



# Conflict Studies Quarterly

Issue 51, April 2025

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ISSN 2285-7605

ISSN-L 2285-7605

Accent Publisher, 2025

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# Central Asia: Borders, Resources, and Power. The Roots of Conflict in the Fergana Valley

Medihanur ARGALI

**Abstract.** The Fergana Valley, as a strategic and multiethnic region of Central Asia, has long been a center of conflict. This study analyzes the ethnic conflicts in the Fergana Valley by focusing on historical, economic, and political causes. This study examines the impact of inequalities in resource sharing, artificial borders, and regional power struggles on ethnic tensions. Empirical analysis of the conflicts in the valley reveals that competition over natural resources, border disputes, and political manipulation by local leaders have played a key role in exacerbating tensions. This study emphasizes that fair resource management and regional cooperation are crucial for achieving sustainable peace.

**Keywords:** Fergana Valley, ethnic conflict, resource sharing, Central Asia, border disputes.

## Introduction

The Fergana Valley, located at the intersection of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, is one of Central Asia's most geopolitically sensitive and historically significant regions. Known for its fertile lands and water resources, it has long been a center for trade, agriculture, and interethnic interactions. However, its strategic importance has made it a persistent site for territorial disputes and violent conflicts. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the emergence of national borders that fragmented communities, exacerbating tensions over resources, governance, and ethnic identities. The valley's unique demographic makeup,

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 51, April 2025, pp. 3–17

DOI: 10.24193/cs.q.51.1  
Published First Online: April 03, 2025

with different ethnic groups coexist but often compete over limited resources, has further contributed to regional instability.

This study is driven by several research questions: What are the key factors fueling ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley? How have historical and contemporary economic inequalities influenced these tensions? What roles do border disputes and resource competition play in perpetuating interethnic violence? By addressing these questions, this study seeks to provide an in-depth understanding of the drivers of conflict in the region.

To guide this analysis, we operate under the following assumptions: (1) ethnic identities in the Fergana Valley are closely intertwined with economic and social structures, shaping group-based grievances; (2) political leaders (especially Stalin and Karimov) have actively manipulated ethnic divisions for strategic and economic gains, exacerbating existing conflicts; and (3) the fragmented nature of territorial boundaries has created a persistent sense of insecurity among ethnic groups, reinforcing exclusionary tendencies and deepening intergroup rivalries.

The primary objective of this research is to move beyond theoretical explanations and focus on empirical data to analyze the root causes of conflict in the Fergana Valley. While previous literature has explored these tensions through various sociological and political lenses, this study prioritizes a data-driven approach by examining specific case studies of conflict, economic disparities, and policy failures. In doing so, we aim to offer concrete policy recommendations to mitigate these conflicts and promote regional stability.

Methodologically, this study employs a qualitative analysis of historical events, government policies, and socioeconomic indicators that have shaped interethnic relations in the region. Data were drawn from archival sources, regional reports, and prior case studies on ethnic violence. The findings suggest that conflicts in Fergana Valley are primarily driven by competition over water and land resources, unresolved border disputes, and political actors exploiting ethnic grievances to consolidate power.

## **Regional Facts and Historical Background**

The Fergana Valley, with an area of approximately 22,000 square kilometers, is renowned for its agricultural potential, as evidenced by the region's favorable soil conditions and abundant water resources. This region, often referred to as the "Granary of Central Asia," has played a significant role in supporting the region's agricultural activities and economic development (Löw et al., 2017). Fergana Valley, irrigated by the Syr Darya River, possesses significant strategic value because of its agricultural productivity and abundance of energy resources. The valley's importance is not only attributed to its natural resources but also to its strategic location along historical trade routes. Serving as a pivotal transit point between the northern and southern branches of the Silk Road, the Fergana Valley has historically functioned as a hub for economic and cultural exchanges (Whitfield, 2004). In the modern

period, the Soviet Union's border policies in the region heightened ethnic and political tensions in the Fergana Valley (Hirsch, 2000).

The Fergana Valley is a region of significant ethnological complexity characterized by the coexistence of the Tajik, Kyrgyz, and Uzbek populations. This diversity has led to a multifaceted social and cultural landscape, contributing to the region's perceived richness in terms of cultural heritage and potential for conflict. Border disputes and ethnic conflicts, particularly following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, heightened the region's strategic importance in terms of security (Toktomushev, 2018). This region plays a pivotal role in the energy infrastructure in Central Asia. The hydroelectric power plants in Fergana Valley satisfy the region's energy requirements and facilitate energy transfer to neighboring countries, positioning the valley as a nexus of significant energy competition (Gabdulhakov, 2017).

The Fergana Valley is strategically important for a multitude of reasons. Historically, the region has always been a crucial location because of its geographical location, natural resources, and cultural diversity. In the modern context, Fergana Valley remains a cornerstone for the stability and security of Central Asia. However, this strategic importance ensures the persistence of political and economic competition in the region.

In the 1920s, the Soviet Union endeavored to restructure Central Asia based on "national identities". This process had a direct impact on the Fergana Valley, which was divided into Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan within the framework of Stalin's nation-building policies. This decision overlooks the ethnically complex nature of the region. This geopolitical shift resulted in the fragmentation of ethnic groups across the borders of multiple nations, thereby establishing a foundation for future political and social tensions (Siegelbaum & Moch, 2016). For instance, a substantial portion of the fertile terrain of the Fergana Valley was allocated to Uzbekistan, while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also maintained significant populations within the valley. This has given rise to numerous conflicts, particularly concerning the allocation and utilization of agricultural water resources (Hirsch, 2005).

As part of the Soviet Union's agricultural policy, the establishment of collective farms (*kolkhozes* and *sovkhozes*) was compulsory in the Fergana Valley in the 1930s. Cotton production was prioritized to increase the agricultural potential of the valley, which led to the formation of a lopsided economic structure that threatened food security in the region (Karadağ, 2022). In this process, the transfer of the region's economic resources to Moscow increased the distrust of the central authority of the local population. In addition, collectivization led to the dissolution of traditional social structures based on land ownership, which caused social unrest (Hirsch, 2005).

