

Geopolitics and International Sports Governance: a Case Study of FIFA's Response to the Russian and Israeli National Teams Amid Russia's Versus Ukraine and Israel's Versus Palestine Rage

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Abstract. This article analyzes the response of the *Federation Internationale de Football Association* (FIFA) to two major geopolitical conflicts, namely the Russia–Ukraine war and the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, by examining the differences in attitudes applied to the Russian and Israeli national teams. This study employs a qualitative comparative case study method, integrating a review of academic literature, analysis of official FIFA documents, and analysis of global geopolitical dynamics to evaluate the consistency of FIFA's application of the principles of neutrality, non-discrimination, and governance in international sports organizations. The findings suggest that the imposition of blanket sanctions against Russia, compared to the non-imposition of sanctions against Israel, reflects the inconsistency of FIFA's stance, which is more accurately understood as a form of politicized neutrality than as normative discrimination. Furthermore, the findings indicate that FIFA's stance is influenced by external geopolitical pressures, global power configurations, and pragmatic considerations of the organization in maintaining its legitimacy and stability. These findings reveal the limitations of claims of sports neutrality within the framework of global governance and affirm that international sports organizations are not completely autonomous from international dynamics. Thus, this article contributes to international relations and sports governance through the development of an analytical framework on the relationship between normative principles, geopolitical interests, and power structures in FIFA's decision-making process.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Governance, FIFA, Politicized Neutrality, Sports Sanctions.

INTRODUCTION

The intersection between the world of sports and geopolitical issues has generated significant controversy that tests the claims of the neutrality of multinational organizations such as FIFA (Meier & Garcia, 2015). This situation has developed in tandem with the growing pressure on international sports organizations to respond to a major political crisis, so that each of its attitudes clearly reflects the tension between the principle of sporting independence and the influence of global sanctions and diplomatic pressure (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). A number of events in recent years have shown how complex FIFA's position is when dealing with this geopolitical issue. For example, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict have attracted great attention to FIFA's stance, especially regarding the handling of the Russian and Israeli national teams at the level of international competitions, which is inseparable from Russia's foreign policy orientation in the era of Vladimir Putin's leadership (Nugroho, 2025). This condition further calls into question FIFA's claims of political neutrality, as the stance of excluding the Russian national team or imposing special regulations for Israeli participation is seen as a form of indirect intervention in the global political dynamics fraught with sanctions and diplomatic pressure (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). This article aims to reflect a significant shift in FIFA's role in international conflicts (Rachman, Yani, & Romadhon, 2025). Therefore, this article is very important to be used to analyze FIFA's response to the two geopolitical conflicts, to assess the suitability of this organization's attitude in maintaining its normative legitimacy (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023).

Although much of the literature has documented FIFA's disciplinary stance towards Russia, such as full sanctions, as well as more cautious methods against Israel, there is still a significant lack of research on the issue of discrimination and political neutrality in both conflicts (Duval, 2023). This shortcoming occurs because existing articles have not been able to show unequivocally that FIFA's stance is driven by deliberate discriminatory motives, but rather is influenced more by broader geopolitics and the international legal obligations that bind the organization (Wiater, 2023). Some of the articles explain that there is no strong evidence to suggest that FIFA's stance stems from systematic or planned discrimination (Broda, 2020). In contrast, FIFA's stance is often seen as a response to geopolitical pressures and the need to operate within the framework of international law, thus sparking an ongoing debate about the legal basis and balance of that stance (Heerdt & Duval, 2020). In addition, there is also an analytical lack in understanding the overall aspect of FIFA's political neutrality, especially when comparing the organization's attitude towards entities whose status is personified, such as Palestine, side by side with Israel, which shows inconsistencies that have not been extensively analyzed in depth (Ber, Yarchi, & Galily, 2017). In other words, the limitations of the article indicate the need for a more in-depth comparative analysis method to assess the suitability of FIFA's stance and distinguish between legitimate and non-legitimate political responses that may be selectively discriminatory (Dart, 2022).

