

# Political Instability and Its Impacts on Cultural Heritage Conservation and Tourism Performance in Amhara National Regional State, Ethiopia

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**Abstract:** *This research investigates the impact of political instability on the conservation of cultural heritage and tourism performance in Amhara National Regional State. In a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, questionnaire data and key informant interviews were integrated and analysed via structural equation modelling (SEM). This study employed systems theory and heritage conservation as theoretical contributions. The findings reveal that political instability significantly undermines tourist destinations by deterring visitors and revenues through government-issued travel warnings, advisories, and widespread trip cancellations. This instability jeopardises cultural heritage conservation, increasing the risks of damage, looting, and neglect due to weakened stakeholder collaboration and diminished cultural value. As a result, historically vibrant cultural festivals lose appeal, further reducing tourist arrivals. Despite these challenges, tourism remains a key pillar of the government's strategy for socio-economic development. Therefore, policymakers should understand those challenges and develop recovery strategies to strengthen cultural heritage conservation and enhance overall tourism performance.*

**Keywords:** Political instability; Tourism performance; Cultural heritage conservation; Recovery strategies; Stakeholder collaboration

**JEL Classification:** N56, Z32, O55

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## 1. Introduction

Research in the area of political crises indicates that political instability can negatively impact tourism outcomes, affect heritage sites, and hinder economic growth by leading to a decrease in foreign investments and a detrimental public perception when governments attempt to pursue tourism planning initiatives (Issa & Altinay, 2006). Besides, political turmoil significantly impacts heritage conservation, influencing both the preservation of cultural sites and the broader socio-political context in which these sites exist (Winter, 2007). Mostly, political unrest in a country can have significant and far-reaching impact on its cultural and historical heritage, often leading to the destruction, damage, or neglect of important sites, artefacts, and traditions, as well as heritage sites exposed to various threats, including vandalism, looting, and targeted attacks.

In Africa, Ethiopia is among the countries with the largest number of World Heritage Sites, some of which are tangible natural and cultural outstanding attractions, and others are intangible cultural heritages (Bayih & Singh, 2020; UNESCO, 2022). The region is endowed with marvellous natural and cultural tourism resources (Tessema et al., 2021). Those National and World Heritage Sites (WHSs) increased tourism receipts from \$2.5 billion in 2006 to \$8.5 billion in 2022 in Ethiopia (World Bank, 2023). In Ethiopia, the Amhara Region is famous for its important heritage sites, which are particularly influenced by travellers. The region is endowed with marvellous natural and cultural tourism resources. Nevertheless, the region has experienced political unrest and conflicts that have sometimes jeopardised the preservation and management of these heritages. Before the political turmoil and conflict in 2020, heritage tourism in Ethiopia contributed \$2.9 billion annually to the economy, supporting nearly one million jobs and accounting for approximately 4.5 percent of the country's gross domestic product (World Bank, 2019). The Amhara region played the most significant role in this contribution.

Several prior researchers have investigated the association among political instability, cultural heritage conservation, and tourism performance; however, only a few have examined the intervening factors (Ahmed & Oumer, 2023; Alene, 2017; Bogale, 2020; Gebremeskel, 2023), and many of them have not explored adaptation strategies. Conversely, most tourism research has concentrated primarily on the importance of peace and stability

to tourism and tourism marketing, political stability and government effectiveness, with few studies taking into account the impact of political turmoil on heritage sites, tourism, or hotel industries independently and inadequately; there are no intervening variables discussed, and the researches are qualitative (Abdulhakeem & Ojonugwa, 2025; Ahmed & Oumer, 2023; Beldados et al., 2023; Chiriko, 2021).

The present research investigates the unique connection between political instability and tourism performance, along with foundational theories that support it, such as system theory. To better understand a complex and dynamic system of tourism metrics that is highly susceptible to various external factors, including political instability (DeTurismo & S, 1967). Thus, the system theory provides a useful framework for analysing the impact of political instability on tourism performance. Besides, to explore mediating roles of heritage conservation on political instability and travel industry results, heritage conservation theory is an appropriate one. It emphasises the significance of cultural heritage in shaping identity, which influences social stability. By conserving heritage, communities foster a sense of belonging and stability, potentially mitigating political unrest (Abdulhakeem & Ojonugwa, 2025; Wang et al., 2024). Thus, this study examines how political instability impacts systematic interactions between cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance in Ethiopia's Amhara National Regional State.

## **2. Rational and Context of the Study**

Major tourist destinations in the Amhara region have faced significant tourism crises, primarily political instability and security issues. Political unrest, notably the state of emergency declared in 2016, severely impacted tourist flows to key destinations: Bahir Dar and Gondar (Asmare, 2016). Australia, Canada, and New Zealand advised their citizens not to travel to parts of Amhara (Government, 2017). This risk of insecurity led to a decline in tourist arrivals and cancellations, damaging the region's image as a safe destination. The Ethio-Eritrean war (1998–2000) also caused a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, dropping from 139,000 in 1997 to 112,000 in 1998, highlighting the sector's vulnerability to conflict (Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2016; Sebsibe, 2017). Additionally, socio-economic challenges, including inadequate infrastructure, weak promotion, and limited

community participation, have compounded these disruptions, hindering sustainable tourism development. Unlike Amhara, Tigray's post-war tourism recovery relied heavily on international aid for heritage rehabilitation (UNESCO's heritage emergency fund, Axum), while Addis Ababa's urban tourism rebounded faster due to infrastructure resilience (Abbink, 2021). According to the UNWTO 2025 report, in 2024, global tourism recovery saw 1.4 billion international tourists, with Africa recording a 7% increase in arrivals compared to 2019, suggesting that it has the potential to grow tourism for Amhara's tourism sector. However, political instability, including 2020 and 2023 conflicts, has limited these benefits by deterring visitors and disrupting its sociocultural and economic benefits, despite its rich tourism resources. But academically, its impact has remained unexamined from a research point of view. This investigation will inform effective planning strategies for improved tourism management. Based on this rationale and context, formulate the following research question:

- How does political instability impact the systematic relationship between cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance in the tourist destinations of the Amhara region since 2020?