Fergana Valley's ethnic diversity was one of the most important factors in the Soviet regime's policy of social control. In particular, to manage tensions between the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Kyrgyz, the Soviets pursued policies that promoted interethnic segregation. The "divide

and rule” strategy ensured that the ethnic groups in the valley had the potential for conflict rather than harmony (Edgar, 2006).

The Soviets also targeted religious institutions in the valley to weaken the social influence of Islam. The closure of mosques, transformation of madrasas, and suppression of religious leaders were key elements of a policy aimed at building a secular identity in the region (Khalid, 2014). Communist Party structures were strengthened in Fergana Valley to promote the adoption of Soviet ideology. However, participation in the Communist Party among the local population was often limited by coercion, which led to the alienation of the local population from Soviet rule. Ethnic and political tensions in the valley became more pronounced, especially during the policies of Glasnost and Perestroika in the 1980s (Roy, 2018).

Soviet Union’s policies in the Fergana Valley left deep social, economic, and political scars in the region. Drawing national borders without regard to ethnic realities, making economic resources dependent on Moscow, and weakening religious and social institutions are the bases of many problems that persist today. These policies have made the Fergana Valley one of the most strategic regions in Central Asia and one of its most fragile social structures (Muhammad et al., 2023).



**Figure 2:** Map of Fergana Valley and Demographic Structure

As the map above shows, Fergana Valley is one of the most densely populated and ethnically complex regions in Central Asia. The Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks are the largest ethnic groups in the valley, but smaller communities (such as Russians, Uyghurs, and Meskhetian Turks) are also notable. This multi-ethnic composition has been a source of both cultural richness and political and social tension. Ethnic diversity in the region has historically been shaped by migrations, its strategic location along trade routes, and the influence of various empires (Timurid Empire, Russian Tsardom, and the Soviet Union)

that controlled the region. Uzbeks constitute the majority population of the valley, while Tajiks are concentrated mainly in mountainous areas and Kyrgyz are concentrated near the northern and eastern borders (Bakijonovich, 2024).

The absence of clearly delineated ethnic group boundaries throughout history has led to an accumulation of tensions in the region, a phenomenon that has been exacerbated following the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Lattimore, 1965). A notable illustration of these tensions can be observed in the 1990 clashes between the Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks, collectively referred to as the Fergana Events (Borthakur, 2017). The maintenance of distinct linguistic, religious, and cultural identities is a hallmark of these communities, with Islam serving as a unifying element among various ethnic groups. However, significant variations in religious practices exist among these communities (Khalid 2014).

Fergana Valley's ethnic and economic diversity is indicative of the region's rich cultural heritage. However, this diversity highlights the presence of social and political vulnerabilities. It is imperative to address inter-ethnic differences and ensure equitable distribution of economic resources to maintain regional stability. To leverage the valley's potential sustainably, reforms in areas such as water resource management, border-crossing facilitation, and regional cooperation are essential.

### **Political Leadership and the Manipulation of Ethnic Divisions**

A significant contributing factor to the occurrence of ethnic conflicts in Fergana Valley is the exploitation of regional challenges by political leaders for their own strategic and economic gains. In other words, throughout history, relations between ethnic groups in the region have been shaped by the policies and strategies of political leaders. Josef Stalin is a notable example of this phenomenon. Under Stalin's leadership, the Soviet administration initiated the process of delineating national borders in Central Asia during the 1920s and the 1930s. The delineation of these borders, based on ethnic divisions, has been identified as a significant contributing factor to the emergence of ethnic tensions in the Fergana Valley. For instance, the eastern part of Fergana Valley, which was traditionally heavily populated by Uzbeks, was divided between the newly established Soviet republics of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This administrative decision, which resulted in the division of a region historically populated predominantly by the Uzbeks, has been identified as a contributing factor to the subsequent emergence of ethnic tensions in the region (Martin, 2001).

Despite the absence of significant direct border alterations in the Fergana Valley during Khrushchev's tenure, agricultural policies and regional management strategies, albeit indirectly, have contributed to the escalation of ethnic tensions. Khrushchev pursued an expansionary agenda for collective agricultural projects in Central Asia to increase cotton production. Large-scale irrigation projects have been initiated, particularly in the Fergana Valley. However, these projects have resulted in heightened competition over water



resources, precipitating disputes among Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik communities over land and water resources (Kalinovsky, 2018).

Despite the perception of the Leonid Brezhnev era as a period of relative stability within the Soviet Union, it was concomitant with an increase in ethnic division and escalation of social tensions in the Fergana Valley. Despite the implementation of centralized control policies by Brezhnev, elites within the Communist Party of Uzbekistan were able to amass significant power. During this period, Sharof Rashidov (First Secretary of the Communist Party of Uzbekistan, 1959–1983) was instrumental in shaping directives from Moscow in a manner aligned with his agenda. Rashidov's actions as a prominent political figure contributed to the augmentation of Uzbek's influence in the region, thereby fortifying the political elite in Uzbekistan and catalyzing the rise of Uzbek nationalism (Roy, 2018). Even during the Soviet era, he pursued policies that increased Uzbek influence in the Fergana Valley.

The Glasnost and Perestroika reforms initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev were one of the processes that deepened the ethnic divisions in the Fergana Valley the most. During the Gorbachev era, local nationalism gained strength within the Soviet Union. In particular, Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik nationalism have risen again after being suppressed for many years (Dadabaev, 2016). As will be analyzed in detail below, in 1989, there were major ethnic clashes between the Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in the Fergana Valley. Hundreds of people were killed, and thousands were expelled from the region during these events.