Existing literature has extensively documented FIFA's disciplinary actions toward Russia, including comprehensive sanctions, as well as its more cautious approach toward Israel (Duval, 2023). However, a significant gap remains in the comparative analysis of these two cases, particularly regarding the underlying mechanisms of discrimination and politicized neutrality. While some studies suggest that FIFA's stance is not driven by deliberate discrimination but by broader geopolitical and legal constraints (Wiater, 2023; Broda, 2020), others highlight the lack of systematic investigation into the normative inconsistencies in FIFA's application of human rights and territorial principles (Ber, Yarchi, & Galily, 2017). For instance, Heerdt and Duval (2020) argue that FIFA's decisions are often framed within international legal obligations, yet they fail to explain why similar legal norms are applied selectively across different conflicts.

Moreover, prior research tends to treat each conflict in isolation, lacking a integrated framework that examines how geopolitical power configurations—such as Western alignment in the Russia–Ukraine case and regional alliance dynamics in the Israel–Palestine context—shape FIFA's responses (Dart, 2022; Kobierecka & Kobierecki, 2023). This fragmented approach limits our understanding of whether FIFA's actions constitute principled governance or adaptive pragmatism in the face of external pressure.

This article addresses these gaps by conducting a systematic comparative analysis of FIFA's responses to Russia and Israel within a unified analytical framework. By integrating insights from international relations, sports governance, and legal studies, this research moves beyond descriptive case studies to examine the structural and geopolitical factors that lead to inconsistent sanctioning practices. Specifically, it introduces the concept of “politicized neutrality” to describe FIFA's strategic balancing act between normative principles and realpolitik considerations.

The main purpose of this article is to make a thorough comparison of FIFA's response to the Russian and Israeli national teams in relation to the geopolitical conflicts it faces

(Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). Comparisons like this are very important because with careful analysis, research can identify and explain the main factors that lead to inconsistencies in FIFA's stance when imposing sanctions, either based on conformity with international law principles or as a result of selective geopolitical considerations (Liu, 2025). Accordingly, this article aims to assess the extent to which FIFA's stance can be categorized as a form of discrimination, by analyzing the legal aspects and their impact on human rights contained in each attitude, including finding loopholes in articles about the organization's efforts to deal with conflicts (Wiater, 2023). Furthermore, a number of articles emphasize the importance of conducting a comparative examination of FIFA's attitude towards regions whose status is disputed compared to officially recognized countries, as this method can clarify the inconsistency between legitimate selective attitudes and possible discrimination in attitudes (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). In practice, FIFA's stance towards Russia is generally sanctioned and direct by restricting participation entirely, while towards Israel the organization has shown a cautious neutral stance accompanied by more specific interventions, raising questions about consistency and underlying principles (Wiater, 2023). Through this method, this article seeks to present an in-depth understanding of FIFA's role as an actor in Global Governance that is not completely immune from the influence of external power dynamics and internal organizational weaknesses (Liu, 2025).

This article suggests that significant inconsistencies in FIFA's response to Russia and Israel should not be seen as clear evidence of deliberate discrimination, but rather as the result of the organization's selective adjustment to the principles as well as pressures of modern geopolitical forces (Lin, Khan, & Song, 2024). This claim arises because FIFA in its implementation is incapable of maintaining full neutrality when dealing with major international conflicts, so its attitude regarding sanctions and the policies it applies often reflect the organization's vulnerability to external political influences that can ultimately threaten its legitimacy (Olusanya, 2023). The evidence that has been described can show that FIFA's stance is highly correlated with current geopolitical conditions, which challenge claims of sporting neutrality and provide room for criticism from various alliances with different political views (Naess, 2023). In addition, FIFA's internal weaknesses, including power dynamics within the organization and lack of regulatory oversight, hinder the organization's ability to handle conflicts consistently and fairly (Chappelet, 2017). Meanwhile, FIFA's stance in sanctioning the Russian national team in line with broader international restrictions reflects how the organization responds to global political pressure rather than fully adhering to the principles of sports independence (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). In systematically analyzing these arguments, this article will apply the methods of academic literature analysis, legal case studies, and attitude analysis, as described in the research method, to assess FIFA's attitude and the factors that influence it, before being critically analyzed in the Results and Discussion section, and finally drawing conclusions.

