%	2.0%	0.3%	0.0%	4.7%
Eshtirakeye	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	1.7%
Haraket Amal	1.7%	1.4%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%
Hezbollah	4.4%	7.8%	3.7%	0.7%	0.7%	17.3%
Independent	10.2%	14.9%	7.5%	7.8%	3.7%	44.1%
Kataeb	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%	1.7%
Lebanese Forces	4.1%	1.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%
Tayar El Watani	2.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	4.4%
Tayar Moustakbal	6.4%	4.1%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	11.9%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 15

The Intersection of Religion and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the religious group I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	0.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.7%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	8.8%	7.1%	2.0%	1.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	12.9%	13.6%	12.5%	3.7%	2.7%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.4%	7.5%	2.0%	2.0%	0.7%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	0.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 16

The Role of Religion in Team Selection

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
Religion plays a role in which team I select to be in	8.8%	17.3%	14.6%	45.1%	14.2%	100.0%

Table 17

The Intersection of Politics and the Item: The political party I belong to funds my favorite sports team

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	2.0%
Civil Society	0.3%	0.3%	2.0%	0.7%	1.4%	4.7%
Eshtirakeye	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	1.7%
Haraket Amal	1.0%	1.7%	1.7%	0.3%	0.3%	5.1%
Hezbollah	4.7%	4.7%	4.7%	1.0%	2.0%	17.3%
Independent	6.8%	8.5%	8.5%	14.6%	5.8%	44.1%
Kataeb	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	1.7%
Lebanese Forces	4.1%	1.4%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	7.1%
Tayar El Watani	2.4%	1.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%
Tayar Moustakbal	6.4%	3.1%	1.4%	0.3%	0.7%	11.9%
Grand Total	26.4%	22.0%	21.0%	19.7%	10.8%	100.0%

Table 18

The Intersection of Religion and the Item: The political party I belong to funds my favorite sports team

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.3%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%	3.1%
Atheist	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.7%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	7.5%	5.1%	2.4%	4.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	8.5%	10.2%	13.6%	6.4%	6.8%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	7.1%	3.1%	2.7%	3.7%	2.0%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	1.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	26.4%	22.0%	21.0%	19.7%	10.8%	100.0%

RQ2: Do fans feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?

Table 21 below highlights the impact of the power of political and religious leaders on the opinions of respondents in general. 49.8% of the participants stated that they feel silenced by political and religious figures who offer financial assistance to their teams and similarly, also prefer not to voice their opinions (43.4%) if it contradicts with the owners of the team and continues supporting the team. While 17.6% and 27.8% of participants disagreed with the aforementioned statements respectively, the rest of the participants were neutral. Finally, 62.3% of respondents claimed that they have a high sense of solidarity with the team they support no matter what. 65% stated that they do not fear to voice their opinions to the religious leaders and political figures who are affiliated with their favorite team.

Table 21

The Power of Political Leaders and Religious Figures on Fan base

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
As a sports fan, I feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?	4%	14%	32%	39%	11%	100%
If I have an opinion different than the majority of fans I tend to keep my opinion to myself	7%	21%	29%	38%	6%	100%
If I have an opinion different than the owners of the team I support, I keep it to myself and continue to support them	5%	14%	28%	44%	8%	100%
I do not fear speaking voicing my opinions to the political figures and/or religious leaders who are affiliated with my favorite team	3%	9%	23%	42%	23%	100%
I do not fear speaking voicing my opinions to the political figures and/or religious leaders who are affiliated with my favorite team	3%	9%	23%	42%	23%	100%
I have high sense of solidarity with the team I support no matter what	2%	5%	31%	41%	21%	100%

RQ3: Do the opinion leaders transfer their thoughts to the followers on how to behave and act in relation to football and basketball?

Fans as opinion leaders or followers

As an attempt to study the attitudes of the fans towards their own opinions and to test the spiral of silence, Table 22 below summarizes these results. 65% of fans state that they are often asked about their opinions regarding games. Only 7% of respondents claimed that they were rarely asked for their opinions. Moreover, more than half of the participants (57.97%) believe that they can influence other fans while only 14% disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The rest were neutral (28%). Finally, roughly half of the participants expressed their opinions on social media and did not hold back while 19% hesitated. Around 31% preferred to remain neutral.

Interview results from the closed-ended question portion of the interview show that players view themselves as influencers when it comes to decisions regarding their teams. For example, 70% either agreed or strongly agreed to the fact that they can influence decisions in their areas. Moreover, only 20% do not believe that they have access to information that they need. Finally, 60% disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that highlights their absence of involvement in politics, or as the statement quotes, “in what the government does.” They believe that they can express their opinions towards governmental decisions. However, when it comes to getting involved in specific issues that matter, there were no significant results due either mixed opinions (f) or their refusal to reply to the statement (g). In the former statement, 50% believe that they cannot contribute to issues that they care about while 30% disagree. The rest 20% are either neutral or refuse

to answer the question. While in the latter statement, 60% refused to reply to the statement, marking the results to be inconclusive.

On the other hand, government-related statements showed accurate results. The majority of the interviewees do not trust the government altogether. For instance, 80% agreed or strongly agreed that politicians are not capable of telling the truth, and 70% agreed that politicians do not involve themselves with important matters. Only 10% agreed that the government strives to do what is right. While these are general viewpoints towards the attitudes of the players towards the government, the results here are significant in a sense because they relate to the perception of players to politics. This is related to the fact that many of the government positions in Lebanon are occupied by its main political parties that usually interfere in different areas including sports.

Communication with Fans

Questions four and five in the interviews were directly related to fans. Question 4 targeted the means of communications. Most of the interviewees stated that they connect with their fans via social media platforms. Some others stated that they were also ready to connect with fans on a personal basis, including and not limited to during practices, after games, and in public spaces (restaurants, streets, and cafes). None of the interviewees denied communication.

The extent of communication and its impact were discussed in question 5. All respondents agreed that as team members, they can influence their fans in general, except for F4, who admitted that he only can encourage the fans to do what is right. All expressed their concern about fans' behavior during games and how it was important for them to be on their best behavior during and after games. The characteristics mentioned across the

interviews for this question included being respectful, ethical, tolerant, fair, civilized, supportive, humble, civilized, and sportsmanlike. They also conveyed their desire to have fans that cheer for the team rather than the political party or religion the team is affiliated with and avoid trouble. Many of the interviewees also deemed themselves partly responsible for their fans' behavior. They considered themselves as potential role models for the fans, and therefore, their behavior should also be exemplary and reflective to the fans.

In some of the interviews, some players recalled certain events about having influenced fans. For example, B1 stated that he "once asked fans of [his] club to stop chanting certain derogatory terms to a specific group, and they accepted and never did it again." Also, B5 mentioned that he had on many occasions influenced his fans: "I do have the ability to influence our fans because fans need guidance and whichever way you guide them, they will react upon that." The results show all players have effective ways to communicate and are mostly able to influence their fans to behave in a more respectful and sportsmanlike manner.

Overall, the interviews emphasized the interference of politics and religion in Lebanon, and many expressed the negative outcomes of this interference. The majority believed that there should be no interference, and the affiliation to a certain political party should not influence the player's status on the team. Moreover, almost all the players thought of themselves as influencers, especially towards their fans, and many thought that their actions and attitudes should reflect exemplary behavior, and this could help fans be more sportsmanlike when supporting their teams. Finally, many do not find their voices to be compromised when they belong to a team that has a different ideology than theirs,

meaning that they can be influencers. However, many hesitated when asked whether they would be willing to fight for a certain cause.

Table 22

Respondents Attitude towards their Own Status as Fans

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
[People ask my opinion about any game related to my favorite team.]	3%	4%	27%	52%	13%	100.0%
I feel that I can influence other fans.	4%	10%	28%	43%	15%	100.0%
I follow other fan posts about the team on social media	3%	9%	29%	42%	18%	100.0%
I oftentimes find myself being among the first to post my opinions/beliefs/attitude about the team	9%	12%	31%	34%	15%	100.0%

Owners as opinion leaders or followers

Table 23 summarizes the communication methods used by the opinion leaders and how they transfer their thoughts to followers. More than 63.7% of the respondents stated that the owners of the team that they supported hold media conferences or releases to announce their opinions, and 49.8% stated that the owners are usually active on social media, communicate with their fans, and have a strong influence on the fans. However, only 26.4% stated that they follow what the owners ask them to do while 43% disagreed with this factor. 29.6% neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement. 33.2% of fans admit to replying to owners’ comments, 26.8% preferred not to reply at all while 40% were neutral.

Table 23

Opinion Leaders’ Transfer of Thoughts on Followers

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
The owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon tell their fans how to behave/act.	2%	7%	42%	42%	8%	100%
I tend to follow what the owners tell me as a fan to do	16%	28%	30%	19%	7%	100%
The owners of the sports team (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon have a strong influence on their fans.	1%	5%	43%	40%	10%	100%

Discussion

Politics and religion have been affecting Lebanese sports for a long time. The purpose of the study was to explore the relation between Lebanese politics/religion and sports. The investigation of the aforementioned factors showed an overall influence of the former on the latter. The results of this study highlighted this influence through both political and religious aspects and the effects are visible in perception, opinion, leader influence, and integration.