Among the leaders of the independent states established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islam Karimov had the most significant impact on ethnic conflicts in Fergana Valley. Since Uzbekistan's independence, Karimov has been instrumental in fomenting ethnic tensions among Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz in the valley through the implementation of stringent policies. In 1990, he led a heavy-handed response to clashes between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks in Fergana, and following the 1999 Tashkent attacks, he increased security measures in the valley, making border crossings between Uzbek-Tajik communities more difficult (Matveeva, 2006). Among the leaders of the independent states established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Islamic Karimov had the greatest impact on ethnic conflicts in the Fergana Valley. Following the establishment of independence in Uzbekistan, Karimov was accused of exacerbating ethnic tensions in Fergana Valley through the implementation of controversial policies. In 1990, he presided over a robust response to confrontations between the Uzbeks and the Meskhetian Turks in Fergana. After the 1999 Tashkent assaults, he augmented security measures in the valley, thereby rendering border crossings between Uzbek-Tajik communities more arduous (Matveeva 2006).

The post-independence leader Askar Akayev (President of Kyrgyzstan, 1991–2005) also took a more repressive stance towards the Tajik and Uzbek minorities in the Kyrgyz region of the Fergana Valley (Batken region) in 1999 and 2000. He tolerated the rise of Kyrgyz nationalism in his country and implemented border policies that deepened ethnic divisions. As for Kurmanbek Bakiyev (President of Kyrgyzstan, 2005–2010), his family's



rhetoric in favor of Kyrgyz nationalism was particularly influential in the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflicts of 2010. In the Osh and Jalalabad incidents in 2010, the Kyrgyz security forces were ineffective against Uzbeks or directly took sides, deepening the ethnic divide in the region. Similarly, Emomali Rahmon (President of Tajikistan, 1994–present) increased the ethnic divide in the Fergana Valley during the civil war in Tajikistan (1992–1997) through his harsh rhetoric against Uzbekistan and repressive policies against the Uzbek minority living in Tajikistan. By underinvesting in infrastructure projects in the Tajik settlements bordering Uzbekistan, he reinforced the economic and social exclusion of Uzbeks in these regions (Klimentov, 2023).

Manipulation of ethnic divisions in the Fergana Valley by political leaders is one of the main causes of conflicts and tensions in the region. This process, which started with Stalin's border policies, continued with the policies of subsequent leaders, and continues to have an impact today. Therefore, to ensure peace and stability in the region, it is essential to understand the effects of past policies and develop policies that consider them. This information has been compiled from cited academic sources and can be used to understand the historical background of the ethnic dynamics in the Fergana Valley.

### **The Dynamics of the Conflict**

Fergana Valley's intricate social structure, ethnic heterogeneity, and abundant natural resources have historically posed both benefits and challenges to regional stability. This dynamic became particularly salient in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's dissolution. The conflict dynamics in the Fergana Valley are influenced by several pivotal factors, including sociocultural elements such as the inequitable distribution of limited resources, inter-ethnic mistrust, and historical prejudices. Over time, these elements have led to the emergence of social comparison mechanisms within the valley, thereby exacerbating social and political segregation (Aleksandrovna, 2017).

The Fergana Valley is endowed with abundant natural resources in the domains of agriculture and energy production; however, the utilization and governance of these resources is a major source of contention in the region. In particular, water and land resources underpin social and economic activities in the valley. The challenge of the effective and equitable allocation of these resources is compounded by their limited nature and the presence of inter-state borders. The Syr Darya River and its irrigation systems are of particular importance to the region as they are critical for the continuity of agricultural production. However, the regional distribution of water has been a constant source of tension among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan (Spoor, 1999). As source countries, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan prioritize the use of water from dams for energy production, whereas Uzbekistan requires a steady flow of water for agriculture. This discord over water allocation has frequently led to mutual accusations and crises, particularly during the dry season (Spoor 1999).

The border adjustments implemented during the Soviet era resulted in the dispersion of ethnic populations and agriculturally productive lands between different countries. In particular, the use of fertile agricultural land in Uzbekistan by communities in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan has led to frequent disputes over land ownership and use rights (Tutinova et al., 2018). This has increased the competition between local populations and led to growing cross-border tensions. Hydropower projects in the valley are also an important area of conflict, as Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's efforts to gain greater control over water for energy production are often met with resistance from Uzbekistan (Tutinova et al. 2018). The inequitable distribution of energy resources deepens economic imbalances in the valley while increasing interstate insecurity (Hanks, 2009).

The dynamics of conflict in Fergana Valley are underpinned by issues of resource sharing. The management of critical resources, including water, land, and energy, carries not only economic ramifications but also social and political consequences. To ensure long-term peace and stability in the valley, mechanisms must be developed to ensure fair and sustainable sharing of these resources. The multi-ethnic nature of Fergana Valley is both a source of wealth and tension in social and political terms. The presence of historical, social, and economic mistrust between major ethnic groups, such as the Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks, has been identified as a key element of conflict dynamics in the region (Tutinova et al., 2018). This mistrust has been exacerbated by historical prejudices, border disputes, and cultural differences. The interethnic mistrust in Fergana Valley is deeply rooted in historical prejudices and the region's social fabric.

- Soviet Era Policies: The Soviet Union's nation-building efforts had the effect of sharpening ethnic identities and emphasizing the differences between groups, which in turn increased ethnic segregation (Edgar, 2006). This was especially evident during the demarcation of borders, as historical ties between Uzbeks, Tajiks, and Kyrgyz were ignored, making it difficult for different ethnic groups to live together in the same region.
- The Impact of Past Conflicts: The impact of past conflicts on social dynamics is a complex and multifaceted issue. One notable example is the ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley in 1989 and 1990, which served to exacerbate historical prejudices between groups in the region. In particular, tensions between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz over land use and access to economic opportunities have had a detrimental effect on social ties (Gabdulhakov, 2017).

The presence of mistrust among ethnic groups is often attributed to mechanisms of social comparison. These mechanisms, which facilitate the perception of disparities between the economic, social, and political positions of diverse ethnic groups, have been identified as contributing factors to the escalation of mistrust.