### **3. Conceptual and Theoretical Framework**

This study examines the interplay between political instability, cultural heritage conservation, and tourism performance in ANRS, Ethiopia. Political instability, characterised by civil unrest and conflict acts as an external shock (Alesina & Perotti, 1996; Fang et al., 2020) that disrupts the conservation of cultural heritage sites (e.g. tangible and intangible practices) and tourism performance (reduced revenue and visitors). The conceptual framework posits that political instability disrupts the system and creates cascading effects, limiting resources for conservation, reducing community engagement and lowering tourism appeal, which in turn degrade heritage sites and deter tourists, forming a reinforcing feedback loop (Gössling et al., 2020). System theory and heritage conservation theory provide insights into dynamic interactions and conservation challenges in the Amhara Region.

### **3.1 *System theory***

System theory views political instability, heritage conservation, and tourism performance as interconnected components within a dynamic system (Van, 2008). Political instability serves as an input that disrupts system equilibrium, affecting processes such as conservation policies and outputs like tourism revenue. Feedback loops, such as reduced tourism income and limiting conservation funds. In 2023, the World Bank, citing UNWTO, reported that conflicts in Amhara, which began in 2020, have reduced tourist visits to Northern Ethiopian destinations, straining conservation budgets. Ethiopian tourism receipts fell by more than 6% in 2023, following a brief recovery after the Pretoria Agreement in 2022.

### **3.2 *Heritage conservation theory***

Heritage conservation theory emphasises preserving cultural heritage through authenticity, stakeholder collaboration, and economic sustainability (Smith, 2006). Political instability challenges these principles by restricting community engagement due to safety concerns and economic incentives tourism revenue losses. In Amhara, conflict-induced disruptions have limited local involvement in conserving sites. ICOMOS in 2022 reported  $\approx$  that 65% of the world's heritages currently suffer from a lack of maintenance and a poor state of conservation, causing structures to lose cultural, artistic, and economic value on a regular basis (ICOMOS, 2022). This theory informs study by analysing how conservation practices adapt to instability and identifying strategies to maintain heritage authenticity.

## **4. Hypothesis Development**

Political instability is a multifaceted and intricate idea that has resulted in various indicators and proxies developed by global organisations and scholars (Murad & Alshyab, 2019). It is associated with the probability of experiencing protests, strikes, various forms of conflicts, crimes and government collapse (Hendrix & Salehyan, 2012). Additionally, according to World Bank (2023), political instability is 'the probability that government will change through unconstitutional or violent means, including domestic violence, terrorism, and other acts of political violence'. The past twenty

years have seen significant changes in the world because of terrorist incidents, regional conflicts, natural calamities, epidemics, and pandemics, safety has notably diminished (Kővári & Zimányi, 2010). Political instability has an impact on tourist demand, destination image, conflicts that directly target tourists and popular tourist destinations, and the use of tourism as a political tool (Dredge & Jamal, 2015). Therefore, Political instability has a significant influence on the tourism sector, this research sets the following hypothesis.

H<sub>1</sub> Political instability significantly deteriorates tourism performance.

#### ***4.1 Cultural heritage conservation and political chaos***

Cultural heritage conservation is part of a development framework because it not only protects the tangible and intangible aspects of a society's cultural heritage, but it also helps towards bringing in the expansion of the economy due to cultural tourism and promotion of community identity (Otero, 2022). However, cultural heritage is more exposed to loss in the midst of political turmoil. Theoretically, this implies that political instability, warfare, and conflicts adversely affect the preservation of cultural heritage.

H<sub>2</sub> Political instability significantly undermines cultural heritage conservation.

#### ***4.2 Cultural heritage conservation on tourism performance***

Cultural heritage serves as a cornerstone for tourism, offering unique experiences that attract visitors and generate economic benefits (Jing & Loang, 2024). However, political instability poses significant threats to cultural heritage conservation, leading to adverse effects on tourism performance (Silva & Henriques, 2021). It often leads to neglect or destruction of cultural heritage sites. The lack of funding for conservation, coupled with decreased tourism revenue, exacerbates the issue (Bank, 2013).

H<sub>3</sub> There is a significant association between cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance.