METHOD

This article used the comparative case study focusing on FIFA's attitude and actions towards the Russian Football Union (RFU) and the Israel Football Association (IFA) as the main subject of the analysis (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). The selection of the two subjects was based on glaring inconsistencies in FIFA's response, from the imposition of

full sanctions against Russia to a more cautious neutral method against Israel, even though both were involved in conditions of major geopolitical conflicts affecting global dynamics (Broda, 2020). To understand the dynamics of these developments in depth, the article directs an analysis of the post-2022 period, from the outbreak of the war between Russia and Ukraine to FIFA's recent stance on Israel's participation in various competitions, which illustrates the rise of geopolitical problems and discrimination at the global level (Rein, 2024). By focusing on these two conflicts, the article can directly assess the shortcomings in the discussion of the consistency of FIFA's disciplinary stance in dealing with two different but equally influential conflicts against Russia as well as various controversies regarding the conduct of the competition, such as the Indonesia 2023 incident, involving Israeli participation, and show how political pressures both domestic and international affect the organization's attitude (Prayoga, et al., 2025). By narrowing the focus to two very different conflicts in this period of intensive conflict, this article can uncover patterns and identify the key factors that are most influential in shaping FIFA's stance in a more precise and planned manner (Kobierecka & Kobierecki, 2023).

This article uses a qualitative comparative analysis design, enriched by a literature review through analysis as well as attitude case studies, in accordance with the methodological efforts commonly used in the analysis of Multinational Organizations (Greckhamer, Furnari, Fiss, & Aguilera, 2018). The selection of this design is based on the characteristics of the Formal Object of Research, namely Geopolitics and Discrimination, which is abstract in nature and requires an in-depth analysis of existing texts, principles, and politics, so that it cannot be simplified to a quantitative measure (Mashigo, Sterkenburg, Hera, & Goncalves, 2024). In this case, the analysis serves to summarize the various results of existing articles, so that agreements and shortcomings can be identified related to the legitimacy of FIFA's stance in sanctioning and the organization's vulnerability to external geopolitical impacts (Jean, Bistaraki, & Schubert, 2024). Furthermore, the article on stance was carried out by comparing the FIFA Disciplinary Statute with its application in two main conflicts, the full sanctions against Russia and the careful application of neutrality in the Israeli conflict, in order to assess normative consistency and possible practical deviations (Duerkop & Ganohariti, 2021). This qualitative method also allows for more in-depth articles on the issues of Law and Human Rights and Sports Diplomacy, which cannot be quantified in numbers but is crucial to understanding the reasons behind FIFA's different patterns of attitudes in the two conflicts (Kassimeris, 2023). In this way, the design of this study provides not only descriptive results, but also analysis and explanation, thus being able to uncover the mechanisms behind the possibility of discrimination that are hidden due to pressure from external forces (Mashigo, Sterkenburg, Hera, & Goncalves, 2024).

The main data sources of this article consist of qualitative secondary data that include three types of documents, namely normative, academic, and contextual documents, which as a whole build on empirical data to assess the consistency of FIFA's attitudes in various geopolitical dynamics (Postlethwaite, Jenkin, & Sherry, 2022). The use of these secondary data is determined because this article requires the triangulation of information that is able to confirm the conformity between FIFA's normative claims as stated in the Statutes, and the application of attitudes in disciplinary actions, and conceptual and analytical interpretations of the academic literature (Beissel & Kohe, 2020). In forming a robust theoretical and