- Economic Competition and Perceptions of Discrimination: Uzbeks are generally seen as more economically advantaged, while dissatisfaction with this situation is widespread

among Tajiks and Kyrgyz (Hanks, 2009). Groups living in rural areas in particular feel that resources and economic opportunities are not shared equally.

- Problems of Political Representation: The perception that ethnic groups are not adequately represented in regional issues increases political distrust. Local governments, especially those established in the post-Soviet period, did not adequately take into account the interests of different ethnic groups, leading to ethnic conflicts (Roy, 2018).

Despite the commonalities shared among various ethnic groups in the Fergana Valley, including Islam as a unifying factor, significant disparities in religious practices and cultural traditions have persisted. These variations have the potential to cause discord and mistrust among the groups. A salient example of this dynamic is the linguistic divide between Tajiks, who speak a Persian-based language, and Uzbeks and Kyrgyz, who primarily use Turkic languages. This linguistic heterogeneity has ramifications, particularly concerning access to education and public services (Khalid 2014). Furthermore, perceptions of threats to social and cultural practices from the social and cultural practices of other groups can impede harmonization in various domains of social life.

Inter-ethnic mistrust is a significant factor that erodes the social cohesion of the Fergana Valley and imperial regional stability. Historical prejudices, social comparison mechanisms, and cultural segregation exacerbate this mistrust (Bekmirzaev 2024). A comprehensive and enduring solution requires the implementation of policies designed to foster mutual understanding and cooperation among ethnic groups. Moreover, the reduction of economic inequalities and establishment of a fair representation system are imperative to mitigate the mistrust that has been observed.

### **Case Studies of Major Conflicts**

Throughout history, the Fergana Valley has witnessed multiple waves of ethnic conflict often triggered by disputes over land, water resources, and political control. The interplay of economic disparities, artificial borders, and historical grievances has repeatedly escalated into violence, leaving lasting impacts on the region's stability. The following case studies highlight some of the most significant instances of interethnic clashes in Fergana Valley. By analyzing these events, we can discern patterns of conflict recurrence, identify key drivers of violence, and explore the role of political actors in mitigating or exacerbating tensions. Each case study provides insight into the underlying causes, the nature of violence, and its broader consequences for regional security and ethnic relations. These conflicts underscore the urgent need for effective conflict resolution mechanisms, sustainable resource management, and diplomatic initiatives to foster long-term regional peace. By examining past incidents, policymakers and scholars can better understand the complexities of ethnic relations in Fergana Valley and develop informed strategies to prevent future violence.

### ***1989 Fergana Pogrom (Conflict against Meskhetian Turks)***

In 1989, a grave ethnic conflict emerged between the Uzbeks and Meskheti Turks residing in the Fergana Valley region of Uzbekistan. The genesis of this conflict can be traced back to the Stalin era expulsion of Meskheti Turks from Georgia and their subsequent resettlement in the region. Economic competition and the local population's perception of Meskheti Turks as "foreigners" emerged as significant catalysts for these events. The consequences of this conflict were significant, with hundreds of Meskheti Turks losing their lives and thousands being compelled to seek refuge beyond the region. This episode is a poignant example of how a deficient central administration within the late Soviet Union engendered a pervasive sense of insecurity and instability in Fergana Valley.

### ***1990 Osh Conflict (Uzbek–Kyrgyz Conflict)***

The 1990 Uzbek–Kyrgyz Conflict, which took place in the Osh region of Kyrgyzstan, has been documented as one of the bloodiest conflicts in the valley (Arzymatova & Atykanova, 2022). The primary source of the conflict stemmed from disputes over land ownership, with the Uzbek minority in Osh perceiving the Kyrgyz majority's endeavors to expand their farmland as a threat to their existence. This tension escalated into violent conflict with local leaders manipulating ethnic identities (Bekmirzaev, 2022). The conflict led to a significant loss of life, with hundreds of casualties, and resulted in the displacement of thousands. This example highlights the long-term challenges posed by the arbitrary delineation of borders in the Fergana Valley (Arzymatova & Atykanova, 2022).

### ***1999 Batken Crisis***

In 1999, the activities of Islamist radical groups, particularly the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the Batken region of the Fergana Valley in Kyrgyzstan, led to an escalation in ethnic and religious tensions. This escalation originated from the IMU's quest to overthrow the government of Uzbekistan, which subsequently led to cross-border conflicts. The IMU's infiltration of the Batken region posed a significant threat to the local population, thereby precipitating a security crisis among the countries of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This incident underscores the assertion that the dynamics of security in the region are not solely driven by ethnic conflicts, but are also influenced by the presence of radical groups (Suyunbaev & Bondarets, 2003).

### ***2010 Osh and Jalalabad Conflicts***

The 2010 resurgence of ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan (Osh and Jalalabad) signifies a critical juncture in the region's recent history, marked by profound socio-political tensions. The prevailing political instability in Kyrgyzstan,

compounded by the post-revolutionary period's authority vacuum, has contributed to the eruption of these conflicts. The Kyrgyz majority's perception of the Uzbek minority as an economically dominant group has been a catalyst for the escalation of violence. The subsequent clashes resulted in significant loss of life and displacement of large numbers of individuals, underscoring the pervasive challenges of social cohesion and the prevalence of ethnic tensions in the region (TACC, 2015).

### ***2021 Border Conflicts (between Uzbekistan–Kyrgyzstan–Tajikistan)***

In 2021, the primary sources of conflict at the intersections of the borders of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan centered around water resources and border disputes. These conflicts stemmed mainly from disputes over the use of water resources and border crossings. The artificial demarcation of borders during the Soviet era and the existence of enclaves further complicate such conflicts. These confrontations have resulted in significant casualties among military personnel and civilians from all three countries (Ryskulova, 2022).

As we move forward, it is essential to not only analyze past conflicts but also to derive actionable lessons that can inform future conflict resolution efforts. Understanding these historical patterns provides a foundation for developing pragmatic policy solutions that address the root causes of violence. In the next section, we will explore potential strategies for mitigating conflict in the region, focusing on policy recommendations that promote cooperation, economic stability, and diplomatic engagement.