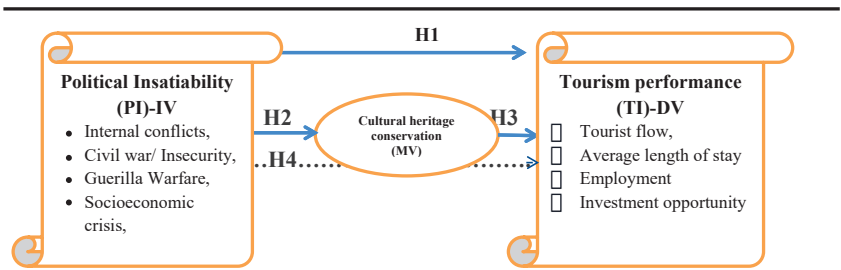
#### **4.3 Mediating role of cultural heritage conservation amid political instability and tourism**

Political turmoil greatly affects the heritage of areas by threatening cultural treasures through theft, looting, and damage, reducing their appeal or accessibility (Feldbacher, 2020). The tourism performance, closely linked to heritage sites, suffers as political instability in tourist destinations leads to a decline in international tourism demand (Groizard et al., 2019). A neglected site reduces the attractiveness of a destination, negatively impacting visitor numbers and revenue. Conversely, strong conservation policy helps to mitigate the negative effects of instability through enhancing a destination's cultural appeal (Timothy & Boyd, 2006). Based on Baloglu and McCleary's (1999) theory for destination image, cultural heritage shapes destination attractiveness, which mediates external shocks like instability. Thus, political instability threatens not only cultural heritage, but also disrupts the entire tourism industry (Ingram et al., 2013).

- H<sub>4</sub> There is a significant association among political instability, fragile cultural heritage conservation and weakened tourism performance.

Based on the above perspectives, the present research constructed a conceptual framework and explored additional relationships within the existing body of knowledge for political instability impacts on cultural heritage conservation towards tourism. Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual framework. It posits that political instability impacts cultural heritage conservation (H2) and tourism performance (H1), while cultural heritage conservation significantly affects tourism performance (H3). Additionally, cultural heritage conservation mediates the relationship between political instability and tourism performance (H4).

**Figure 1:** Conceptual framework



Source: Conceptual framework (self-developed)

**Note:**

- Indirect effect - - - - - > ; Direct effect ———>
- IV=Independent Variable
- DV=Dependent Variable
- MV=Mediating variable

## 5. Methodology

### 5.1 Description of the study areas

Ethiopia has natural, religious, historical, and cultural tourism attractions that have significantly contributed to its economy from tourism (Engda, 2020). According to UNESCO (2024), Ethiopia inscribed 12 sites on the ‘cultural and natural World Heritage list’. The Amhara region has 3 of the 12 WHS of Ethiopia (UNESCO, 2022). Tourism in the region is also an important part of the local economy and can be used to create jobs and investment opportunities. Geographically, this study is limited to ‘Gondar, Bahir Dar, Lalibela, and Debark’ tourist destinations that are among the most visited sites in the Amhara region of Ethiopia. Debark-Simien Mountains National Park, a WHS, covers five districts and over 30 kebeles, hosting attractions like Ras Dashen and endemic wildlife (Walia Ibex and Ethiopian wolf) (Girmay et al., 2023). Lalibela includes Yimrehane Kristos and Genet Maryam, alongside its rock-hewn churches (Richard & Golkarian, 2023). Bahir Dar attractions include the Tis Abay Waterfall and Zege Peninsula monasteries; while Gondar integrates Fasil Ghebbi and out of the city heritage sites (Gorgora).

## **5.2 Research design, sampling and data collection**

In order to fully understand how political instability affects heritage conservation and tourism, this research utilised a convergent parallel mixed-methods design. It is taken as a blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches because it provides the advantage of adapting the strengths (McCusker & Gunaydin, 2015) and overcoming some of the bias and limitations of using only one of them (Creswell, 2014; Johnson & Christensen, 2019). The primary focus of this study included travel agencies, tour guides, hotel staff, souvenir shops, car rentals, boat rentals, scouts, and ecotourism enterprises, as well as tourism and heritage experts and government representatives of the tourism sectors. The researchers took a representative sample from the intended population and then applied stratified random sampling techniques to fulfill the objectives of the study. To calculate the sample size, the study utilized the Yamane (1967) formula with a 95% confidence level, taking into account the population size ( $N = 5239$ ) to guarantee representativeness. A margin of error of 5% was established to allow for acceptable variation.

As a result, the sampling technique employed a sample size ( $n$ ) of 372, which represents the target population, using the following Yamane (1967) formula  $n = N / ((1 + N(e)^2)) = 372$  and randomly chose 372 tourism business personnel from each tourist destination. Subsequently, the allocation of respondents to every destination (stratum) was carried out according to the method outlined by Kothari (2004), applying a sample distribution formula  $n_1 = nN_1 / N$ . Researchers gathered 372 questionnaires utilising surveyCTO software through trained interviewers/data collectors and an online system (self-administered), but 5 of these questionnaires were incomplete. Hence, for this study, 367 questionnaires were used for analysis to generalise the impacts of political instability on cultural-heritage conservation and tourism performance in the Amhara region, Ethiopia.

Moreover, qualitative data is used as supplementary data for quantitative results (Heaton, 1998), its data collection strategy, the research applied the convenience and purposive sampling technique to consciously choose participants for this study by taking into account their characteristics, knowledge, experiences, and willingness to participate (Guest, 2014). Consequently, key informant participants were interviewed who were assigned in government and private tourism sectors with experience in these

study sites: site managers, tourism experts, and local tour guides to capture system theory (e.g., how political unrest affects tourist flows) and conservation practices (e.g., community involvement in site maintenance). “Interviews are widely held to be a fundamentally useful way to understand informants’ beliefs and experiences” (Mann, 2016). In addition, in this study, secondary sources of data were used to address the study objective effectively, including either published or unpublished materials. Data analyses were conducted utilising Partial-Least-Squares-Structural-Equation-Modelling (PLS-SEM) through the SmartPLS-4 and SPSS software programs.