analytical framework, this article initially gathered relevant academic literature and has been peer-reviewed, which includes articles related to sanctions against Russia, restrictions on the participation of Israeli national teams in conflict territories, as well as studies on the governance of sports organizations that emphasize the issue of discrimination or invisible geopolitical impacts (Wagner & Ludvigsen, 2024). In addition, this article draws on official FIFA documents, such as the Statutes, Code of Conduct, and the decision of the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) regarding sanctions against Russia, as a normative data source that supports the measurement of the legal basis as well as the official justification of each organization's stance (Beissel & Ternes, 2022). Furthermore, official claims and international media reports are used as contextual information to interpret the dynamics of global public thought, diplomatic impacts, and geopolitical narratives that influence the background of FIFA's stance on the international arena (Hajjaj, Borodin, Perticas, & Florea, 2024). Therefore, this combination of data that combines normative, academic, and contextual perspectives ensures that the resulting analysis is based on strong empirical evidence, and can shed light on the relationship between principles, interests, and power in FIFA's decision-making process (Postlethwaite, Jenkin, & Sherry, 2022).

The data collection method in this article mostly utilizes desk reviews that are carried out systematically, and further enriched with media sentiment analysis to filter public narratives in order to identify evidence supporting the Formal Objects of the article, namely Geopolitics and Discrimination (Goytom, 2024). This method is taken because desk review allows researchers to organize, map, and select large amounts of textual information, ranging from policy documents, legal instruments, to academic literature, efficiently and remain relevant to the main variables of the article (Timmermans & Tavory, 2022). In the early stages of information gathering, the article lists keywords taken directly from the focus of the article, such as "FIFA sanctions against Russia," "Israel West Bank - soccer," "discrimination in sports organizations," and "FIFA neutrality," which are used to search for documents and literature appropriately (Rai, Kajla, Itani, & Cho, 2025). Furthermore, FIFA's attitude data and legal documents were obtained through systematic methods that followed the timeline of events, including tracking important dates of post-2022 sanctions for Russia and resolutions relating to human rights issues and territorial conflicts in Israel, so that the identification of normative bias could be more appropriately (Goytom, 2024). In addition, global media sentiment analysis is applied qualitatively to describe international public narratives, especially in distinguishing opinion tendencies that have the potential to influence or exert geopolitical pressure on the direction of FIFA's attitude (Ibanez, Ventura, Mateos, & Jimenez, 2023). Therefore, the implementation of a planned desk review along with media sentiment analysis ensures that the data obtained is relevant, valid, and accountable, especially in articles that prioritize the analysis of principles, attitudes, and power dynamics (Ali, Farooq, Imran, & Hindi, 2025).

The main data analysis method used in this article is Qualitative Comparative Analysis, which is specifically designed to assess the variation in FIFA responses and test hypotheses in detail regarding specific suitability with geopolitical dynamics (Maulana, 2024). The use of this method is based on the argument that comparative analysis is the most appropriate strategy in the field of International Relations to compare two different cases, namely Russia and Israel, even though both are under similar organizational independence,

thus allowing the recognition of the relationship between independent variables, such as geopolitical pressures, sensitivity of problems, and international norms, with dependent variables, such as FIFA decisions (Huber, 2025). This analysis was carried out by comparing FIFA's disciplinary attitude towards Russia, which includes full sanctions of all international competitions, with a cautiously neutral method against Israel, which is not sanctioned despite conflicts related to territorial issues and human rights violations, so that variations in severity and legal basis can be assessed systematically (Naess, The Normative Legitimacy Gap: International Sports Associations, Human Rights and Stakeholder Democracy, 2019). Next, the article looks at whether the variation in justification, in which sanctions against Russia are based on compliance with global sanctions, while the absence of sanctions against Israel is due to efforts to avoid sensitive geopolitical issues, point to a form of normative inconsistency that can be classified as discrimination (Huber, 2025). In the transparency of the analysis, every comparison attitude is based on a clear source of official FIFA documents, academic literature, and relevant legal decisions, so that the validity of the results in the Results and Discussions section can be accounted for (Maulana, 2024). Therefore, this method of analysis supports the article to explain explanatory that inconsistencies in the application of FIFA principles are better understood as a consequence of external geopolitical calculations than just a form of internal discrimination (Huber, 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