### **Proposals**

A comprehensive multidimensional approach is imperative to resolve conflict dynamics in the Fergana Valley and ensure regional stability. Interidentity dialogue and reconciliation processes are crucial for lasting peace between ethnic groups in the valley. It is recommended that common platforms and cultural exchange programs be established to break down the historical prejudices and mistrust between ethnic groups. Such a process allows both individuals and communities to understand each other and develop cooperation. In particular, the implementation of collaborative cultural initiatives endorsed by local administrations has been shown to facilitate interactions among diverse societal groups. Moreover, the incorporation of mechanisms aimed at fostering reconciliation with the assistance of international mediators has been shown to contribute to the resolution of past conflicts and alleviation of their associated trauma (Özçelik, 2023). Regional actors such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) have been suggested to mediate such reconciliation processes. On the other hand, concrete steps towards direct mediation initiatives by organizations such as OTS and SCO are limited.

Resource sharing is one of the most critical conflict elements in Fergana Valley. Equitable and sustainable management of resources such as water, land, and energy is key to reducing tensions in the region. To maintain the economic vitality of the valley, a resource-management system that fosters multilateral cooperation must be established. Co-management platforms can be important tools in this process. They can provide a neutral framework for the efficient use of water resources, ensuring fairness in land distribution and optimizing energy sharing (Hanks, 2011). Such a governance model could also allow the Organization of Turkic States to play the role of a regional coordinator.

Education and awareness-raising play a critical role in building a lasting culture of peace in the Fergana Valley. Education should aim to promote tolerance and mutual respect between different ethnic groups. In particular, programs targeting younger generations will be a fundamental investment in building a peaceful future. Curricula that present ethnic diversity as a source of richness can be effective in breaking down historical prejudices and stereotypes. In addition, community events focused on tolerance and peace education can strengthen social bonds between groups (Aondover et al., 2024). Media campaigns should also play a role in this process, emphasizing messages of peace rather than discourses that fuel ethnic tensions.

Solutions for peace and stability in the Fergana Valley should be supported by regional and international cooperation. The Organization of Turkic States can play an important mediating and facilitating role in this context. The existing efforts of the OTS to strengthen cultural and political ties among Central Asian countries can provide a model for resolving the problems in the Fergana Valley. In addition, international organizations could support peace initiatives in the valley through human rights and development projects. Investment in economic development projects by global actors such as the World Bank or the United Nations would be a critical step to alleviate regional social and economic imbalances (Fumagalli, 2007).

**Table 1:** Table of Solution Suggestions

Solution Proposal	Explanation	Expected Impact
Social Solidarity and Cohesion	Establish joint forums, cultural exchange programs, and mediation mechanisms	Trust between groups is increased and the ground is prepared for cooperation.
Fair Management of Resources	Developing platforms for transparent and shared management of water, land, and energy resources	Economic tensions are reduced, encouraging cooperation rather than competition for resources.
Training and Awareness Activities	Education programs, tolerance workshops, and media campaigns promoting ethnic diversity	Prejudices are broken down, awareness is raised in society, and a peaceful atmosphere is created.
Regional and International Cooperation	Strengthening regional platforms, increasing the role of international observers	Regional stability is strengthened and economic development is supported.

## Conclusion

The conflicts in the Fergana Valley illustrate the deep-seated challenges posed by ethnic fragmentation, resource competition, and political instability. The region's strategic significance, combined with the legacies of Soviet-imposed borders and economic inequalities, has contributed to its status as a persistent site of interethnic violence. This study has demonstrated that conflicts in the Valley are not isolated events but part of a broader pattern of contestation over land, water, and governance.

A key takeaway from this analysis is that ethnic tensions are frequently exacerbated by political actors who manipulate divisions for their own benefit, rather than inherent animosities between groups. The case studies examined in this research highlight how localized disputes over natural resources and border issues can escalate into larger-scale conflicts, often fueled by nationalist rhetoric and economic disparities. Understanding these dynamics is essential to formulating effective conflict mitigation strategies.

Moving forward, sustainable peace in the Fergana Valley will require a combination of diplomatic engagement, economic cooperation, and fair resource management. Regional organizations such as the Turkic States Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization have a critical role to play in fostering dialogue and facilitating cross-border collaboration. Equally important is the establishment of transparent governance mechanisms to ensure equitable access to resources and prevent further marginalization of ethnic minorities.

Ultimately, the findings of this study underscore the importance of proactive conflict prevention measures. Without concrete policy interventions and regional cooperation, the underlying drivers of conflict will continue to threaten stability in the Fergana Valley. Long-term diplomatic initiatives, economic investment, and community-driven reconciliation efforts are essential for fostering sustainable peace in one of Central Asia's most contested regions. The Fergana Valley's ethnic conflicts are deeply rooted in historical border divisions, resource competition, and political manipulation. Empirical analysis of major conflicts in the region demonstrates that economic inequalities, water disputes, and ethnic segregation continue to drive instability. To mitigate these challenges, diplomatic engagement and policy-driven initiatives will be crucial for promoting lasting peace.

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# Pakistan: Vanished Livelihoods. Reverberations of Civil War in Swat

Haseeb BHATTI, Steven LIM

**Abstract.** This case study relies on primary data from a household survey conducted in conflict-affected Swat. The methodology consists of a two-step procedure. First, the k-means clustering tool validates the household classification in Swat. Second, we identify asset-base (human, physical, social, natural, and financial) constraints in pursuing alternative high-return and sustainable livelihood possibilities. The specific limitations in human and financial capital are observed. We highlight priority improvements in wide-ranging infrastructural necessities. These have strong potential to make household livelihood choices sustainable again. Such sustainability is likely to diminish their chances of sympathizing with and joining militants again. If not, they may fall under their strong influence again.