The Impact of Politics and Religion on Sports

The results have highlighted the inevitable link between political and religious intervention in sports in football and basketball. Firstly, a significant link was highlighted between politics and religion. This was confirmed in both the interviews and the literature. The political parties in Lebanon are also supported by their corresponding religious sects. For example, within the interview, the athletes discussed the relations of the teams with their corresponding politics and religious affiliations, and within their statements, a link can be established between the teams and the link to politics. Player B5 indirectly mentions the Lebanese Forces political party as a Christian one. Moreover, Hezbollah political party is mostly followed by Muslim Shiaa. Likewise, Karami (2013) explains that connection: Muslim Sunnas represented by Tayyar el Mostakbal and Christians represented by Lebanese Forces and Tayyar El Watan El Hor. As a result, Maliks (2014) states that if the aforementioned representations are indeed a given, then it should hardly be surprising that religion and politics become intricately intertwined within and across both communities and states in the region (Malik, 2018). Finally, this is also established in Faour's (2007) article, where he emphasizes on the relation between religion, demographics, and politics

in Lebanon and argues that Lebanon's 18 religious sects, under the bigger umbrella of two main religions, Christians and Muslims, are both governed by their corresponding political party to maintain political security and balance. This was confirmed in the results, as a clear link was established between the political and the religious affiliations especially in the Muslim community where the majority of the Muslim Sunna supported the Tayyar El Mostakbal, while the Muslim Shiaa were affiliated with the Hezbollah party. Interestingly, the results showed a significant increase in individuals who stated they do not belong to any political party and claimed to be independent. However, there was no correlation between their political affiliation and their religious affiliation. Many of the independents still identified themselves as Muslim Shiaa (along with other religions), and very few identified themselves as non-religious (atheists, agnostics, and the like). Yet, since many of the independent politically were still affiliated religiously, there is a probability, in accordance with the results, that their choice of team support is linked to that of religion rather than politics. This could also relate to the mistrust in politics but not in religion in general.

The rise of independent youth in the past several months has gained significant attention, who asserted that all political figures to be corrupt and not to be trusted. This explains the results of the close-ended items in the interviews as well as the open-ended where athletes that were pointed out the untrustworthiness of political figures and governments.

Secondly, since politics and religion are interrelated, then if sports in Lebanon is influenced by one of the aforementioned, it is also influenced by the other. For example, if a certain team is supported by a certain political party, then it is also represented by the

religious sect of that political party (Faour, 2007; Karami, 2013; Malik, 2018). Results have clearly stated an interference of politics and religion in sports, especially in the basketball field, and the interference was mostly highlighted by interviewees, who claim to have been a witness of this interference, especially in terms of funding effects and fan attitude. Nassif and Amara's (2015) research shows that the over-representation of religious and political communities in the sports industry is inevitably existent in sports. Likewise, Karami (2013) lists important basketball teams, such as Sagesse and Riyadi, and links them to their corresponding political parties, Lebanese Forces and Tayyar el Mostakbal, respectively. He discusses that politics and sectarianism have damaged basketball in Lebanon since this was reflected on a prospective ban of the Lebanese Basketball Association from being a member of FIBA. Similarly, when it comes to football, the intervention of politics in sports is consequential. In their interview, F2 and F3 pointed out how the interference might result in a FIFA ban, similar to the one that occurred in Kuwait. A similar occurrence took place in Egypt, where the politicization of the Ultras caused a football ban by FIFA (Ennarah, 2017).

Moreover, the impact of politics and religion on sports was mostly seen negatively, especially in the surveys. In the interviews, on the other hand, while all pointed out the negative impacts, some of the interviewees also considered some of the positive outcomes of this intervention, and this mostly involved the issue of budgeting. This is because the world of sports is rarely considered a domain of importance in Lebanon, and building a career in the sports industry is often discouraged. Many teams, as a result, resort to politics to secure a budget. B5, in his interview, stated that many political candidates resort to sponsoring a team to gain popularity among the people, and this has helped with the

advancement in sports. This claim is also supported by Nassif (2010) who asserted that due to the lack of budget within a sports team, funding has become a necessity no matter the means.

Also, other interviewees, such as player B3, stated that political and even religious involvement also encouraged an increase in the number of fans. Many fans, for example, seem to encourage a certain team because of its religious or political affiliation. Many others have decided that the team they support must be based on their own religious beliefs. This was also reflected in the fact that the majority of the Maronites do not support any football team because none of them have any Maronite affiliation. Similarly, half of the Muslim Shiaas also stated that they do not support any basketball team for similar reasons. However, the intensity is less. The rest were scattered, but a huge number have chosen Riyadi, a team with Muslim affiliation, indicating that one's religion affects one's team choice. Based on the numbers, there was more loyalty to religion than politics, and this could be due to the increase in the number of independents and the ongoing corruption in politics that many of the youth are recognizing. Even with religion being integrated with politics, the population might be more inclined towards their religious group rather than politics if they were to choose between them.

A counter-argument for the aforementioned claims by interviewees was that the support of politics reflects negatively on the team and the fans. Results of the interviews showed how political intervention can damage sportsmanship, decrease the productivity of teammates, open doors for discrimination of players, and affect the overall atmosphere of the games where winning a game can be represented with a symbolic victory of a certain political party or religious sect. This is in accordance with Karami (2013), who stated that

this political conflict represented within the teams will promote hatred between the fans. This can be seen during games when fans tend to get physically and verbally violent toward the fans of the other team. Moreover, as mentioned in the interview with B5 and supported by Nassif and Amara (2015), sports organizers are usually selected by the political party they represent, and oftentimes, are not qualified for their jobs. This will negatively affect the team in the long run financially and logistically.

Influence of Political and Religious Leader on Fans and Players

Despite the claim that political and religious leaders influence fans and players in general, many claimed that this influence does not hinder them from forming opinions on their own. Teammates believe that they can influence decisions made in the team, and most stated that they did not trust the government. However, this issue might differ depending on the team, how affiliated it is to the corresponding political and religious party, and how the decisions of the team might or might not create a conflict of interest at one point. Fans, on the other hand, do not deny the influence of owners and political leaders on mass opinion but deny the fact that they are silenced. This is compatible with the study done by Hayes (2007), who stated that people are more likely to express their opinions in a friendly atmosphere rather than a hostile one. Since this study aimed at fans who would be influenced by others on social media rather than a physical setting, it is perhaps easier to avoid providing opinions online when the comments they might be receiving are hostile. However, the fact that they refuse to be silenced could be a pride issue as most stated that they tend to not give their opinions if it contrasts the majority. However, this does not deny the presence of a power struggle but also seems not to accept full affiliation to the opinions of owners. Research shows that many sports teams in Lebanon are funded by certain

political figures or parties, and this creates a complex club-team-fan dynamic (Nassif & Amara, 2015). Needing the sponsorship and the funds, teams sometimes tend to accept or overlook certain decisions made by big owners, and even if some do not agree with the decisions of the owners, they tend to continue with supporting them. However, the statement of fans that denied remaining silent might show their denial state.

This can also be reflected in the overall structure of the club. This influence in decision making can also be the result of the incompetence of decision-making members. Around 90% of the team organizers are considered unqualified for the positions they are in and were only selected because of their political or religious affiliation (Nassif & Amara, 2015). The interviewees also pointed this out, and some considered that this has also affected the hiring process. Some interviewees pointed out that most of the team members are those who belong to the political party and/or religion the club is affiliated to and probably have more influence in the decision-making process. Fans also seem to be driven in the system since around half claimed that they preferred not to be involved in the decision making and in voicing their opinion when it contradicts the overall benefit of the political party, especially if that political party is funding the team. This is in accordance with the Spiral of Silence theory, which states that people tend not to share their opinion in fear of the majority voice. In this case, when it comes to political issues in sports, the fans were less willing to express their opinions, as generally stated in Pew (2012). When fans expressed that they were most likely to continue supporting their teams no matter what, this also goes in accordance with the influence of the Two-Step theory as it states that people are more willing to express and support because others, and in this case, the political entourage, have that particular influence on them as opinion leaders. Again, since these

discussions are usually put forward on social media, many will want to display their loyalty towards the team and its politics, and as mentioned in Pew (2012), perhaps only confidence and those who are independent in thought might express their opinions freely. However, the results in this study show a disparity in the statements because while more than half stated that they would prefer not to voice their opinion, 65% stated that they would be ready to voice their opinions against political and religious figures. This contradiction might be the result of conflict between individual and political authority. Fans might not psychologically accept the fact that they are fully governed by a higher political body and might want to assert individual thinking and autonomy. Needless to say, many also have lost trust in the government.

Team Players' Perception of Team Status

The results showed that most team players view themselves as valuable members of the team; however, they did not deny the occasional pressure that might arise from the administration. For example, many players denied their direct affiliation to the political party their club team is supported by but considered that there might be favoritism, in both basketball and football, towards the members that are affiliated. This is in accordance with Nassif and Amara (2015) who stated that the hiring process of both administration and team can be biased towards those who support the political agenda. Therefore, even the selection of team members can be seen as political. In the case of Lebanese league, religious and political considerations integrated into the selection process, but many team members that were interviewed denied any political connection and stated that they were content in their team and were involved in the decision-making process. This also can be compared within both the football and basketball union perspective. For example, the

basketball president of the basketball union is given to a Christian Maronite and the president of the football union to a Muslim Shiaa. Therefore, players might get affected in the selection process statistical-wise; fewer Christians play football and fewer Muslims play basketball, and this can also be connected to the fan base mentioned previously, who would prefer to choose teams that have players from the same affiliation as the team and as their own.

Moreover, the players emphasized their influence on the fans in general. All players stated that they can influence the way that their fans behave in and outside the field. Most players even considered themselves as strong influencers and do not entertain foul behavior from the fans. As a result, many of the players consider themselves potential opinion leaders capable of influencing the public, in this case, the fans. Karami (2013) noted that the existence of politics in the basketball field, for example, has sometimes affected fans in the worst ways, especially during playoff games, through physical and verbal abuse of fans, players, and club officials. This, as B5 mentioned in his interview, is due to historical issues between different political/religious groups, a “cold war” as B3 mentioned, continues to penetrate in different areas, even among youths, who might be affected by the stories their parents and grandparents narrate about the wars they have lived through between the 1960s and the 1980s. However, the results of the interviews of this study deny this participation in political “wars” as players pointed out the importance of sportsmanship and their refusal of violent and unsportsmanlike behavior of fans, which might show an awareness of such issues and a form of maturity towards a friendlier and sportsmanlike competition.