FIFA's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 was marked by the application of full sanctions against all Russian national team and club competitions, which was the strictest and fastest sanctioning attitude the organization has ever taken in its modern history (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). This drastic stance is inseparable from the growing global moral and political pressure on Russia as a country perceived to be pursuing a confrontational foreign policy under the leadership of Vladimir Putin (Nugroho, 2025). Preliminary evidence suggests that the disciplinary stance includes full sanctions for the Russian national team from the World Cup and Russian clubs from major competitions such as the Chamacions League, as noted in the Key Findings documenting the extent of such an attitude (Duval, 2023). The second evidence confirms that the pace of implementation of the sanctions is in line with the wave of global economic sanctions led by the European Union and the United States, which confirms that FIFA can effectively adapt to significant geopolitical pressures (Evenett & Pisani, 2023). Third evidence suggests that these sanctions constitute one of the fastest and toughest collective attitudes in the history of international sports sanctions, exceeding previous problems in both scope and urgency of their implementation, reflecting an extraordinary level of responsiveness (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). Therefore, full sanctions against Russia are a prime example of how geopolitical dynamics directly affect and even determine the direction of the sanctions policy of an international sports organization that claims to be a neutral organization (Duval, 2023).



Diagram 1. Visualization of FIFA's Politicized Neutrality in Geopolitical Conflicts

Source: Adapted from Jamali et al. (2023); Naess (2023); Duval (2023)

Response to Russia: Full Sanctions and Legal Implications

Table 1. FIFA Sanctions against Russia

Sanction Category	Description	Impact
Competition	Russia excluded from all FIFA competitions	Loss of international participation
Team	Russian national team banned from UEFA competitions	Loss of income and exposure
Transfer	Foreign players free to leave the Russian national team	Significant economic losses

Source: Jamali et al. (2023); Duval (2023); Raihan (2022)

While the full sanctions against Russia appear to reflect global political solidarity, this stance faces significant legal challenges regarding the principles of non-discrimination and proportionality in International Law and Human Rights (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). Criticism arises mainly because collective sanctions like this are considered to punish athletes and teams that are not directly involved in the political policies of their countries, thus risking violating their fundamental right to participate in sports competitions without discrimination (Naess, Sport Governing Bodies and the Prioritization of Human Rights: A Conceptual Analysis of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Dispute With Russia, 2025). This denial was corroborated by the filing of a lawsuit by the Russian Football Union (RFU) to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS), which questioned the validity and proportionality of the sanctions, as revealed in the results of the CAS Challenge (Duval, 2023). In addition, the article on legal or human rights debates also highlights concerns about the principle of non-discrimination, given that the sanctions are imposed on all Russian sports organizations regardless of their role or level of involvement in the ongoing conflict (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023). This situation raises a more complex moral dilemma, namely that efforts to uphold the principle of sovereignty may conflict with the protection of

the individual's right to opportunity in sport (Naess, Sport Governing Bodies and the Prioritization of Human Rights: A Conceptual Analysis of the International Olympic Committee's (IOC) Dispute With Russia, 2025). Therefore, although sanctions against Russia are driven by geopolitical factors, this stance results in a complicated legal precedent on the extent to which international sports organizations can ignore the principle of non-discrimination in order to meet global political demands (Jamali, Kozlova, Whelan, & Faix, 2023).