**Keywords:** Post-war livelihoods, Taliban and Swat, Civil war, post-war reconstruction.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 51, April 2025, pp. 18–40

DOI: 10.24193/csq.51.2  
Published First Online: April 03, 2025

## 1. Introduction

Violent civil conflicts are among the most severe man-made disasters, shocks, and catastrophes, and they have immense consequences. Escalated conflicts, particularly civil wars, devastate physical infrastructure and natural resources, limit occupational choices, disrupt education and healthcare services, and displace populations. Civil wars create food insecurity, which, if it worsens, often results in famine (as seen in Somalia, Ethiopia, Sudan, and, more recently, Yemen). Civil

wars contain factors that disrupt lives and lead to man-made famines. In addition, war causes injuries, physical disabilities, and casualties among civilians.

Despite the devastating nature of civil wars, there is limited evidence in the literature on how civil war explicitly damages and disrupts household livelihoods in war-affected regions. While some destruction in conflict zones may be similar, much of it is region- and household-specific. Answers to such questions hold significance beyond academic concerns. Many post-conflict recovery efforts—aimed at achieving maximum impact—depend on meaningful investigations and findings about ‘who has been affected and to what extent’. Therefore, such investigations are more insightful when they analyze a specific civil conflict and its aftermath, rather than drawing broad conclusions. Despite approximately 20 years of foreign military presence, massive financial aid, and development programs, efforts failed to prevent the Taliban’s resurgence and their militant takeover of the entirety of Afghanistan.

However, studying conflicts directly may be difficult: a war zone is not welcoming to outsiders. Data collection, and sometimes even visits to conflict areas, are restricted by government forces and pose risks due to the potential presence of rebels. Thus, it is understandable that many post-conflict studies focusing on households rely on published data from national or international sources.

Nevertheless, few studies are based on literature reviews. For example, Wiggins et al. (2021) primarily analyze the effects of conflict on livelihoods in 11 countries and find variations in the nature and severity of consequences at the national level. Alternatively, Kaila and Azad (2019) use telephone interviews and a panel dataset from a local public organization in Kenya. They examine post-conflict household welfare in three regions of Kenya.

These examples strengthen our argument that primary data collection in affected regions remains risky and rare. Moreover, reliable panel surveys make it difficult to extract information in conflict regions (as explained in detail later in this article). Because people migrate during wars, they may not resettle in their pre-conflict habitats.

Furthermore, considerable literature relies on secondary data sources. Among recent studies that rely on published household data are Badiuzzaman et al. (2020), D’Souza and Jolliffe (2012) for Afghanistan, and Justino et al. (2012) for six conflict-affected contexts, particularly regarding their impact on women. Following a similar data pattern based on a national survey, Minoiu and Shemyakina (2012) quantify post-conflict child health complexities in Côte d’Ivoire. Rockmore (2017) compares the welfare costs of risks associated with violence in neighboring areas with those in active conflict areas of Northern Uganda. It is relevant to mention that these authors acknowledge that collecting primary data from conflict-ridden regions is risky and challenging. Nevertheless, an argument can be made that reliance on published data sources (which are often limited) may constrain the selection of parameters and, to some extent, the objectives of the study.

Despite the complications involved, recent conflict literature—which is still limited—shows little interest in directly examining affected households and the local (micro) impacts of

violence using primary data sources. To cite a few, Shah and Shahbaz (2015)—although at a limited level—analyze the rationale behind post-conflict livelihoods in Swat, which is also the study area for this article. Similarly, a study by Fransen and Mazzucato (2014) explores remittances as a worthwhile safety net in the post-conflict rebuilding and resettlement phase in urban Burundi. Likewise, Blattman and Miguel (2009), Bozzoli et al. (2009) and Justino (2009) base their studies on primary data from conflict-affected regions.

This article seeks to determine how economic shocks caused by the civil war between the Taliban and military forces in the Swat region might affect the sustainable livelihoods of households. The point of departure from existing literature is that we focus on detailed household asset base endowments and adopt an approach based on the sustainable livelihood framework (SLF). This method is used both for household data collection and for analyzing the livelihood patterns of post-conflict households in Swat. Violent conflicts have multiple impacts on rural and urban households, livelihood options, assets, and outcomes for households and various institutions—conflict in Swat was no exception. Therefore, merely focusing on the impact of conflict on employment and income opportunities was insufficient and unconvincing.

The primary data at hand first allow us to categorize households into distinct livelihood portfolios using k-means clustering. These portfolios comprise five major income- and labor-specific strategies. Clustering households with identical livelihood strategies (LS) advances our analysis. It may also support post-conflict public investment strategies; a clear distinction of LS could be useful for efficient interventions where they are needed most. We further model these livelihood choices as a function of post-war core asset endowments (physical, financial, human, social, and natural) and investigate how damaged or limited war-torn assets constrain the pursuit of high-return portfolios in Swat.

### ***1.1 Background: The Civil War in Swat***

The Swat district was a renowned tourist-friendly region in Pakistan. *Tehrik-e-Nifaze Shariat-e-Muhammadi* (TNSM) meaning ‘the movement for enforcement of the law of Prophet Muhammad’ started multiple radical religious propaganda activities in the region in early 2000. Their escalation included a campaign to wipe out dissent, alongside other militant activities, which included the recruitment of local people and militant training. Political opponents, security personnel, and independent journalists were killed, often executed by beheading. Moreover, the Islamic movement promised to end the dominance of large landlords and offered Sharia law as an answer to public grievances, particularly as a rapid solution to land disputes. They launched armed attacks on business locations and began blowing up infrastructure, such as power supplies, bridges, government offices, and girls’ schools—declaring them un-Islamic (Bhatti, 2015; Torwali, 2009). By force, they took full control of the district. Finally, the state responded, and a full-scale civil war erupted between the Taliban and military forces in mid-2009. The war ended when the Taliban retreated and fled Swat.

Household economic activities and assets were greatly affected. Orchards, the key to Swat's agriculture, were damaged, and houses suspected of serving as safe havens for opponents were demolished. In addition to orchard farming, Swat's economy relies heavily on tourism, which came to a complete standstill, and tourism-related businesses suffered greatly. Businesses such as hotels, restaurants, and thousands of various shops were either destroyed or permanently closed.