### **5.3 *Measurement and instrument***

In this study, ‘close-ended and open-ended questionnaires were used; close-ended questionnaire’ used with five-point Likert scale options to measure the response of the respondents whereas open-ended questions were provided space in the questionnaires to state and write the answers of the respondents.

The current study employs four constructs in its surveys: political instability, cultural heritage conservation, adaptive strategies, and tourism performance. To operationalise these constructs, items have been developed from various sources and methods: examining current literature, engaging in thorough discussions with subject matter experts, consulting relevant academics, and conducting a pilot survey. Different scholars’ published papers instruments from previous studies were used to measure the major variables related to ‘impacts of political instability on heritage conservation and tourism performance’; political instability information derived from Seddighi et al. (2002), Adane (2021), Ahmed and Oumer (2023), which was modified to include indicators of political instability such as influences of internal conflicts, crimes, insecurities, civil wars, socioeconomic crisis, bombings, kidnapping, and guerrilla war (e.g., TPLF-Federal government since 2020 and Fano and Federal since 2023, the same issues in Oromia, Southern Ethiopia and Gambella region), tourism performance information derived from Ivanov (2017), Chiriko (2021); cultural heritage conservation information derived from Al-Mushiki et al. (2020), Ahmed and Oumer (2023) and (Kukanja et al., 2022; Su et al., 2020), impact on heritage conservation nuances distinct from generic conflict scenarios elsewhere.

Validity and reliability of the questionnaire were thoroughly evaluated in a content-validity-index (CVI) and Cronbach Alpha. Validation process

received affirmation from advisors, colleagues, experts, and academic professionals through the use of CVI for a pretest survey. Following pretesting and some modifications, the study’s questionnaires were distributed among 50 respondents from the pilot population. Cronbach Alpha was also applied to confirm reliability of the questionnaire’s answers (Taber, 2018). Finally, experts and academics again reviewed the findings, suggesting some changes and distributing the questionnaire to the final sample of 372.

6. Data Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Description of the respondents’ characteristics

In this part, researchers presented and analysed profiles of the respondents, particularly focusing on employees involved in the tourism industry. The main variables explored in the study encompassed demographic traits such as gender, age, experience, type of business, destinations, and educational background. To present the data, descriptive statistics, including frequency and percentage, were utilised. Additional information can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents (n = 367)

| Items                                    | Categories            | Frequency | Percentage |
|------------------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Sex                                      | Male                  | 281       | 76.57%     |
|                                          | Female                | 86        | 23.43%     |
| Age                                      | 18-24                 | 21        | 5.7%       |
|                                          | 25-34                 | 166       | 45.2%      |
|                                          | 35-44                 | 121       | 33.0%      |
|                                          | 45-54                 | 44        | 12.0%      |
|                                          | 55-65                 | 13        | 3.5%       |
|                                          | 65+                   | 2         | 0.5%       |
| Education                                | Never attended school | 6         | 1.63%      |
|                                          | Primary School        | 11        | 3%         |
|                                          | Secondary School      | 47        | 12.81%     |
|                                          | Diploma & TVT         | 132       | 35.97%     |
|                                          | BA and Above          | 171       | 46.59%     |
| Tourist Destinations                     | Gondar                | 100       | 27.25%     |
|                                          | Debark                | 68        | 18.53%     |
|                                          | B/Dar                 | 122       | 33.24%     |
|                                          | Lalibela              | 77        | 20.98%     |
| Experiences in Hotel and Tourism Sectors | 10 years and less     | 257       | 70.03%     |
|                                          | Greater than 10 years | 110       | 29.97%     |

Source: Researcher-owned result (2024)

6.2    *KMO and bartlett’s test*

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure is utilised to assess the suitability of a sample for factor analysis and to quantify the extent to which underlying factors may influence the variance in the variables. After confirming this adequacy, the researchers can progress to the subsequent phase of factor analysis. KMO measure assesses whether the partial correlations among the variables are sufficiently small. Kaiser and Rice (1974) suggest that the basic guidelines for KMO value are: “Less than 0.05 is considered poor; Between 0.5 and 0.6 is considered average; Between 0.7 and 0.8 is considered good; and More than 0.8 is considered excellent”.

In addition, ‘Bartlett’s test’ determines whether correlation is an identity metric that can be ruled out if the p-value of each test is less than 0.005. So, KMO value obtained was 0.777, and Bartlett’s test revealed a p-value of 0.0000, which is below 0.005; this suggests that the variables are adequate for factor analysis and there is no significant correlation among the items. Table 2 shows Principal Component Analysis and KMO results, indicating factor analysis is appropriate.