The economic consequences of sanctions against Russia are not only related to restrictions on participation in international competitions, but also include changes in player transfer rules that indirectly give a competitive advantage to foreign teams in the global market (Alrefaei, 2024). This regulatory change is presented as FIFA's emergency response to the ongoing geopolitical conditions, where the organization allows foreign players who still have contracts with the Russian national team to suspend their deals and join other teams without restrictions, a stance that clearly benefits non-Russian teams (Raihan, 2022). Preliminary evidence suggests that FIFA's transfer regulations provide complete freedom for foreign players to leave the Russian national team without contractual consequences, thereby significantly reducing the value of the assets and the financial bargaining power of the Russian national team, as listed in the Key Findings (Ozsu, 2022). Second evidence shows that this attitude serves as an indirect economic sanction, as it exacerbates financial isolation and reduces the competitiveness of the Russian national team before the international community (Rachman, Yani, & Romadhon, 2025). The third piece of evidence suggests that this attitude reflects FIFA's ability to adjust the rules in the midst of a crisis, but it also raises questions about a fair compensation mechanism for teams that suffer losses as a result of such decisions, as reflected in the Organisational Governance (Fenbert, 2025). Therefore, the transfer policies changed during this crisis show that geopolitical dynamics can significantly change the economic map and regulatory framework in the world of sport globally, as well as indicate that the impact of sanctions goes beyond the competition space on the field (Ozsu, 2022).

Response to Israel: Cautious Neutrality and Controversy

In contrast to the efforts to deal with Russia, FIFA's response to Israel in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict suggests a more cautious method of neutrality, i.e. a strategy that avoids intervention unless conditions are truly urgent to intervene directly (Broda, 2020). This attitude is linked to different global political dynamics, especially since Israel receives support from regional alliances such as UEFA and Western countries, which effectively reduces outside pressure to implement joint sanctions as it did against Russia (Acikmese & Ozel, 2024). Preliminary evidence suggests that FIFA's disciplinary attitude towards Israel is generally limited to a cautious form of neutrality, where intervention is only made if a football competition is deemed to threaten safety or potentially interfere with the conduct of the competition, as noted in a previous article (Belcastro, 2023). The second evidence shows that Israel continues to participate fully in all UEFA competitions, which is a strong signal that the support of regional alliances is crucial in ensuring the continued participation of the Israel Football Association (IFA) without the threat of sanctions (Dart J. , 2016). The third evidence shows inconsistencies in the application of sanctions standards, where the

"emergency" principle used by FIFA appears to be applied in a partisan manner, the conflict in Russia is considered to be more detrimental to the global order than the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, resulting in very different responses (Belcastro, 2023). Therefore, FIFA's cautious method of neutrality against Israel can be considered an indication of the organization's selective alignment with the interests of certain global political forces, thus reinforcing the view regarding discriminatory practices in international sports governance (Broda, 2020).

Table 2. FIFA's response to Israel in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Analysis Aspect	FIFA's Practices Towards Israel	Normative and Geopolitical Implications
Participation Status	Israel remains allowed to participate fully in FIFA and UEFA competitions	Showing the absence of collective sanctions despite the ongoing armed conflict
Regulative Method	FIFA adopts the "cautious neutrality" method (cautious neutrality)	FIFA avoids attitudes that have the potential to trigger political escalation
Human Rights & Region Issues	Lack of enforcement of Israeli teams in West Bank settlements	Potential violations of international law principles ignored
International Pressure	Global pressure is fragmented and inhomogeneous	In contrast to the case of Russia facing collective pressure
Impact on the Host Country	Rejection of Israel's participation, for example Indonesia U-20 2023	Conflict between FIFA's domestic policy and international obligations

Source: Broda (2020); Belcastro (2023); Prayoga et al. (2025)