The Influence of Politics on Fans in Sports

The results of this study showed that more than half of the fans believe that their opinions regarding games matter and are also able to influence other fans. This also does not go hand in hand with the Two-Step Theory as many fans consider themselves as potential leaders capable of affecting other fans. Bastos et al.'s (2013) study confirms the results of this study by proving that minority groups can become opinion leaders. Even though sports in Lebanon are influenced by politics and religion, many of the fans believe that they can influence the team and that their opinion matters. This could be due to the spread of social media platforms that encourage freedom of expression. There was a disparity with sharing thoughts on social media, some believing that they need to express their opinions while others preferred to remain silent. This can have several reasons. Many of the fans consider themselves extremely loyal to the political party they belong to, and even in the sports sector, they tend not to express their opinions since they do not want to upset their political leaders ("Zaiims") or mass opinion. This goes in accordance with the Spiral of Silence theory, in which fans, depending on their level of belonging to a certain political party or religious sect, would hesitate to share any form of opinion on social media fearing criticism and isolation from other devoted fans.

Opinion Leaders' Influence on Followers

This study has shown that the majority of the owners transfer their thoughts to their followers on social media and occasionally announce their opinions and guide the fan base. However, only a quarter emphasized that they are to agree with statements, and a slightly higher percentage of fans admitted to avoiding replying to comments and remaining neutral to avoid conflict. Most of the neutral answers were confined to questions concerning

vocalizing opinions on social media or disagreeing with opinion leaders. Also, and surprisingly, many fans replied with “neutral” when asked about who funds their favorite team. Whether the intention is their lack of knowledge, fear, or preference not to reply remains unclear. This shows how opinion leaders remain a source of influence for the fans and indirectly govern their behavior or at least manage unwanted reactions. While this is a common factor in the Two-Step theory, literature shows that while opinion leaders have that influence, they do not necessarily derive from political leaders or the majority (Bastos et al., 2013). The results of this study, however, show that unlike what the two-step flow theory states, people were not blindly affected by the statements of the opinion leaders. Nevertheless, while many did point out that having access to social media can make opinions more accepted, the people who have more access to the media are more powerful and can make their opinions accepted by the majority through providing valuable content.

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study. One of the major limitations was time constraint and the global situation (e.g., COVID-19). Because of the pandemic, the interviews could not be conducted face to face, so most of them were done through Skype and Whatsapp. Some of the responses were written while others were spoken. This created a variety of responses, but also created some imbalance between those who articulated their answers and those who preferred to write them down. What made proceeding difficult was that some interviewees refused to answer certain questions, and this did not allow the interviewer to have substantial content for some questions.

Moreover, the content of the questionnaire contained some sensitive information such as one’s religious and political affiliation and required participants to answer

questions that required them to psychologically assess their loyalty to the aforementioned. This might have affected sincere and honest answers. This could also be because although the questionnaire stated that the responses were to remain anonymous, some of the respondents were familiar with the researcher and his background.

The sample representation and size were also an issue due to the limited time and religious affiliation. The respondents were mostly Muslim Shiaa, which did not provide an equal demographic distribution. This was also due to the fact that many sports platforms, which belonged to different political/religious affiliations refused to post the questionnaire on their sports pages. Most of the limitations were due to circumstances beyond control, but there could have been more effective communication, even on Whatsapp, with the interviewees to ensure better responses. Finally, the studies surrounding the theories are very limited and need further study. For instance, the studies surrounding the Two- Step theory have contrasting results, such as the nature of influencers being minorities rather than the mass majority.

Implications and Future Research

This study reinstated the inevitable influence of politics and religion on sports in Lebanon. The results clearly stated how both fans and players were fully affected by this phenomenon, and while team independency was highlighted in certain cases and that most were looking forward to having this interference removed, it was clear that this influence will continue in sports since the issue of finance still stands, especially after the economic crises Lebanon. This study has highlighted the attitude towards both fans and players regarding the integration of politics in sports and has shed light on both the negative and positive aspects of this integration. Also, the different attitudes of fans towards loyalty to

political parties and religious sects and their connection to the respective teams were a novel point in the study. Interestingly, the slight difference in attitude between basketball and football is also a key discovery in this study as the rise in fame of basketball due to funds received favorably by fans and players despite political affiliation. The results of this research, however, inspire future research. For example, research should be done comparing the situation of boys' team versus girls' teams. Also, the interviewees were mostly men (1 female from a female team), so no significant comparison could have been made to assess the situation of politics in sports on girls' teams. Possible future research can focus on gender differences in supporting sports and their attitude towards the interference of sports. Furthermore, more observational research should be conducted regarding fan behaviors. Also, a more obvious research suggestion could be studied to start suggesting possible solutions to the integration of politics and religion and sports and healthy ways to separate them.

Finally, to tackle the issue of political and religious interference in Lebanon, it is crucial to introduce laws that do not allow the interference of politics and religion in sports by managing the source of funding the team receives and ensuring that each team includes people of all religions and minorities. This can also allow fans to make their decisions based on the qualifications of the teams and their players rather than the club's political or religious affiliation. This might be difficult to achieve, considering the context of Lebanon, but it is not impossible. The teams can ask for financial help from organizations/companies/institutions that do not have any political or religious affiliation. Also, monitoring players, fans, coaches, and administration from clubs help in keeping the political and religious tension at bay. Finally, raising awareness by organizing campaigns

can also be a small yet positive step to achieve political and religious segregation from sports.

There is no doubt that politics and religion play a major role in sports in Lebanon. Many fans and players are caught between the tumultuous political battles that subtly reflected in the administration of clubs and games. This study aimed to explore the relationship between politics and sports and fans' and team players' attitudes towards this integration. This research aimed to merge two theories, the Spiral of Silence and the Two-Step Flow theory into this study to describe the present situation from both the fans' and players' perspective. The results showed a significant relationship between politics and sports and the impact of this integration on fans' and players' attitudes. Both fans and teams viewed this integration to be a negative one, stating that this interference may affect their own opinion and the majority. However, some participants also stated that there were positive outcomes to this interference, especially interviewees who focused on the financial aspect. The results mostly agreed with the theories mentioned although more research is needed on the matter. The Spiral of Silence theory and the Two-Step Flow theory are somehow evident in the results, but it is not sufficient to determine that the political leaders are opinion leaders who govern the fans' opinions and silence them or whether they are the sole opinion leaders that govern mass opinion. It is safe to assume that the involvement of politics and religion in Lebanon's many fields, including that of sports, is a complicated matter and will need years to resolve.

Appendix A: Questionnaire

I am a student at Notre Dame University – Louaize conducting my master's thesis about the integration of politics and religion with sports. I kindly ask you to fill out this questionnaire with your personal and genuine opinion. There are no right or wrong answers and the purpose of this study is purely educational. Your participation is anonymous and your responses confidential. Clicking the next button indicates that you voluntarily are willing to participate in this study. * Required

1. How old are you?

2. Indicate your gender

Mark only one oval.

- Female
 Male

3. What is your political affiliation?

Mark only one oval.

- Civil Society
 Tayar Moustakbal
 Hezbollah
 Haraket Amal
 Tayar El Watani
 Lebanese Forces
 Kataeb
 Eshtirakeye
 Independent

4. If other, please specify.

5. What is the religion you identify with the most?

Mark only one oval.

- Muslim Sunni
- Muslim Shiaaa
- Maronite
- Latin Catholic
- Roman Catholic
- Orthodox
- Druz
- Evangelical
- Agnostic
- Atheist

6. If other, please specify.

7. Kindly indicate the team you support in basketball? *

Mark only one oval.

- Riyadi
- Sagesse
- Homentmen
- Champville
- Mouttahed
- Byblos
- Atlas
- Hoops
- I dont support any basketball team

8. Do you consider yourself a fan of this basketball team? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

9. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most), rate how much you consider yourself to be a fan of the sports team you selected.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. Kindly Indicate the team you support in football (If you don't support any football team, you may end the survey. Thank you for your time and responses). * Mark

- only one oval.
-
- Nejmeh
- Ansar
- Ahed
- Tadamon Sour
- Tripoli
- Sahel
- Other

I dont support any football team

11. Do you consider yourself a fan of this football team? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No
- Not applicable

12. On a scale of 1-10 (10 being the most), rate how much you consider yourself to be a fan of the sports team you selected.

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

13. Are you a fan of both football and basketball? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

14. If you are a fan of both sports, which do you consider yourself more a fan of? *

Mark only one oval.

Football

Basketball

15. Select the answer that best fits your behavior in relation to sports in Lebanon. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Always	Often times	Sometimes	Never
I attend basketball games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I attend football games	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I support my basketball team on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I support my football team on social media	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I watch all games of my favorite team	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
I defend my favorite team when talking about sports	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

16. Rate the level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements in relation to your preferred sport and team. *

INTEGRATION OF POLITICS AND SPORTS IN LEBANON 85

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I believe the sports team I support is the best team	<input type="radio"/>				
I think the team I support has the best team players	<input type="radio"/>				
I think the sports team I support has the best strategy in the game	<input type="radio"/>				

17. Rate the level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements. *
 Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Politics impacts sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon positively.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics impacts sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon negatively.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics changes the way the game is played.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics changes the way fans act.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics has a lot to do with how players of the sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon are selected.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics plays a role in how the teams behave.	<input type="radio"/>				
Sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon are financially supported by politics.	<input type="radio"/>				
Politics plays a role in which team wins.	<input type="radio"/>				
Religion impacts sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon positively.	<input type="radio"/>				
Religion impacts sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon negatively.	<input type="radio"/>				
Religion impacts the way people participate in sports (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon.	<input type="radio"/>				

Religion plays a role in which team I select to be in.