**Table 2:** ‘KMO and Bartlett’s test’

| Test                             |                    | Statistics |
|----------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy |                    | .777       |
| Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity    | Approx. Chi-Square | 8158.438   |
|                                  | df                 | 378        |
|                                  | Sig.               | .000       |

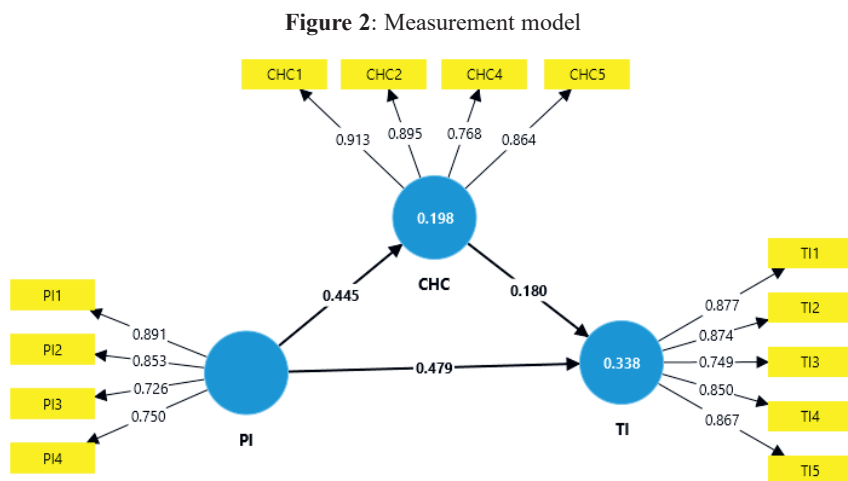
Source: Researcher (2024)

6.3    *Evaluation of PLS-SEM path model results*

The current study employed SmartPLS 4 to perform structural equation modelling (SEM). Two types of models were examined: measurement and structural. Partial-Least-Squared Structural-Equation-Model approach was utilised in the measurement model to address convergent and discriminant validity, while the structural model focused on hypothesis testing to accept or reject the hypotheses.

## 6.4 Measurement model

All constructs that have been validated through confirmatory factor analysis are further investigated in the measurement model to determine if each confirmed construct plays a significant role in the model proposed in this research. Given that reflective measurement approaches are employed, research evaluates internal consistency reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. So, convergent validity is assessed using factor loading, composite reliability, and Cronbach's alpha, all of which should ideally be above 0.7 to be deemed reliable. Additionally, it is advisable for the average variance extracted (AVE) to exceed 0.5. Whereas, 'discriminant validity', measured by the 'Fornell-Lacker criterion.' This study's measurement modelling examines associations among political instability, cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance. The measurement model is shown in Figure-2.



## 6.5 Convergent validity

Convergent validity relates to the extent the 'measures of the same idea and is concerned with construct loadings and Average-Variance-Extracted (AVE)' (Hair et al., 2019). The recommended standardised indication for outside loading should be 0.700 or greater, as it reflects the intensity of the load on all components of the building. Any exterior loading valued below 0.7

should ideally be discarded. However, items can be retained if the construct's AVE value exceeds 0.50. The outcomes of the preliminary measurement model, which assesses internal consistency and convergent validity, are shown in Table 3.

The variance values for each construct indicate convergent validity when the AVE exceeds 0.50. The initial findings of this study revealed an Average Variance Extraction result. However, after removing the items (PI5, PI6, TI6, CHC3, and CHC6) that had low factor loadings, the AVE for the constructs reached the necessary threshold of 0.50, allowing for the measurement of the correlation between political instability, tourism performance, and cultural heritage conservation. The researchers proceeded to calculate the construct reliabilities for the variables; the resulting construct reliability values for each variable are presented in Table 3. 'The construct dependability cut-off value is 0.70 or above (Blumberg et al., 2014)'.

Table-3 shows that the high reliability of all structures differs: Political instability displayed a composite reliability of 0.920, tourism performance had a reliability of 0.882, and cultural heritage conservation reported a reliability of 0.926. This indicates that reasonable composite reliability values support convergent validity. Thus, in this study, measurement modelling is identifying the association among political instability, tourism performance, and cultural heritage conservation.

**Table-3:** Measurement model

| Construct                            | Item code | Factor loading (FL) | Cronbach's alpha | Composite Reliability (CR) | Average variance extracted (AVE) |
|--------------------------------------|-----------|---------------------|------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Political instability (PI)           | PI1       | 0.891               | 0.891            | 0.920                      | 0.743                            |
|                                      | PI2       | 0.853               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | PI3       | 0.726               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | PI4       | 0.750               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | TI1       | 0.877               |                  |                            |                                  |
| Tourism performance (TI)             | TI2       | 0.874               | 0.831            | 0.882                      | 0.653                            |
|                                      | TI3       | 0.749               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | TI4       | 0.850               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | TI5       | 0.867               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | CHC1      | 0.913               |                  |                            |                                  |
| Cultural Heritage Conservation (CHC) | CHC2      | 0.895               | 0.899            | 0.926                      | 0.714                            |
|                                      | CHC4      | 0.768               |                  |                            |                                  |
|                                      | CHC5      | 0.864               |                  |                            |                                  |

Source: Researcher (2024)

6.6 Discriminant validity

Discriminant validity is demonstrated when the square root of AVE exceeds the correlations between constructs. In this study, ‘Fornell-Larcker criteria’ were employed to assess the discriminant validity of the components. It is one of the most common techniques used to check the discriminant validity of measurement models. According to the Fornell-Larcker criterion, ‘the square root of the AVE of each latent construct is more essential than the latent inter-construct correlation with other latent variables in the model (Hair et al., 2019)’. Once this condition is satisfied, discriminant validity is established.

As shown in Table 4 of ‘Fornell-Lacker criterion’, it is demonstrated that the AVE square-root for the square root of each latent construct’s average variance extracted exceeds the magnitudes of its inter- construct-correlations with other latent variables in the model. Thus, the inter-construction matrix indicated that the square root of AVE for each factor exceeds the inter construction correlations. This study test confirms that discriminant validity of all constructs (PI, CHC, and TI) is satisfactory.