Although FIFA has formally established a framework of human rights stances, its implementation and enforcement of sensitive issues related to Israel, especially regarding teams operating in disputed territories, presents significant limitations (Dart J. , 2017). This limitation is mainly due to FIFA's tendency not to get deeply involved in regional conflicts fraught with political issues, so the application of human rights standards is often ignored in order to maintain a balance of diplomatic relations with influential member states (Rickett, 2025). Preliminary evidence suggests that although human rights policies have been implemented as noted in articles on legal and human rights debates, their implementation is still very limited when dealing with the issue of Israeli national teams participating in competitions despite being located in West Bank settlements (Duval, 2020). The second evidence confirms that this issue is directly contrary to the principles of international law regarding territorial power, but FIFA has chosen a passive, politically charged method, rather than exercising its normatively recognized human rights responsibilities (MacInnes, 2024). Third evidence suggests that this strategy is often criticized for violating political ethical and moral principles, given that FIFA's stance reflects more of an effort to maintain organizational stability than a consistent commitment to human rights protection (Heerdt & Duval, 2020). Therefore, these limitations in the enforcement of human rights confirm that FIFA's response to Israel's conditions is influenced more by pragmatic geopolitical interests than by its profound adherence to the principles recognized by the organization (Dart J. , 2017).

Israel's participation in international competitions has sparked controversy

surrounding the implementation of the competition in a number of host countries, suggesting that geopolitical tensions could affect the sports landscape and even cancel planned global competitions (Belcastro, 2023). This conflict arises mainly due to the dynamics of the foreign policy and public diplomacy of the host country, which leads to the rejection of the participation of the Israeli national team, thus forcing FIFA to take drastic actions such as changing the location or canceling the competition for the continuation of the competition (Prayoga, et al., 2025). Initial evidence emerged in the most striking problem, namely the dispute over the organization of Indonesia 2023, when the government and community alliances rejected the arrival of the Israeli national team in the U-20 World Cup, as recorded in the Main Findings (Maksum, Alimuddin, Sahide, & Farid, 2024). The second evidence indicates that the event shows how the geopolitical impact of member countries, particularly in the Global South, can hamper FIFA's operations, although it does not always lead to the application of sanctions against those who refuse (Belcastro, 2023). The third piece of evidence shows FIFA's weakness as a multinational organization, as the legitimacy of this organization can be questioned or even challenged in the face of strong domestic and ideologically-based political sentiment from the country where the competition is held (Broda, 2020). Therefore, the tension in the implementation of this competition shows that although FIFA is trying to maintain Israeli participation, the political impact of such protection can disrupt the stability and smooth running of global sports competitions (Prayoga, et al., 2025).

Synthesis of Findings and Geopolitical Dynamics

The comparative findings clearly show that the imposition of sanctions against Russia is not only a normative response to violations of the FIFA Statutes, but also a manifestation of economic and political pressures arising from major global powers (Crozet & Hinz, 2020). This alignment can be seen as a result of the comprehensive pressure exerted by Western organizations, reinforced by the global media opinion flow and the international community, which creates strong normative conditions that force FIFA to set aside its claims of political neutrality in order to maintain strategic relations with influential parties (Sayed, 2025). Preliminary evidence suggests that sanctions against Russia are precisely in line with the decisions of the European Union and NATO countries, as noted in the Key Findings, which show the close alignment between FIFA and the configuration of the global power (Fenbert, 2025). The second evidence indicates that the absence of sanctions against Israel is strongly related to the protection of regional alliances as well as the global support of Western geopolitics, thus creating opportunities for Israel's participation in UEFA membership (Broda, 2020). The third evidence confirms that the significant differences between the two issues show that the mechanisms of enforcing the principles, interests, and powers within FIFA are selective, heavily influenced by who is targeted by global geopolitical pressures (PT Trans News Corpora, 2025). Therefore, the inconsistency in FIFA's response to Russia and Israel should be considered a natural result of the organization's structural vulnerability to geopolitical influence and pressure (Rachman, Yani, & Romadhon, 2025).