During field visits and discussions for this study, it was reported that those who remained in business not only suffered substantial income losses but also faced job cuts and wage reductions—resulting in widespread underemployment and unemployment.

During the war, shelling, aerial bombings, militants, and military movements further damaged crops, fruits, and irrigation sources such as canals, tube wells, dug wells, and flood embankments. Moreover, the civil war in Swat resulted in the large-scale internal displacement of the population. The World Bank (2009) estimated that more than 140,000 families were displaced from the Swat District. The war left devastating, visible impacts on the infrastructure, regional economy, and households. Houses, land, and road networks were severely damaged, and bridges that are major physical and communication links among many towns were either partially damaged or destroyed. In addition, the presence of approximately 30,000 military troops altered normal life even after the retreat of the Taliban from Swat (Duparq, 2011).

Beyond the introduction above, this article proceeds as follows: the next section scans some micro post-conflict household studies and briefly presents the analytical framework. Subsequently, we explain the survey areas, data collection, limitations, and the clustering of households. Next, we present the empirical results, followed by the conclusions.

## **2. Related Research**

More than a decade ago, Justino (2006) noted the lack of focus on individuals and households in conflict-related literature and even in conflict resolution strategies. She observed that such analytical shortcomings prevailed in the absence of systematic data sets and detailed information about households. Contributing to inquiries on micro household impacts, Elahi (2015) focused on Swat and used, among other methods, a limited household survey to determine gender inequality and lapses in the post-conflict reconstruction efforts. Justino and Verwimp (2006) probe postwar household income effects for Rwanda. They note that previously land-rich and affluent households suffered income and welfare losses, including severe damage to houses and land, which decreased incomes per adult in the households.

Alternatively, postwar welfare outcomes from agricultural production in rural northern Mozambique are addressed by Bozzoli and Bruck (2009). The authors conclude that the allocation of resources to endogenously known activity choices results in better welfare outcomes than experimentation with some cash crops, which depend upon market

response. A post-war damaged economy is uncertain, and future returns and prices are likely to fluctuate. In a related study, post-war cropping patterns and investment decisions—made under varying degrees of fear about renewed violence in rural areas of Chittagong—are observed by Badiuzzaman et al. (2011). Such decisions include increased land use and cash crop cultivation, and complementary efforts to increase human capital. These authors seem to be in agreement with Bozzoli and Bruck's (2009) observation that the market prices of cash crops can be uncertain, and that returns from schooling years depend on future demand in local labor markets. However, Badiuzzaman et al. (2011) did not elaborate that the perception of violence prompting specific livelihood practices impacts the smallest fraction (9%) of their sample households—who express the highest sensitivity about the recurrence of violence. This study further overlooks the relative income status of this fraction: heightened fear of violence may be linked to more assets and a better income level.

Post-conflict human capital impacts are observed by Justino, Leone, and Solari (2010) for Timor-Leste, while Akresh and De Walque (2008) quantify the primary educational losses for Rwanda. These studies infer a substantial negative effect of conflict on primary school completion and on significant long-term loss of human capital among young males. Such losses involve future consequences for labor markets and productivity. Alternatively, Dourian, Litchfield, and Sabates-Wheeler (2010) analyze rural Kosovo and probe the immediate losses of social and physical assets. They note that reliance on social networks becomes difficult as neighbors and friends are experiencing similar stresses and shocks. Furthermore, the sale of physical assets provides limited returns when markets are flooded with goods, with other households doing the same.

Displacement is a typical outcome during violent conflicts—it brings vulnerability and further asset-based restraints and may completely alter the known livelihood patterns. Focusing on displaced post-conflict Colombian households, Ibanez and Moya (2009) argue that these households leave behind physical capital; natural capital becomes vulnerable (particularly crops and livestock). Such households lack formal references—assets or collateral—so credit is constrained at new destinations. Moreover, the displaced population finds it enormously difficult to enter new labor markets. Similarly, self-employment and labor market behavior in post-conflict rural Colombia are studied by Bozzoli, Bruck, and Wald (2013). They note that displacement from original habitats reduces self-employment—particularly in agriculture. A related significant aspect that emerges from displacement is that people seek refuge or asylum in other countries. Focusing on this aspect, Zimmerman and Zetter (2011) highlight the lives of Somali refugees in two host countries, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. They argue that refugees face social pressures originating from connections in their host country and exile—alongside experiencing social problems including drug use and divorce, which lead them to economic exclusion and poverty.

A village-based study by the World Bank (2007) involves a qualitative livelihood assessment for post-war Lebanon with an asset-based approach. It assesses war impacts and highlights



damage to physical and human capital, while identifying the scarcity of financial capital in reviving livelihoods. Some inspiration for the present article relies on identifying such asset base losses and constraints in Swat. However, here, the household data and adopted methodology are expected to provide new directions in studying post-war household livelihoods.

The literature discussed above evaluates the negative consequences of conflict on income and other proxy indicators of household welfare. Nevertheless, these studies have limitations, either in the data sources used or in the scope. The region-specific quantitative literature based on affected household information and centered on the SLF framework is difficult to locate. Identifying this space and contributing to micro conflict-based research, this article addresses the role of five core capitals (human, physical, natural, financial, and social) in determining livelihood choices in post-war Swat. In what follows, we aim to investigate post-conflict livelihoods and legacies and use primary household information from the rural and urban localities of the Swat district.

### ***2.1. The Livelihood strategy concept***

A livelihood strategy is a portfolio of activities and choices that people make to achieve their livelihood objectives, including productive activities, investment strategies, management of assets, and reproductive choices (Jansen et al., 2006). Moreover, secure livelihoods depend on substitution capabilities among assets and livelihoods. Low substitution potential makes livelihoods more vulnerable, particularly in times of crisis and when coping with shocks (Ellis, 2000).