Table-4: Fornell-Larcker criterion for discriminant validity

|                                      | CHC          | PI           | TI           |
|--------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
| Cultural Heritage Conservation (CHC) | <b>0.862</b> |              |              |
| Political Instability (PI)           | 0.445        | <b>0.808</b> |              |
| Tourism performance (TI)             | 0.393        | 0.559        | <b>0.845</b> |

Source: Researcher (2024)

6.7 Evaluation of the structural modeling

After establishing the reliability and validity of the measurements for the outer models, an assessment of the structural model is performed to verify the proposed relationships within the inner model (Khan et al., 2022). The structural model illustrates the associations among the constructs under examination. As shown in figure 3, this model highlights how (PI), (TI), and (CHC) are linked, marking independent, dependent, and mediating variables, respectively. The associations assessed in the recent analyses are defined by three key criteria: Coefficient of Determination ( $R^2$ ), Effect Size ( $f^2$ ), and Path Coefficients.

6.7.1 *Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ )*

R square ( $R^2$ ), it reflects how much the independent variable is causing/ influencing the dependent variables (Hair et al., 2019). The primary objective of PLS-SEM is to improve the  $R^2$ , as the intention is to clarify the endogenous latent variable. “The range of  $R^2$  is 0 to 1, with values of 0.25, 0.09, and 0.01 indicating large, medium, and small effects, modest predictive accuracy, respectively” (Convery & Williams, 2019; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2017). Table 5 presents the  $R^2$  values associated with the endogenous constructs.

**Table-5:** Coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ )

| Construct                            | R Square | R Square Adjusted | Effect |
|--------------------------------------|----------|-------------------|--------|
| Cultural Heritage Conservation (CHC) | 0.198    | 0.196             | Medium |
| Tourism performance (TI)             | 0.338    | 0.336             | Large  |

Source: Researcher (2024)

So, in this study, political instability is causing 19.8% and 33.8% of  $R^2$ /variation in cultural-heritage conservation and tourism-performance, respectively (show above table-5). Furthermore, current research findings suggest that  $R^2$  value for cultural heritage conservation is 0.198, indicating a medium effect, and for tourism performance is 0.338, indicating a large effect.

6.7.2 *Effect size ( $f^2$ )*

In this study, effect size ( $f^2$ ) assesses whether the absent construct significantly influences the endogenous factors. The  $f^2$  value of the coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was crucial as it influences the intensity of the changes accounted for by the independent variables. To determine the magnitude of the effect, multiply  $R^2$  by the proportion of variation in the endogenous latent variable that is still unexplained. “Cohen (1988) defined small, moderate, and significant effects as two values of 0.02–0.14, 0.15–0.25, and greater than 0.25. Table-6 below presents  $f^2$  value for each path”. The effect size ranges from a low of 0.039 concerning cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance to a maximum of 0.278 related to political instability and tourism performance.

Table-6: Result for effect size ( $f^2$ )

| Path                                                   | f-square | Effect |
|--------------------------------------------------------|----------|--------|
| Cultural Heritage Conservation → Tourism performance   | 0.039    | Small  |
| Political Instability → Cultural Heritage Conservation | 0.247    | Strong |
| Political Instability → Tourism performance            | 0.278    | Strong |

Source: Researcher (2024)

6.7.3 Hypothesis testing

The bootstrapping method is employed to determine the empirical t-value for path coefficients, allowing for the evaluation of the significance of expected relationships. Consequently, significance is important, as it would necessitate management’s focus (Khan et al., 2022).

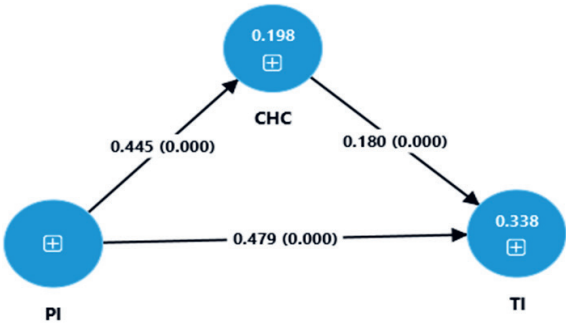
Table-7: Outcomes of the Hypothesis Testing regarding both direct and indirect relationships

| Hypothesis | Path                                                                        | $\beta$ | M     | SD    | T-value | P-value | 5%    | 95%   | Mediation |
|------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|---------|---------|-------|-------|-----------|
| H1         | Political Instability → Tourism performance                                 | 0.479   | 0.478 | 0.055 | 8.704   | 0.000   | 0.362 | 0.576 | Supported |
| H2         | Political Instability → Cultural Heritage Conservation                      | 0.445   | 0.451 | 0.025 | 17.912  | 0.000   | 0.399 | 0.497 | Supported |
| H3         | Cultural Heritage Conservation → Tourism performance                        | 0.180   | 0.182 | 0.041 | 4.380   | 0.000   | 0.104 | 0.265 | Supported |
| H4         | Political Instability → Cultural Heritage → Conservation → Tourism Industry | 0.080   | 0.082 | 0.018 | 4.353   | 0.000   | 0.047 | 0.121 | Supported |

Source: Researcher (2024)

Table 7 summarises the results of hypothesis testing. This study model investigates the relationship between political instability, cultural heritage conservation, and tourism performance. Figure 3 shows the results of the structural model.