18. Rate the level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
People ask my opinion about any game related to my favorite team.	<input type="radio"/>				
I feel that I can influence other fans.	<input type="radio"/>				
I follow other fan posts about the team on social media.	<input type="radio"/>				
I oftentimes find myself being among the first to post my opinions/beliefs/attitude about the team.	<input type="radio"/>				

19. Rate the level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements. *

INTEGRATION OF POLITICS AND SPORTS IN LEBANON 88

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon hold media conferences or media releases to announce their opinion.	<input type="radio"/>				
The owners of the sports team (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon I support are active on social media.	<input type="radio"/>				
The owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon regularly communicate with the fans.	<input type="radio"/>				
The owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon tell their fans how to behave/act.	<input type="radio"/>				
I tend to follow what the owners tell me as a fan to do.	<input type="radio"/>				
I tend to reply to the owners' comments on social media.	<input type="radio"/>				
The owners of the sports team (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon have a strong influence on their fans.	<input type="radio"/>				

Rate the level of agreement from strongly agree to strongly disagree for the following statements. *

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a sports fan, I feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?	<input type="radio"/>				
If I have an opinion different than the majority of fans I tend to keep my opinion to myself.	<input type="radio"/>				
If I have an opinion different than the owners of the team I support, I keep it to myself and continue to support them.	<input type="radio"/>				
I do not fear speaking voicing my opinions to the political figures and/or religious leaders who are affiliated with my favorite team.	<input type="radio"/>				
I have high sense of solidarity with the team I support no matter what.	<input type="radio"/>				

21. Rate your level of agreement with the following statements. *

INTEGRATION OF POLITICS AND SPORTS IN LEBANON 90

Mark only one oval per row.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the political party I belong to.	<input type="radio"/>				
The sports team I support is supported by the most of the people of the religious group I belong to	<input type="radio"/>				
The political party I belong to funds my favorite sports team	<input type="radio"/>				

Appendix B: Interview Questions

No	Question
1	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree (strongly agree/agree/neutral/disagree/strongly disagree) with the following statements (take into consideration the political aspect and background of your club when analyzing these statements).</p> <p>a. analyzing these statements).</p> <p>b. You feel that you can influence decisions in your area.</p> <p>c. You know where to go to find out information that you need.</p> <p>d. As a player, you feel you have no say in what the government does.</p> <p>e. You trust politicians to tell the truth.</p> <p>f. You trust politicians to deal with the things that matter.</p> <p>g. You can affect things by getting involved in issues you care about.</p> <p>h. You trust the government to do what is right</p> <p>Sometimes you feel strongly about an issue, but you don't know what to do about it.</p>
2	<p>Does political engagement have a positive or negative impact on any type of sports? Please explain your answer.</p>
3	<p>The purpose of the sportsman life is only to serve the nation by displaying patriotism when winning the game rather than winning to serve and the political affiliation of the team. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your interpretation.</p>
4	<p>How do you communicate with the fans?</p>

5-	How likely do you think you can influence the fans' behaviors?
6	As a player who belongs to a specific sports team that represents a political party or has a religious affiliation, does this mean you support this party?
7	How is politics and religion integrated with sports in Lebanon?
8	What are the impacts of this integration?

Appendix C: Transcribed Interviews (Football)

The following are the detailed interviews of all football players. They are all first division players and have agreed to participate in the interviews. Some players have chosen not to answer certain questions. This is highlighted in **bold**. Some players have roughly translated Arabic idioms into English. The researcher has clarified some of these idioms next to them in *italics*. Finally, some have chosen to merge two questions. This is made clear by replacing the question numbers simultaneously.

Player F1: Ansar

1. **(Chose not to reply to the statements)**
2. Political engagement in football has a negative effect on the level of the game in general as this causes to have a lot of nervousness between the fans; they would focus on the political stuff more than cheering in a civilized and ethical way.
3. For sure! In my career, I had a target, and that was to collect international and local trophies. As for the Lebanese national team, I always wanted to give everything, and I dealt with this duty as a national duty, and this has nothing to do in political stuff; I always put such issues behind my back (*“disregard such issues”*) and move on.
4. I don't communicate with the fans on social media; our fans have a very big foundation, and I have nothing for them but respect, appreciation, and love. The communication happens when we are present at the training sessions.
5. Regarding influencing the behavior and actions of the Ansar, I assure you that our fans are civilized and ethical, but sometimes, they can get angry and lose

control. I hope that they always stay patient and on their best behavior. I hope they cheer in a civilized manner and stick with football slogans when cheering, without mentioning or insulting any political figures or parties.

6. If a player plays with a team that is affiliated to a certain political party, then he is not forced to also be affiliated to the same political party, regardless of his religious sector. We at Ansar club have a lot of players belonging to different religious sectors, but we all treat each other as if we are one family and brothers inside and outside the football field.
7. Regarding the politics and sports... well I usually don't like to talk about this topic, but I go back in time ("*reminisce the time*") when football was alright ("*doing well*") and had the best image, right before the martyrdom of Rafik Alhariri.
8. I don't think political interference is present, and if it is, it should not be acceptable as they are both in separate sections ("*separate entities*"). In Lebanon, football teams are known to being affiliated to certain political parties, but the situation of the country is forcing this issue, but I believe that we should not engage football and politics together ("*we should not merge football and politics*").

Player F2: Ahed

- 1- a. Strongly Disagree
- b. Strongly Agree
- c. Strongly Disagree
- d. Strongly Agree

e. Agree

f. Disagree

g. no reply

h. no reply

- 2- The involvement of politics in sport usually has a negative impact. This is why FIFA states that countries where politics interferes with sport would be banned from participating in international competitions. This is similar to what happened with Kuwait recently and with many other countries before. The issue is that the politicians fight each other in many different aspects and domains, and their involvement in sports makes it another one of the said domains, so it will always have a negative impact on sport.
- 3- The main purpose of sports is to build ethics and morals (sportsmanship) despite winning or losing. There are a lot of people, working in the field of sports, who are not financially rewarded like others, and they suffer because of that. However, what's more important is that these players work hard for their club and countries because ultimately they (on an international level) are representing their people and nations. That's besides their effect on their communities in which they help their people, especially the kids. Now, we how players are contributing their time and effort to fulfill some children's dreams. Ultimately, the sport is about ethics more than it is about winning or losing.
- 4- Regarding communication with the fans, it is now much easier thanks to social media such as Facebook, Instagram, Whatsapp, and many others. So communication is very easy nowadays on social media, and with everybody, not

only the fans. Ultimately it's down to the player's morals and ethics whether they would respond to the fans, but most of the players do respond because after all, the player is worth as much as the fans love him/her.

- 5- Of course, top players have a big effect on the manners/behavior of fans as well as the relationship between them and the club. That is due to the fans seeing top players as role models. If a top player is always humble, respectful, and ethical, the fans will most likely pick up some of these traits, so I agree with this subject.
- 6- Like I said before. Clubs are interested in winning competitions and reaching milestones, and every club has players from all religions and sects. I don't think clubs think this (referring to the question) this way. I'll give you an example, at Al Ahed club (my club), we have players from all sects and religions, and there's equality and justice between all the players. The management only looks for ethical players and their performance on the pitch and behavior off the pitch. They care a lot about that. So no, I don't think that a player playing for a particular club would necessarily have the same political or religious affiliations as said club. That doesn't exist and is very unhealthy if it did, and hopefully it will never exist in the future.
- 7- (merged with 8): To be honest, yes we do suffer from problems in Lebanon relating to the involvement of politics and religion in sports and particularly in football. However, I believe that comes down to the mentality and culture of the fans, because after all, all clubs have players from all parts of the nation regardless of their name, sect, or religion. Sometimes people are cultureless/unethical and support their club on a political or religious level which

heavily impacts the game in a negative way. Because of that, we hope these types of things go away, especially here in Lebanon where we have many sects and religions and these types of things. These issues are rarely found abroad and that positively impacts the game over there, so I am hoping this phenomenon disappears from our games (in Lebanon).

Player F3: Nejme

1. a. Agree
 - b. Agree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Disagree
 - g. no reply**
 - h. no reply**
2. By all means, the effect of the interference of politics in sports is negative, and this exposes the sports in Lebanon to being banned. I remember the FIFA ban on Kuwait after politics clearly interfered with sports, and in general, this interference is negative.
3. Sure, the player's main target in his career is to win an international trophy as this would make him a national hero among his fellow citizens, and it should not have anything to do with political clashes.

4. I communicate with my fans using the social media platforms. Nowadays, communication is much easier and faster; pre and post matches' moments are for the fans to see if they are satisfied with the performance.
5. All sports figures influence fans' actions and behaviors, and players should be exemplary in their actions and the way they behave both outside and inside the football field.
6. No for sure! Each person has his freedom in choosing his religion and political affiliations, and belonging to a club that has a certain political affiliation does not mean that that the player has to have the same affiliation as his club.
7. The relationship between politics and religion with sports is a geographical relationship, and according to the political affiliations, each club belongs to the political party that is dominant in the area in which his bases are. This issue is normal in Lebanon.
8. The effect of the interference of politics in football is negative, not only on football, but also on all sports in Lebanon. Sports should not have any relationship with politics.

Player F4: Al Safa

1. a. Strongly agree
- b. Strongly disagree
- c. Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Disagree
- f. Disagree

g. no reply

h. no reply

2. The interference of politics in sports negatively affects the team and its players because of sectarian and sectarian problems and frictions.
3. The ultimate goal of sport is serving the country by winning matches, but unfortunately, in most clubs, politics and its authority have become the dominant and controlling part of the clubs.
4. I am in contact with the fans during the match in the football field and through social media.
5. Of course, I am not able to influence the actions of the fans, but I always wish and encourage them to be civilized, support the team, and avoid fabricating problems.
6. The club does not impose the football player to be affiliated with the political party of the club because he plays sports and is not involved in politics and (*“therefore”*) has freedom of opinion and expression.
7. Religion has no interference in Lebanese sports, but politics interferes in all sectors because club supporters are usually political men.
8. While the relationship between politics and sports can be seen positively since it provides income and support for the club, but on the other hand, sectarianism and problems sometimes arise among fanatics.