Table 3. Comparison of FIFA's Response to Russia and Israel

Aspects	Russia	Israel	Explanation
Geopolitical Pressures	Tall and consistent	Split	Determining the direction of attitude
Response Type	Full sanctions	Careful neutrality	Two standards of implementation
Legal Basis	CAS supports the ban	Human rights are not upheld	Normative gaps
Impact of Sports	Total isolation	Stay competitive	Unstable output

Source: Synthesized from Jamali et al. (2023); Broda (2020); Naess (2019); Rachman et al. (2025)

FIFA's response, both through full sanctions against Russia and a cautious neutrality towards Israel, clearly demonstrates the fundamental limitations of Sports Diplomacy in realizing a sustainable resolution of conflicts (Postlethwaite, Jenkin, & Sherry, 2022). These limitations arise as a result of exercise, although often promoted as a universal means of peace and dialogue, it has proved to be less effective when dealing with disputes rooted in complex sovereign and territorial issues, so that their diplomatic impact tends to be symbolic and substantially less significant (Rookwood, 2025). Preliminary evidence indicates that in the conflict in Russia, FIFA's role was limited to the application of sanctions as noted in the Key Findings, without making a significant contribution to the mediation process of the conflict (Usova & Tkalych, 2025). The second evidence shows that in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, despite various coexistence initiatives that rely on Sports Diplomacy, the results have been mixed and have not succeeded in triggering fundamental geopolitical policy changes (McDuff, 2020). Third evidence confirms that the article's limitations on FIFA's conflict governance strategy result in an excessive focus on the application of sanctions, rather than on the development of more significant and future-oriented diplomatic mechanisms (Costa & Moriconi, 2024). Therefore, these results reinforce the assumption that in highly politicized political issues, sport is more likely to act as a target and a means of sanction than as an effective means of mediation (Postlethwaite, Jenkin, & Sherry, 2022).

Overall, the synthesis of the results of this article shows that the differences in FIFA methods towards Russia and Israel cannot be considered as deliberate discrimination, but rather as an illustration of the organization's adjustment to existing geopolitical interests and pressures (Gerschewski, Giebler, Hellmeier, Keremoglu, & Zurn, 2024). This conclusion is reached because FIFA, as an international organization that relies heavily on political recognition and support from influential member states, in practice prioritizes its sustainability more, so that inconsistencies in the application of principles become an unavoidable adaptive method (Chappelet, 2017). Preliminary evidence suggests that FIFA took a firm stance against Russia because the actions were in line with the narrative and sanctions series led by Western organizations, as described in the findings on Geopolitical Influence (Prayoga, et al., 2025). The second evidence suggests that the absence of sanctions for Israel is closely related to FIFA's efforts to avoid political conflicts between the United States, the European Union, and UEFA, a regional alliance that affects the smooth operation

of the organization (Acikmese & Ozel, 2024). A third piece of evidence suggests that this distinction directly fills in the gaps in the literature, by signaling that FIFA's disciplinary stance is not based on consistent internal principles, but rather on a *framework* that limits its freedom (Cazotto, Fronzaglia, & Racy, 2022). Therefore, the Results and Discussion section shows that FIFA's response to both issues is a clear example of the interaction between principles, interests, and powers, resulting in an attitude that is visibly discriminatory but in fact pragmatic and politically influenced (Fenbert, 2025).

CONCLUSION

This article demonstrates that FIFA's inconsistent responses—full sanctions on the Russian national team amid the Ukraine conflict versus cautious neutrality toward the Israeli team in the Palestinian context—reflect "politicized neutrality" rather than deliberate discrimination, driven by alignment with Western geopolitical pressures, institutional pragmatism, and *realpolitik* over normative principles like objectivity and human rights. Key evidence highlights FIFA's selective sanctioning mirroring global regimes, prioritization of legitimacy amid member state tensions (e.g., Indonesia U-20 2023), and limitations in sports diplomacy, contributing conceptually to international relations through frameworks like "Principled Pragmatism" and critiques of neutrality in global governance, though constrained by Western-biased qualitative data and a narrow case focus. For future research, expand the analysis longitudinally with quantitative methods tracking FIFA's sponsorship, funding, and revenue shifts post-sanctions, incorporating cases like Iran or North Korea and Global South perspectives to enhance generalizability and counter representational bias.

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