**Figure 3:** Structural model



In this study, the structural model is examined through testing the hypothesis using SmartPLS 4 software. The researchers compute the ‘beta coefficient, mean, standard deviation, t-value, p-value, upper-control-limit (UCL) and lower-control-limit (LCL)’; these are used to estimate the significance level of the finding. This study offered three direct and one indirect hypothesis to analyse the link between the variables. According to the first hypothesis (H1), the path coefficient for political instability on impoverished tourism performance was reported as a t-value of 8.704, which is above the threshold value of 1.96. The p-value was reported as 0.000, which indicates significance for any value less than 0.05. The first hypothesis (H1) was accepted, and the generated model (Figure 3 and Table 7) revealed a significant positive relationship between political instability and destitute tourism performance. Similarly, tourist numbers reported by Gondar, Lalibela, Debarq and Bahir Dar culture and tourism offices (2023), 2019/20 tourist numbers, both domestic and international, compared to 2022/23 after unrest decreased for domestic tourists by 50%, international tourists decreased by 90%, which is associated with a reduction in visitor numbers and declined tourism revenue.

In spite of the fact that Amhara is one of Ethiopia’s best tourist destinations, since the Tigray region conflict started, the area has experienced political instability due to internal conflicts, civil war, crime, kidnappings, security problems, and socio-economic crises. This region’s tourism

performance has been negatively affected by political instability, which poses a security threat to tourists. Most interview participants emphasised that the political turmoil has severely affected tourism performance in the Amhara region, particularly tourist flows and visitor spending. “Despite some tourists coming, most have cancelled their plans to Amhara region main tourist sites due to political instability. For example, most embassies and governments of tourist-generating countries warned their citizens and tourists about travelling to Ethiopia in 2020 because of the worsening violence in the country like UK and the USA. Travel consultants have also recommended avoiding all travel to Ethiopia (travel agents and tour guides, August 2024).” Similarly, after 2020, tourist flow declined significantly compared to the previous year. However, in 2019, tourism contributed significantly to a 3.7 percent share of GDP (World Bank, 2023).



U.S. Department of State (.gov)  
<https://travel.state.gov> › content › travel › Ethiopia

### Ethiopia International Travel Information

As the security environment remains fluid in Amhara, the U.S. Embassy urges U.S. citizens to avoid travel to the region. ... Contact the Embassy of Ethiopia for ...

Source: US Department of State (2024)

However, a tourism expert stated that political instability and conflict issues are challenging tourism performance as far as peace and security issues are concerned. In the meantime, the government is working on developing tourism in Gondar and Lalibela. Tourism is therefore likely to be socio-economic development area for Ethiopia, along with water, agriculture, peace, and technology, as the government mainstreams. So, such incidents are not considered as serious challenges to the tourism industry in the long-term (tourism expert, September 2024). Tourism is a vital economic pillar, fueling growth through major socioeconomic contributions (Ahmad et al., 2025).

Furthermore, the path coefficient for political instability on limited cultural heritage conservation was 0.445, with a t-value of 17.912, which is greater than the threshold value of 1.96, and the p-value was 0.000, indicating significance at any value greater than 0.05. This study supported the hypothesis (H2) that political turmoil has a negative impact on the conservation of vulnerable cultural heritages ( $\beta=0.445$ ,  $M=0.451$ ,  $SD=0.025$ ,  $LCL=0.399$ , and  $UCL=0.497$ ). This implies political instability,

including conflict, and social unrest, all of which can lead to increased neglect of cultural heritage conservation in Amhara region National and World Heritage Sites. In addition, key informants stated the current political instability challenges: poor stakeholder collaboration toward conservation campaigns, lack of adequate funds, and inadequate political commitment toward cultural protection initiatives, which degraded site maintenance and further deterred visitors. As underscored by UNESCO (2011) and Mydland and Grahn (2012), Heritage conservation theory explains why conservation efforts faltered: the lack of community involvement due to safety concerns undermined collaborative preservation efforts, a key principle of sustainable conservation. As a result of this political instability in the resource-endowed Amhara region and its major tourist sites, heritages are more neglected, looted, and exposed to further destruction, especially in rural areas. According to a report compiled by the Ethiopian Tourism Minister (2022), service providers, heritage sites, churches and museums were some of the most affected by political instability. A report by Ahmed and Oumer (2023) for heritage destruction in the Amhara region revealed that “during armed conflicts museums, cultural institutions such as heritage houses, churches, mosques, libraries, and public spaces that reflect Ethiopian history and culture were damaged and pillaged.”

*According to heritage experts working in the Amhara Region Culture and Tourism Bureau, even though there is no strategic policy framework to protect heritages during conflict, some of the heritages have been looted, destroyed, and some of them are still vulnerable. Conversely, conservation works are underway in some areas, such as the Gondar Fasil compound and the Lalibela rock-hewn churches at world heritage sites, which are encouraging for the preservation of heritage and development of tourism (Heritage Expert, September 2024).*

Similarly, the path coefficient for cultural heritage protection and tourism performance was 0.180, with a  $t$ -value of 4.380 (higher than the threshold value of 1.96) and  $p$ -values of 0.000 (more than 0.05). This finding demonstrates that cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance validate the Hypothesis ( $H^3$ ), which was also accepted based on the outcomes of this study, implying that the connection between heritage

conservation and tourism is unlikely to be chance.