Player F5: Captain of Hoops Football Team

1. a. Strongly Agree
- b. Strongly Agree
- c. Neutral

d. Strongly Disagree

e. Strongly Disagree

f. Agree

g. Strongly Disagree

h. Agree

2. I believe that political engagements usually have a negative impact on sports. I believe that politics and sports should not mix and so sports should remain independent. In the end, when one engages and belongs in a certain team, they should support the team and the philosophy, but they should never be pressured to do anything they are not comfortable with.
3. Even before I was on a professional team, I always wanted to be part of any team and bring a trophy home. While my aspirations at that time was not winning a national trophy, I somehow feel that this has become possible. However, my intentions are purely patriotic. No matter what team I am on, I want to make my country proud and not a certain political party.
4. We communicate with our fans mostly on our Instagram page. We have a field of supporters, especially women who are proud that there is a women's team, especially at Hoops. We do usually receive lots of support, and this has helped us with the cause of women empowerment in sports.
5. Usually, our team motto is sportsmanship. No matter what, we want to show the world that unlike other teams (boys' teams), we do not want to create any animosity between other teams. As a captain, I ensure that. I emphasize on ethics and fair play, and I always encourage my teammates to ignore those who are looking for

trouble on the field. We don't need to change a game into a battle of politics. I believe this can reflect on the fans.

6. Not necessarily. I respect all religions and political affiliations, and irrespective of my own personal beliefs, I never bring it with me to the field. The key word, I believe, here is respect. I am always grateful to the club, the coaches and my teammates, but I do not want to be involved in the club's politics and affiliation, and I am glad that my team emphasizes on respect and the close bond between teammates, despite their different religions and political affiliations.
7. Unfortunately, every club, sport's organization or academy in Lebanon has a certain political affiliation, and in order to get funds/donations, certain decisions must be made. I don't think this a big deal as long as it does not affect the teammates. However, in Lebanon, it usually does, and sometimes, players, and good players, get caught in that wildfire battle of politics. Some players get kicked off a team. Fans intervene if a player ends up giving his opinion on a political party that contrasts his team's belief.
8. So, as I mentioned, the integration is disadvantageous to the player and to the whole sport's world. Like it was once said about how religion should not interfere with politics, I see that this also applies with sports. They are separate entities. Sports is pure and supposed to bring people together in a friendly competition-like atmosphere. When politics get involved, things may become dirty, and in Lebanon, it usually does. We must work to ensure that this is no longer the case.

Appendix D: Transcribed Interviews (Basketball)

The following are the detailed interviews of all basketball players. They are all first division or former first division players and have agreed to participate in the interviews. Some players have chosen not to answer certain questions. This is highlighted in **bold**. Some players have roughly translated Arabic and Armenian idioms into English. The researcher has clarified some of these idioms next to them in *italics*. Moreover, some have chosen to merge two questions. This is made clear by replacing the question numbers simultaneously. Finally, players 3 and 5 attempted to answer a follow up question and provide an after note respectively.

Player B1: Riyadi

1. a. Disagree

- b. Agree
 - c. Agree
 - d. Disagree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Neutral
 - g. Neutral
 - h. Agree
2. In sports, in general, politics has a negative impact because sports should stray away from politics and focus on the joy of the game, and fans should support the team and players they like and not the one associated with their political party. Sports mission is to stray away from racism and bring people together.
 3. The purpose of sportsman life is not to win the game but to play the game to the best of his abilities. Sometimes you win; sometimes you lose. Sports is a big stage with a large crowd engagement, which is why politics tries to influence it in Lebanon.
 4. Through social media and interviews and sometimes in person.
 5. Very likely. I asked fans of my club to stop chanting certain derogatory terms to a specific group, and they accepted and never did it again.
 6. Playing for a professional sports team has no relation absolutely to personal beliefs or religion or politics. It's merely a technical decision to give the team the best chance to win and the player a best contract.
 7. & 8. Politics in Lebanon has inflated the game and slowly destroyed it, hindering the ability for true professionalism, and limiting the success of sports in

Lebanon. However, considering the true environment of Lebanon as a country, politics has given a means for sports to achieve short term success.

Player B2: Homenetmen

1.
 - a. I believe I can make a difference, specifically things related to sports and life. How my personal life experiences with God can influence others.
 - b. It depends on what I'm looking for and what kind of people I'm surrounding myself with. Embracing NGOs helped me a lot to validate about different things in my life that happened before and in the moment. Spiritual-wise, I receive my messages from God on how to do things and deal with them.
 - c. My personal point of view is that this idea is vague and needs a lot of work.
 - d. It's not that I don't trust politicians; people, including politicians, are hard to trust. Spiritually truth comes from the Man above, and I put my trust in him only.
 - e. I believe they can make it happen, but I don't trust that they will do it for sure.
 - f. Not always, it depends on the issue and if I can be a good example.
 - g. I believe the government always tries to do what is right.
 - h. It's separated, and maybe not always. There's anything in my hands that I can do (*"My hands are tight/I can't do anything about it"*).
2. It has both N (*"Nationalism"*) and P (*"Politics"*) but I believe in Lebanon the N (*"Nationalism"*) % (*"percentage"*) is more. Using politics as a first option to destroy the other rather than how we can be a good team and use it to provide what non-political leaders can do (*"As a good team, we need to provide examples"*).

3. As a professional athlete, I truly believe that the concept of winning is explained in different ways. When we say winning and losing, what are we winning? And what are we losing? And why are we doing (*“putting”*) this effort? At the end, politics is around the world (*“existing in the world”*), but it really matters that you never see that winning for a political party is a right thing, but it’s the one that works, and winning for the nation doesn't apply.
4. Three ways:
 1. During game through body language. It matters a lot.
 2. Respecting and understanding their reactions.
 3. Being an example of the Image of God for them.
5. Fans’ behavior is like throwing a fish in a sea and giving them the opportunity to swim everywhere and in whatever ways they want. My personal idea (*“opinion”*) is being positive and beside the fans, when they are out of control, it makes a huge impact.
6. I play to earn respect and prove my skills and serve the team, not the political party.
 Jesus came to earth to save us from being religious (*“extreme”*) and separated. I play for being united with Muslims, Christians, Druz. We are all children of God.
7. In Lebanon, some politics (*“political parties”*) are related to specific religions; that's why they are both combined. But according to sports, I think it's getting mixed up to the war, which is the opposite party's fighting in the two ways (*“politics and religion is interfering in sports, and there seems to be a war between the two”*).

8. Impact is always the opposite (“*negative*”) and unhealthy for face (“*image*”) or the message.

Player B3: Byblos

1.
 - a. Disagree
 - b. Strongly Disagree
 - c. Disagree
 - d. Agree
 - e. Disagree
 - f. Agree
 - g. no reply**
 - h. no reply**

2. The integration of politics in sports helped Lebanese Basketball in two ways. The first factor is the financial support for the teams; the second factor is attracting the fans. The money factor is because of political clashes and that led to the support of these political parties to these teams. Negatively, the political clashes led to many problems in the Lebanese Basketball Federation, and caused huge problems among the fans. As a result, the game (“*and the survival of the team*”) was not stable; it was dependent on the financial support that is also not stable.

3. The main goal of sportspeople is to win all the games they participate in, and that is how athletes are raised. Sadly, when playing in Lebanon, this mentality will decrease because of the situation in the country.

4. I communicate with the fans in the basketball pitch and on all social media platforms. Lately, I was not active on social media.

5. Sure, all basketball players have a platform in which they have the opportunity to be a positive influence on the fans.
6. In some instances, yes, players that were involved in a certain team for a long time did belong to the political party of the team, but that does not apply on most of the players.
7. 8. I think I have talked about the integration between politics, religion with sports in Lebanon. The clash between Riyadi and Sagesse helped basketball in one way and showed in the other way the problem that was present in Lebanon between Muslims and Christians.

Follow-up Question: Does having a lot of religious sects helped in having a huge fan base?

Yes, it did help in attracting a huge fan base in a way, but it did cross the limits in some incidents.

Player B4: Beirut

1. a. Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Agree
- f. Disagree
- g. Agree
- h. no reply**

2. Both. In a positive way because political parties tend to support the teams financially, and this helps a lot because there are times when there are no sponsors to pay a huge amount of money. In a negative way because politics should not integrate with sports by any means.
3. Sure because all sportspeople and Athletes seek to win matches and be the reason for the happiness of the people that support them in their country.
4. Yes, I communicate with the fans through social media platforms and by making appearances in some places or by sudden appearances in public places.
5. Sure, I do because when athletes don't accept the unethical behaviors from the fans, they will have a good influence on them.
6. Unfortunately, there are many clubs that are directly affiliated to certain political parties.
7. The effect of this relationship is that such relationship delivers the political sensitivities to the basketball pitch, and this issue not healthy for the game.
8. Not necessarily, but yes, sometimes clubs do favor some players over others based on their political affiliations.

B5: Former Captain of Homentmen

1. a. Agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Disagree
- e. Disagree
- f. Agree

g. Disagree

h. Agree

2. Definitely the political engagement has a negative impact on any type of sports because we tend to forget what best case scenario is for the situation, and we go for the option of what's the best for our political party or our team because each team represents a political party in Lebanon or let's say a political team or a sect, so definitely, it has a negative impact because we don't go after what's best for the country or what's best for the sports rather than going for what's best for the political party.
3. I totally agree because what athletes chase is winning championships and games and personal legacy regardless to what team they are playing for, especially athletes nowadays, where for example, you can see Muslims playing for Christian teams and Christians playing for Muslim teams. So no, we have that mixed, kind of, today in our sports, but that wasn't the case back in the days because before, the Muslims used to play with the Muslim teams and the Christians used to play with the Christian teams, so we didn't see the integration between the society members, but nowadays, athletes care for the money and winning championships. For example, if you have an Armenian athlete playing for Sagesse, and Sagesse are known to be affiliated to the Lebanese forces, so the athlete doesn't care what the political party says and what are their goals; they just care about winning games and their money ("*earning money*"). But back in the days... like if the player changes his team, he used to be called as a traitor... like this doesn't happen because he used to play for his team which is also representing his

political group. Because once he changes his team, they say he changed his ideology, so that's why they called him traitor and not very loyal (*"though his act to be not very loyal"*).

4. I communicate with the fans using several channels on social media, Facebook, Instagram twitter, and second interviews whether it's on TV, websites or a radio ("radio channels"). I'm a friendly person; I like interaction with people; I'm always on the floor meeting (*"with"*) people saying hi. I'm not the type of a person that keeps a distance between myself and the fans. At the end of the day, I am from that group of the people, but I chose to be an athlete, so this doesn't give me the right to create this distance between me and them.
5. If you are talking about my team's fans, I do have the ability to influence our fans because fans need guidance and whichever way you guide them, they will react upon that. For example, if you preach for violence and if you preach for garbage and nonsense talks or political chants and you are pro to that, they will continue doing that, but once you tell them to stop and focus cheering for the team rather than attacking someone, they will listen, and they will take it into consideration. For example, you can't control everyone. On the end of the day, they are here to have fun, but no, the vast majority will listen and act smart. When it comes to other team's fans, they will not listen, and they will take it as gas on fire (*"they will be offended"*), especially when you get attacked on social media because you are a face of the team, and the other team's fans don't know you, and they hate the team you play for, so they attack you in person, but you have to live with-it.

6. I support this party, if I am talking about myself. I do support that party, yes, but not blindly, you know. There is nothing wrong for people or athletes supporting political parties or having religious philosophies, but extremism and blind following is something that I don't like and practice. So, I keep the balance between what is right and what is wrong, between what is best for me and my team. In the end, it is a sport, so it is not a place where I fight for the cause of the political party; it's not the case; definitely, it's not how I work at least. So, I proudly support because perhaps we as Armenians have a different approach to this idea, but no I don't follow them blindly.
7. They are integrated with everything in Lebanon, especially in sports because teams participate in the championships are for example religious teams or teams that represent a certain religion or sect or political party, so they are interrelated like... as everything in Lebanon. For example, if you are talking about Sagesse, it is known a group of religious people support this team, and they pay money to the team, and also, they have a political interference when it comes to Riyadi, also when it comes to Champville, also when it comes to Homentmen, so there is a very high ("*strong*") relationship, unfortunately.
8. The impact of this integration is a negative one because everyone will be blindfolded by the results, goals, and outcomes of the project because everyone wants to secure his political parties' and religious groups' victories rather than something else, especially, for example, if they are forming a committee, they don't bring the best people out there; they just bring people from different religious backgrounds, which is something nice, but this doesn't ensure forming

the best comity possible because what's wrong if I can choose 7 or 9 representatives from one religious group but everyone is doing his own job, and meeting the points ("*tasks*"), but no, in Lebanon, we have to respect the special situation; the religious group has to be represented by their sports teams.

By the way, I want to add something, Yes, I hate politics' interference with sports, but I don't really hate politicians interfering with sports as sponsors. For example, if someone wants to declare his candidacy for his next election... like why not choose a sports platform or a team to sponsor in order to grab the attention of the fans. That's not bad, but that's it; you cannot interfere in the decision making; you cannot interfere in what the team message is, so I'm not totally against the idea of political sponsoring money, but I am against politics interfering with sports. Let them support the sports as who they are in person but not who they represent as a political party ("*Let them support the team and not support the political party they represent*").

Appendix E: Tables and Charts of Results

Table 1*Football*

Football Team	Political Affiliation	Religious Affiliation	Owner	Number of fans
<u>AlAhed</u>	<u>Hezbollah</u>	<u>Muslim Shiaa</u>	<u>Tamim Solayman</u>	<u>46</u>
<u>Nejmeh</u>	<u>Tayyar</u> <u>AlMostakbal</u>	<u>Muslim</u> <u>Sunna/Shiaa</u>	<u>Asaad Sakal</u>	<u>71</u>
<u>Shabab</u> <u>Alsahel</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Muslim Shiaa</u>	<u>Samir Dbouk</u>	<u>16</u>
<u>Tadamon Sour</u>	<u>Haraket Amal</u>	<u>Muslim Shiaa</u>	<u>Samir Baweb</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Ansar</u>	<u>Tayyar</u> <u>Motsaqbal</u>	<u>Muslim Sunna</u>	<u>Nabil Bader</u>	<u>51</u>
<u>Tripoli</u>	<u>Najib Mikatti</u>	<u>Muslim Sunna</u>	<u>Ghassan Yakan</u>	<u>4</u>

Table 2*Basketball*

Basketball Team)	Political Affiliation	Religious Affiliation	Owner	Number of fans
<u>Riyadi</u>	<u>Tayyar</u> <u>AlMostakbal</u>	<u>Muslim Sunna</u>	<u>Mazen Tabarra</u>	<u>83</u>

<u>Champville</u>	<u>Tayyar</u> <u>Alwatani</u>	<u>Christian</u> <u>Maronite</u>	<u>Akram Safa</u>	<u>38</u>
<u>Sagesse</u>	<u>Lebanese</u> <u>Forces</u>	<u>Christian</u> <u>Maronite</u>	<u>Elie</u> <u>Yahchouchi</u>	<u>61</u>
<u>Moutahed</u>	<u>Mohammad Al</u> <u>Safadi</u>	<u>Muslim Sunna</u>	<u>Ahmad</u> <u>ALsafadi</u>	<u>7</u>
<u>Hoops</u>	<u>X</u>	<u>Muslim Shiaa</u>	<u>Jasem Kansou</u>	<u>14</u>
<u>Byblos</u>	<u>Tayyar</u> <u>Alwatani</u>	<u>Christian</u>	<u>John Khaled</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Homentmen</u>	<u>Tachnak</u>	<u>Christian</u> <u>Armenian</u> <u>Orthodox</u>	<u>Rafi</u> <u>Mometechilian</u>	<u>18</u>

Table 3

Players' Club Affiliations (Both Football and Basketball)

Player	Club Affiliation
F1	Ansar
F2	Al Ahed
F3	Nejmeh
F4	Safah

F5	Hoops
B1	Riyadi
B2	Homentmen
B3	Byblos
B4	Beirut
B5	Homentmen

Table 4

Respondents' Political Affiliation

POLITICAL AFFILIATION	Total Result	Percentage	
Independent	130	44%	
Hezbollah	51	17%	
Tayar Moustakbal	35	12%	
Lebanese Forces	21	7%	
Haraket Amal	15	5%	
Civil Society	14	5%	
Tayar El Watani	13	4%	
Did not answer	6	2%	
Kataeb	5	2%	
Eshtirakeye	5	2%	
TOTAL	295	100%	

Table 5

Respondents' Religious Affiliation

RELIGION	Total Result	Percentage	
Muslim Shiaa	134	46%	
Maronite	58	20%	
Muslim Sunni	55	19%	
Agnostic	9	3%	
Druz	9	3%	
Atheist	8	3%	
Roman Catholic	7	2%	
Other	0	0%	
Orthodox	5	2%	
Latin Catholic	3	1%	
Evangelical	1	0%	
ToTAL	289	100%	289

Table 6
The Intersection of Participants' Political and Religious Affiliation

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	Orthodox	Roman Catholic	Other
Independent	2.4%	1.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	10.4%	19.0%	8.0%	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%
Hezbollah	-	-	-	-	-	-	17.6%	-	-	-	-
Tayar Moustakbal	-	-	-	-	-	1.0%	-	11.1%	-	-	-
Lebanese Forces	-	-	-	-	0.3%	4.2%	0.3%	-	1.0%	1.4%	-
Haraket Amal	-	-	-	-	-	-	5.2%	-	-	-	-
Civil Society	0.3%	1.0%	0.7%	-	-	-	2.8%	-	-	-	-
Tayar El Watani	-	-	-	-	0.3%	4.2%	-	-	-	-	-
Did not answer	0.3%	-	-	-	-	-	1.4%	-	-	-	0.3%
Eshtrakeye	-	-	1.7%	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kataeb	-	-	-	-	-	0.3%	-	-	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%

Table 7

The Intersection of Participants' Religious Affiliation and Favorite Basketball Team

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	Orthodox
Riyadi	0.34%	1.36%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	9.83%	15.93%	0.00%
I dont support any	1.69%	0.34%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	19.66%	0.34%	0.00%
Sagesse	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	8.81%	7.12%	0.34%	1.36%
Champville	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	8.14%	3.73%	0.00%	0.00%
Homentmen	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	0.34%	0.00%	1.02%	2.71%	0.68%	0.00%
Hoops	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	1.36%	1.69%	0.34%	0.34%
Mouttahed	0.68%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	1.02%	0.00%
Byblos	0.00%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%
Grand Total	3.05%	2.71%	3.05%	0.34%	1.02%	19.66%	45.42%	18.64%	1.69%

Table 8

The Intersection of Participants' Religious Affiliation and Favorite Football Team

	Agnostic	Atheist	Druz	Evangelical	Latin Catholic	Maronite	Muslim Shiaa	Muslim Sunni	C
I dont support any	0.34%	1.02%	0.68%	0.00%	0.68%	16.95%	3.39%	1.36%	
Nejmeh	1.02%	1.36%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	1.36%	18.31%	1.36%	
Ansar	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.36%	14.92%	
Ahed	0.68%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	14.58%	0.00%	
Other	0.34%	0.34%	1.69%	0.34%	0.00%	1.02%	1.69%	0.00%	
Sahel	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	4.75%	0.00%	
Tadamon Sour	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	1.36%	0.00%	
Tripoli	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	
Grand Total	3.05%	2.71%	3.05%	0.34%	1.02%	19.66%	45.42%	18.64%	

Table 9

The Intersection of Participants' Political Affiliation and Favorite Basketball Team

	Tayar Moustakbal	Civil Society	Eshtirakeye	Haraket Amal	Hezbollah	Independent	Kataeb	Lebanese Forces Tay
Riyadi	9.83%	1.02%	0.00%	1.02%	0.68%	15.59%	0.00%	0.00%
I dont support any	0.00%	1.36%	1.02%	1.69%	11.19%	6.78%	0.00%	0.34%
Sagesse	0.34%	0.34%	0.00%	1.69%	2.37%	7.46%	1.36%	6.44%
Champville	0.68%	0.68%	0.00%	0.00%	1.69%	5.08%	0.34%	0.00%
Homentmen	0.00%	0.34%	0.34%	0.68%	0.34%	4.07%	0.00%	0.34%
Hoops	0.00%	0.34%	0.34%	0.00%	1.02%	3.05%	0.00%	0.00%
Mouttahed	1.02%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%
Byblos	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%
Grand Total	11.86%	4.75%	1.69%	5.08%	17.29%	44.07%	1.69%	7.12%