Conversely, the indirect effect was also calculated in this stage and the significance level was determined via bootstrapping. According to Hypothesis (H<sup>4</sup>), “political instability can have a significant impact on tourism performance if cultural heritage conservation is neglected.” The indirect path coefficient for political instability→limited cultural heritage conservation→weak tourism performance is 0.080. To assess the relevance of the indirect path, the researchers conducted 5000 rounds of bootstrapping using Smart PLS 4. The results showed that the t-value for the indirect path was 4.353, accompanied by a p-value of 0.000. This highlights the significance of the indirect path. This implies political instability (e.g., internal conflict) reduces tourism revenue, which limits conservation practices, further degrading heritage sites and deterring tourists, and then results in turnover and unemployment.

Moreover, results indicate that political instability generates a disruptive feedback cycle within the heritage-tourism system. Recent ‘Gena’ and ‘Timket’ festival celebrations throughout Lalibela and Gondar world heritage sites reported between 2021 and 2024 were subdued and muted, around 60% decrease in attendance at both events (Heritage experts in Gondar and Lalibela tourism offices, 2024), leading to a more than 50% cut in conservation budget. Additionally, the Ethiopian government has permitted 70% of the total generated tourist revenue to be used for heritage conservation, but the heritage conservation fund is still small due to safety concerns and declining tourist flow to visit these WHS (Site Manager, 2024). The local community’s participation in conservation practices is reduced due to conflicts throughout northern Ethiopia and political unrest in Amhara, compromising the authenticity and sustainability of heritage sites. Besides, during the conflict, social media and other mass media streaming played a great role in disseminating heritage site information, and help to discuss issues for international organizations’ (Heritage expert, 2024). Social media sparks interconnection of the global community, and increases awareness and support for heritage conservation work (Lozhkina, 2019). They also stated in line with findings of previous research, that what was not targeted to be damaged during war, the rock-hewn churches and archaeological sites and no moveable heritage objects were not taken away either by occupying forces or by looters to take advantage of insecurity, except at ‘Genete Maryam’, a rural place that has already been found rich in lithic artifacts

(Beldados et al., 2023). These insights indicate that stabilising the system requires interventions: international funding to disrupt the negative feedback loop. Leveraging traditional knowledge on cultural heritage conservation, along with technological systems, is crucial to safeguarding and preserving heritage, even under challenging conditions.

## **7. Conclusion and Implication**

In summary, political instability severely undermines cultural heritage conservation and tourism performance. It deters visitors, diverts resources from preservation efforts, and leads to declining tourist numbers, ultimately causing revenue losses and job cuts in the sector.

This paper investigates the theoretical implications that focus on how political unrest complicates the preservation of cultural sites, which ultimately affects the growth of the tourism industry. Prior studies overlook the interplay of political instability, cultural heritage conservation, and tourism development, particularly the need for strategies to protect heritage during and post-conflict, as well as the critical role of safety and stability in sustaining tourism. Drawing on Systems Theory and Heritage Conservation Theory, this study argues that political turmoil deters tourists and undermines conservation efforts by diverting resources, leading to economic losses, including reduced tourist arrivals and job decline.

Practical implications show that the Amhara region's tourism industry is vital for its local economy but faces challenges from significant economic underdevelopment, political instability, and conflict. These insights help policymakers understand heritage conservation challenges and develop rapid recovery strategies. These issues hinder stakeholder engagement in cultural heritage conservation, which is essential for tourism growth. Instability not only discourages immediate visitors but also jeopardises the long-term preservation of heritage sites, which suffer from inadequate funding and negligence. This has led to a damaged reputation of cultural festivals, further diminishing tourism potential. Examples from Lalibela and Gondar highlight how unrest disrupts celebrations and negatively impacts local economies.

To counter this, enhancing collaboration among tourism and heritage stakeholders is vital for securing funding and ensuring the safety of tourists. Adaptive strategies and awareness programs are needed to protect cultural sites, and all parties, including governments, businesses, and NGOs must

promote heritage conservation. Strategic collaboration highlights the importance of cultural preservation, with training on effective conservation practices, especially during conflicts. Stability is essential for sustainable tourism and heritage conservation, creating an environment that safeguards cultural treasures and attracts visitors. Urgent action is required to prevent the cultural heritage of the Amhara region from fading, along with its economic advantages.

## **8. Study Limitations**

The objectives of the current research were successfully achieved; however, this would not have been possible without imposing certain limitations on the study's scope. Initially, to address constraints related to time and budget, the research focused on the primary tourist destinations in the Amhara region. Most notably, ongoing conflict and instability resulted in an unpredictable situation for conducting research. Gathering data and responses for this study proved difficult due to restrictions on mobility. However, researchers utilised the SurveyCTO application along with an online self-administered system to gather data. Data collectors reached 367 randomly selected participants from the tourism and hospitality sector across four popular tourist destinations. This revealed that tourist areas in the Amhara region and throughout Ethiopia encountered restrictions. This restriction may have an impact on the results' generalizability. Besides, due to the PLS-SEM approach, this study identifies associations rather than causal relationships between political instability, cultural heritage conservation, and tourism performance. In the absence of sufficient data before the 1990s to compare patterns in crisis resilience across all Ethiopian regions, future research employs longitudinal designs to confirm causal pathways and incorporate direct perspectives from residents to enhance the understanding of conflict impacts.

## **CRedit author statement**

**Getachew Melesse:** Conceptualisation, Design of methodology, Data collection, Formal analysis, Writing - Original draft preparation and Editing. **Endalkachew Teshome:** Conceptualisation, Editing, Validation, and Supervision. **Busha Taa:** Visualisation, Editing, Validation, and Supervision.

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