Table 10

The Intersection of Participants' Political Affiliation and Favorite Football Team

	Tayar Moustakbal	Civil Society	Eshtirakeye	Haraket Amal	Hezbollah	Independent	Kataeb	Lebanese Forces T
I dont support any	1.36%	1.36%	0.00%	0.00%	1.02%	12.54%	1.02%	6.44%
Nejmeh	0.00%	1.36%	0.34%	3.39%	3.39%	13.90%	0.00%	0.68%
Ansar	9.49%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.68%	6.78%	0.00%	0.00%
Ahed	0.00%	0.68%	0.00%	0.34%	10.85%	3.39%	0.00%	0.00%
Other	0.00%	1.02%	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	3.39%	0.68%	0.00%
Sahel	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.68%	1.02%	3.73%	0.00%	0.00%
Tadamon Sour	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.68%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%
Tripoli	1.02%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.00%
Grand Total	11.86%	4.75%	1.69%	5.08%	17.29%	44.07%	1.69%	7.12%

Table 11a:

Intersection of Level of Fandom in Football Teams with Political Affiliation

	8 to 10	5 to 7	1 to 4
Civil Society	1.3%	1.7%	1.3%
Eshtirakeye	1.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Haraket Amal	4.8%	1.7%	0%
Hezbollah	14.1%	5.7%	2.2%
Independent	18%	19.3%	4.8%

INTEGRATION OF POLITICS AND SPORTS IN LEBANON 121

Kataeb	0%	1.3%	0.4%
Tayyar EL Watani	0%	0.4%	0.4%
Lebanese Forces	0.8%	1.3%	1.3%
Tayyar Mustakbal	11%	2.2%	0.4%
Others	0.4%	2.2%	0.8%
Total	51.7%	36.2%	12%

Table 11b

Intersection of Level of Fandom in Basketball Teams with Political Affiliation

	8-9-10	7-6-5	4-3-2-1
Civil Society	1.14%	2.28%	1.14%
Eshtirakeye	0.38%	0.38%	0.38%
Haraket Amal	0.38%	2.28%	1.14%
Hezbollah	1.14%	3.8%	6.4%
Independent	17.49%	22.8%	7.98%
Kataeb	1.9%	0%	0%
Tayyar El Watani	4.94%	0.76%	0.38%
Lebanese Forces	6.84%	1.14%	0.38%
Tayyar El Mustakbal	9.5%	3.42%	0.38%
Others	0.38%	0.76%	0.38%
Total	44.09%	37.52	18.51%

Table 12

Intersection of Politics and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the political party I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	0.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.7%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	8.8%	7.1%	2.0%	1.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	12.9%	13.6%	12.5%	3.7%	2.7%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.4%	7.5%	2.0%	2.0%	0.7%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	0.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 13

Intersection of Religion and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the political party I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	0.3%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	1.4%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.3%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.7%	2.7%
Druz	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	1.0%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	9.2%	3.7%	2.0%	4.7%	0.0%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	9.2%	12.9%	13.6%	6.8%	3.1%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.8%	5.8%	1.7%	4.1%	0.3%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	27.1%	28.1%	20.3%	19.7%	4.7%	100.0%

Table 14

Intersection of Politics and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the religious group I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%	0.0%	2.0%
Civil Society	1.0%	1.4%	2.0%	0.3%	0.0%	4.7%
Eshtirakeye	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	1.7%
Haraket Amal	1.7%	1.4%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	5.1%
Hezbollah	4.4%	7.8%	3.7%	0.7%	0.7%	17.3%
Independent	10.2%	14.9%	7.5%	7.8%	3.7%	44.1%
Kataeb	0.7%	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%	0.3%	1.7%
Lebanese Forces	4.1%	1.0%	2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	7.1%
Tayar El Watani	2.7%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	4.4%
Tayar Moustakbal	6.4%	4.1%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	11.9%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 15

Intersection of Religion and the Item: The sports team I support is supported by most of the people of the religious group I belong to

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.7%	0.3%	1.0%	1.0%	0.0%	3.1%
Atheist	0.7%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	0.3%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	8.8%	7.1%	2.0%	1.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	12.9%	13.6%	12.5%	3.7%	2.7%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	6.4%	7.5%	2.0%	2.0%	0.7%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	0.7%	0.3%	1.4%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	31.5%	31.5%	21.4%	10.2%	5.4%	100.0%

Table 16

The Role of Religion in Team Selection

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
Religion plays a role in which team I select to be in	8.8%	17.3%	14.6%	45.1%	14.2%	100.0%

Table 17

Intersection of Politics and the Item: The political party I belong to funds my favorite sports team

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.3%	0.0%	0.7%	0.7%	0.3%	2.0%
Civil Society	0.3%	0.3%	2.0%	0.7%	1.4%	4.7%
Eshtirakeye	0.0%	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	1.7%
Haraket Amal	1.0%	1.7%	1.7%	0.3%	0.3%	5.1%
Hezbollah	4.7%	4.7%	4.7%	1.0%	2.0%	17.3%
Independent	6.8%	8.5%	8.5%	14.6%	5.8%	44.1%
Kataeb	0.3%	0.3%	0.3%	0.7%	0.0%	1.7%
Lebanese Forces	4.1%	1.4%	0.7%	1.0%	0.0%	7.1%
Tayar El Watani	2.4%	1.7%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	4.4%
Tayar Moustakbal	6.4%	3.1%	1.4%	0.3%	0.7%	11.9%
Grand Total	26.4%	22.0%	21.0%	19.7%	10.8%	100.0%

Table 18

Intersection of Religion and the Item: The political party I belong to funds my favorite sports team

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Grand Total
-	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%	0.0%	2.0%
Agnostic	0.3%	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.7%	3.1%
Atheist	1.0%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.7%	2.7%
Druz	0.3%	0.7%	1.0%	0.7%	0.3%	3.1%
Evangelical	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%
Latin Catholic	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%
Maronite	7.5%	5.1%	2.4%	4.4%	0.3%	19.7%
Muslim Shiaa	8.5%	10.2%	13.6%	6.4%	6.8%	45.4%
Muslim Sunni	7.1%	3.1%	2.7%	3.7%	2.0%	18.6%
Orthodox	0.3%	0.7%	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%
Roman Catholic	1.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	2.4%
Grand Total	26.4%	22.0%	21.0%	19.7%	10.8%	100.0%

Table 19

The Overall Impact of Religion on Sport

Religion impacts sports (BOTH) in Lebanon negatively						Religion impacts sports (BOTH)			
Grand Total	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	RELIGION	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral
3.05%	0.00%	0.34%	0.34%	1.36%	1.02%	Agnostic	0.0%	0.3%	1.0%
2.71%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.68%	2.03%	Atheist	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
3.05%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.68%	2.03%	Druz	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
0.34%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	Evangelical	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
1.02%	0.00%	0.34%	0.00%	0.68%	0.00%	Latin Catholic	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
19.66%	0.00%	0.34%	1.02%	3.39%	14.92%	Maronite	0.3%	1.0%	1.4%
45.42%	0.68%	2.37%	4.41%	14.58%	23.39%	Muslim Shiaa	3.7%	5.1%	6.1%
1.69%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.69%	Orthodox	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
2.37%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	1.36%	1.02%	Roman Catholic	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
2.03%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	0.00%	2.03%	(blank)	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
100.00%	0.68%	5.08%	6.44%	30.17%	57.63%	Grand Total	5.1%	10.8%	11.5%

Table 20

The Overall Impact of Politics on Sports

Politics impacts sports (BOTH) in Lebanon negatively						Politics impacts sports (BOT			
Grand Total	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	POLITICAL PARTY	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutra
4.7%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	2.0%	2.4%	Civil Society	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%
1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	1.0%	Eshtrakeye	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
5.1%	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%	1.7%	3.1%	Haraket Amal	0.3%	0.3%	1.0%
17.3%	0.7%	1.4%	2.0%	5.8%	7.5%	Hezbollah	2.0%	2.4%	2.7%
44.1%	0.0%	1.4%	3.4%	12.5%	26.8%	Independent	1.7%	4.1%	5.4%
1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.4%	Kataeb	0.0%	0.3%	0.0%
7.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%	2.0%	4.4%	Lebanese Forces	0.3%	0.0%	0.3%
4.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	1.7%	2.7%	Tayar El Watani	0.0%	0.7%	0.0%
11.9%	0.0%	1.7%	0.3%	3.1%	6.8%	Tayar Moustakbal	0.7%	2.4%	1.4%
2.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.3%	1.7%	(blank)	0.0%	0.3%	0.3%
100.0%	0.7%	5.1%	6.4%	30.2%	57.6%	Grand Total	5.1%	10.8%	11.5%

Table 21

The Power of Political Leaders and Religious Figures on Fan base

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
As a sports fan, I feel silenced from the power of the religious leaders or political figures who offer financial assistance to maintain the team?	4%	14%	32%	39%	11%	100%
If I have an opinion different than the majority of fans I tend to keep my opinion to myself	7%	21%	29%	38%	6%	100%
If I have an opinion different than the owners of the team I support, I keep it to myself and continue to support them	5%	14%	28%	44%	8%	100%
I do not fear speaking voicing my opinions to the political figures and/or religious leaders who are affiliated with my favorite team	3%	9%	23%	42%	23%	100%
I do not fear speaking voicing my opinions to the political figures and/or religious leaders who are affiliated with my favorite team	3%	9%	23%	42%	23%	100%
I have high sense of solidarity with the team I support no matter what	2%	5%	31%	41%	21%	100%

Table 22

Respondents Attitude towards their Own Status as Fans

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
[People ask my opinion about any game related to my favorite team.]	3%	4%	27%	52%	13%	100.0%
I feel that I can influence other fans.	4%	10%	28%	43%	15%	100.0%
I follow other fan posts about the team on social media	3%	9%	29%	42%	18%	100.0%
I oftentimes find myself being among the first to post my opinions/beliefs/attitude about the team	9%	12%	31%	34%	15%	100.0%

Table 23

Opinion Leaders' Transfer of Thoughts on Followers

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Grand Total
The owners of the sports teams (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon tell their fans how to behave/act.	2%	7%	42%	42%	8%	100%
I tend to follow what the owners tell me as a fan to do	16%	28%	30%	19%	7%	100%
The owners of the sports team (e.g., football, basketball) in Lebanon have a strong influence on their fans.	1%	5%	43%	40%	10%	100%

Table 24

Close-Ended Statement Results

	Scale/Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	No Answer
PLAYER STATUS AND INFLUENCE	a. You feel that you can influence decisions in your area.	10%	10%	0	50%	20%	10%
	b. You know where to go to find out information that you need.	10%	10%	10%	40%	20%	10%
	c. As a player, you feel you have no say in what the government does.	20%	40%	20%	10%	0%	10%
	f. You can affect things by getting	10%	40%	10%	30%	0%	10%

	involved in issues you care about.						
	h. Sometimes you feel strongly about an issue, but you don't know what to do about it.	0%	10%	0%	30%	0%	60%
GOVERNMENT RELATED	d. You trust politicians to tell the truth.	10%	70%	0%	0%	10%	10%
	e. You trust politicians to deal with the things that matter.	10%	60%	0%	20%	0%	10%
	g. You trust the government to do what is right	20%	30%	10%	10%	0%	30%

References

- Bastos, M. T., Raimundo, R. L. G., & Travitzki, R. (2013). Gatekeeping twitter: Message diffusion in political hashtags. *Media, Culture & Society*, 35(2), 260-270.
doi:10.1177/0163443712467594
- BBC Sport (2018, January 16). English Championship boasts third biggest crowds in Europe. Retrieved June 9, 2020, from <https://www.bbc.com/sport/football/42704713>
- Bryman, A. (2008). *Social research methods*. 3rd ed. Buckingham: Open University Press. Retrieved from: https://www.academia.edu/30520568/Social_Research_Methods_4th_Edition_by_Alan_Bryman.pdf
- Bumi, G. A., Widyakirana, M. A., & Haroen, S. S. (2019). The role of Indonesian's sport ambassador 2017 in "AYO OLAHRAGA" digital campaign. *Research, Society and Development*, 8(11), 368111485-e368111485. doi:10.33448/rsd-v8i11.1485
- Casinelli, J. (2019, May 9). La Liga posts record financial figures. Retrieved June 4, 2020, from <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-soccer-spain-finances/la-liga-posts-record-financial-figures>
- Choi, S. (2015). The Two-Step Flow of communication in Twitter-based public forums. *Social Science Computer Review*, 33(6), 696–711. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894439314556599>
- Druckman, J. N., Gilli, M., Klar, S., & Robison, J. (2014). The role of social context in shaping student-athlete opinions. *PLoS One*, 9(12), e115159.
doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0115159

- Dunning, E. (1999). *Sport matters: Sociological studies of sport, violence and civilisation*. London: Routledge Ltd. doi:10.4324/9780203025291
- Ennarah, K. M. (2017, April 11). The Ultras Ahlawy. Retrieved from <https://tcf.org/content/report/the-ultras-ahlawy/?session=1&agreed=1>
- Farah, Y. (2017, October 03). Celtic-Rangers: Old firm the most heated rivalry in world football? Retrieved from <https://bleacherreport.com/articles/705188-celtic-rangers-old-firm-the-most-heated-rivalry-in-world-football>
- Gearhart, S., & Zhang, W. (2015). "Was it something I said?" "No, it was something you posted!" A study of the Spiral of Silence theory in social media contexts. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior and Social Networking*, 18(4), 208.
- Hakim, C. (2019). The French mandate in Lebanon. *The American Historical Review*, 124(5), 1689-1693. doi:10.1093/ahr/rhz1024
- Hawkey, I. (2010, January 06). When the battle is not just confined to the pitch. Retrieved from <https://www.thenational.ae/sport/when-the-battle-is-not-just-confined-to-the-pitch-1.555694>
- Hayes, A. F. (2007). Exploring the forms of self-censorship: On the spiral of silence and the use of opinion expression avoidance strategies. *Journal of Communication*, 57(4), 785-802. doi:10.1111/j.1460-2466.2007.00368.x
- Ji, S., Zhao, W., Ford, J.C., Beckwith, J.G., Bolander, R.P., Greenwald, R.M....
McAllister, T.W., (2015). Group-wise evaluation and comparison of white matter fiber strain and maximum principal strain in sports-related concussion. *Journal of Neurotrauma*, 32(7), pp.441-454.

- Karami, F. (2013). Politics, sectarianism destroyed Lebanese basketball. Retrieved from: <http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/90380>.
- Marathovouniotis, S. (2017, September 26). Politics in Italian football: Mussolini, regionalism and intercity rivalries. Retrieved from <https://www.theversed.com/72603/politics-in-italian-football-mussolini-regionalism-and-intercity-rivalries/#.9WOAS3oSJ9>
- Maron, B.J., Poliac, L.C., Kaplan, J.A. and Mueller, F.O., 1995. Blunt impact to the chest leading to sudden death from cardiac arrest during sports activities. *New England Journal of Medicine*, 333(6), pp.337-342.
- Maugendre, A. (2018). Ethnography of the Lebanese Football Clubs. *Athens Journal of Sports*, 5(3), 213–225. doi: 10.30958/ajspo.5-3-3
- Michuda, Y.P. & Youssef, Y. (2010). Ways of perfection of socio-economic bases of development of physical culture and sport in republic Lebanon. *Pedagogika, psihologia ta mediko-biologicniroblem fizicnogo vihovanna I sportu*, 8, pp.61-64.
- Minorities at Risk Project (2004). Chronology for Maronite Christians in Lebanon. Retrieved on 26 May 2020 from <https://www.refworld.org/docid/469f38b3c.html>
- MTV. (2017, January 9). Turkish flags raised during Riyadi-Homenetmen game. Retrieved June 9, 2020, from https://www.mtv.com.lb/news/articles/667074/turkish_flags_raised_during_riyadi-homenetmen_game
- NBA Hoops Online. (n.d.). NBA Players turned politicians. Retrieved June 15, 2020, from <https://nbahoopsonline.com/History/articles/Player-Politician.html>

National Legislative Bodies / National Authorities (1989, November 5), *Lebanon*:

National Reconciliation Accord-- Taif Agreement Retrieved at 26 May 2020 from

<https://www.refworld.org/docid/5b3e376f4.html>

Naharnet Newsdesk. (2013, July 12). Karami: Politics, sectarianism destroyed Lebanese basketball. Retrieved March 12, 2020, from

<http://www.naharnet.com/stories/en/90380>

Nassif, N., & Amara, M. (2015). Sport, policy and politics in Lebanon. *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics: Small States and Sport Policy*, 7(3), 443-455. doi:10.1080/19406940.2014.914553

Nassif, N (2014). Corruption in sport: The case of Lebanon. *Middle East Law and Governance Journal* 6, pp.123-140.).

Nassif, N. (2010) *Sport Policy in Lebanon, 1975 to 2004: Lebanese Geopolitical background, Lebanese Sport Characteristics and Difficulties Plan for Development*. Saarbrucken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing GMBH & Co.KG.

O'Reilly, J. ed. (2012). *Women and sports in the United States: A documentary reader*. UPNE.

Salibi, K. S. (1988). *A house of many mansions: The history of Lebanon reconsidered*. London: I.B. Tauris.

Saunders, M. N. K., Lewis, P., & Thornhill, A. (2009). *Research methods for business students* (5th ed.). Harlow, England: FT/Prentice Hall.

Scalia, V. (2009). Just a few rogues?: Football ultras, clubs and politics in contemporary Italy. *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 44(1), 41-53.

doi:10.1177/1012690208101682

Sekaran, U., & Bougie, R. (2010). *Research methods for business: A skill-building approach* (5th ed.). Chichester, U.K: Wiley.

Sharif, A. (2017, April 10). How basketball became Lebanon's most popular sport.

Retrieved from <https://theculturetrip.com/middle-east/lebanon/articles/how-basketball-became-lebanons-most-popular-sport/>

The PA Team. (2018, May 21). Explained: The bitter religious divide behind Celtic-Rangers rivalry. Retrieved from

[https://punditarena.com/football/the pateam/explained-the-bitter-religious-divide-behind-celticrangers-rivalry/#:~:text=Celtic and Rangers have exerted,existence of either Glasgow club.&text=Rangers,](https://punditarena.com/football/the pateam/explained-the-bitter-religious-divide-behind-celticrangers-rivalry/#:~:text=Celtic and Rangers have exerted,existence of either Glasgow club.&text=Rangers)

Traboulsi, F. (2012). From mandate to independence (1920–1943). *A History of Modern Lebanon* (pp. 88-109). London: Pluto Press. doi:10.2307/j.ctt183p4f5.12

Uzunoglu, E., & Misci Kip, S. (2014). Brand communication through digital influencers:

Leveraging blogger engagement. *International Journal of Information*

Management, 34(5), 592-602. doi:10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2014.04.007

Vakulenko, D. (2013) Franco years in Spain through El Clásico: FC Barcelona vs. Real Madrid. Retrieved on 15 June 2020 from

file:///C:/Users/User/Downloads/DPTX_2011_2_11230_0_322557_0_121645.pdf

Wimmer, R. D., & Dominick, J. R. (2011). *Mass media research: An introduction* (9th, International ed.). Australia: Wadsworth/CENGAGE Learning

Yee, V. (2019, May 16). Basketball Is 'War, Minus the Shooting' in Sectarian Lebanon.

Retrieved May 12, 2020, from

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/16/world/middleeast/lebanon-basketball-sectarian-politics.html>