The definition of livelihood was systematically expanded by the Department for International Development (1999, 2005) to form a framework. This framework identifies five core assets or capitals on which livelihoods are built. These include human capital, such as age, education, and family structure; natural capital (e.g., land, climate, and water); physical capital (e.g., equipment, tools, public facilities, and access to public infrastructure); financial capital (e.g., credit, savings, and transfers); and social capital (e.g., social relations, affiliations, and associations). Livelihood strategies determine the use of land and labor allocations, investment in education, migration decisions, and participation in strengthening social resources. Sustainable livelihoods are those that can avoid or resist stresses (predictable pressures) and shocks (unpredictable phenomena, e.g., natural disasters and civil violence) and have the ability to bounce back to their previous state (Chambers & Conway, 1991).

A number of studies focus on the Sustainable Livelihood Framework (SLF), and analyse household decisions with certain asset endowments in different settings. Notable examples as discussed later include, Alwang, et al. 2005; Jansen, et al. 2006; Ellis & Bahigwa, 2003; Ellis et al., 2003; Iiyama et al., 2008; and Tuyen & Lim, 2011.

### 3. Research sites and data

The household survey was completed by late 2011—one year after the extremely violent period—with 296 completed questionnaires. It is quite difficult to use a panel data technique (data from two points in time) in post-conflict studies, particularly if conflicts are associated with the displacement of households. On their return, they might not be living in the same houses or even the same villages or towns, depending on asset losses and available livelihood opportunities. In addition, if pre-conflict data are collected, it is practically difficult to predict the end of a particular conflict.

Five out of seven *tehsils* (subdistricts as administrative units) in the district were selected as research sites. These *tehsils* include, Babozai, Barikot, Charbagh, Khwazakhela and Matta. Each *tehsil* was covered by locally hired enumerators (who were well-versed in the local *Pashto* language). The far northern Bahrain (which includes the famous tourist destination, Kalam) and the Kabal *tehsils* were excluded. The former is 60 kilometres from Mingora (major town of the district). Its distance and dilapidated roads, military check posts and unavailability of public transport after sunset made it difficult for commuters to make one-day return trips. The latter, at the time of this survey, was inaccessible and unsafe due to ongoing targeted military operations and occasional combat. The selection of five *tehsils* and their respective study areas and provided reasonable coverage for the survey within the Swat district, and diverse income and employment patterns in a range of different geographic areas were identified.

The household data cover the asset portfolio, income, and consumption—including food and non-food items—and expenditures on health and education. The survey reveals that agricultural production is the dominant livelihood choice of 33.1 percent of households; the mean income of those households is the lowest among other livelihood activities. Nevertheless, it provides much supplementary wage work, such as planting saplings, pruning, harvesting, picking, weeding, packing, and drying fruits. Self-employment in business constitutes the second major livelihood choice, forming the primary income source for approximately 27% of the sampled households. Swat, an all-year-round tourist destination, creates multiple business opportunities for the local population.

#### *3.1. Sampling frame*

A multistage sampling design was used. In this sampling design, after an initial selection of five *tehsils*, two to six localities or villages were randomly selected depending upon the *tehsil* population. Very remote and scattered rural dwellings were excluded because access was difficult and required extensive travel. Finally, households were randomly selected for interviews. This created a sample, as Deaton (1997) mentions, in which sample households are geographically grouped (*tehsil*-wise in Swat), rather than being randomly distributed over space. A random pilot study of 50 households in Swat was conducted to investigate the feasibility of the questionnaire in Mingora and other areas, including Islampura,

Qambar, Ghalegai, Khwazakhela, and Matta. As Glewwe (2005) suggests, the pilot study was conducted in both urban and rural areas.

The percentage of households interviewed in five tehsils was approximately proportional to the population of each tehsil. For example, the most populous tehsil is Babozai, and more than 31% of the sample households were interviewed there. Notably, any updated population data for the tehsils, particularly after the large displacements, were unavailable. The proportional representation in the sample was adjusted after field discussions and in conformity with the available sample frame.

There was a successful outcome (complete and usable data) for 275 households consisting of 2,288 household persons in the conflict-affected population.

The survey collected wide ranging information about the possession of capital (human, social, natural, physical and financial). Moreover, market prices of various food crops, including horticultural products for agriculture-based households and other income-generating products, and output variations in the post-conflict era were collected. Data on land holdings were gathered. Participants were asked for any recent diversion in expenditure patterns (food, education, health, housing, etc.) in the post-conflict period.

### ***3.2. Livelihood strategy identification***

This study uses shares of income from one or more sources of total household income to make livelihood classifications in Swat. Several studies on the classification of livelihood strategies use the share of income from various sources as a group characteristic, as a baseline criterion. For example, Barrett et al. (2000) examine rural African households, and Iiyama et al. (2008) adopt this approach for rural Kenya. Similarly, Alwang et al. (2005) use this method in their study of livelihoods for three central African countries. Similarly, Dercon and Krishnan (1996) probe household characteristics and barriers to entry into higher return activities in Tanzania and Ethiopia. Lopez (2008) analyzes livelihoods in Ecuador, while Tuyen and Lim (2011) observe livelihoods in peri-urban areas of Vietnam. There is some disagreement over income-based grouping; for example, Brown et al. (2006) propose directly considering households' asset endowments when analyzing livelihood strategies. They favor that the income earned and the type of activity undertaken by a household function as a function of the assets it controls. However, their argument ignores the work of Dercon and Krishnan (1996), which highlights that an important determinant of income is the comparative advantage of households in particular activities, which results in higher outcomes. As a real-world example—in farm-based activities—two farms of the same size, even with the same crops, may give different yields, depending on farm management practices. The decisive factors could be the type of seeds used, better timing practices for farm inputs such as water, and appropriate choices for pesticides and fertilizers. In addition, household and village characteristics influence the income output of households with more or less similar asset portfolios.

### 3.3. Livelihood strategies in Swat

Field data reveal that a significant number of household members in Swat are involved in more than one income-earning activity. Approximately 68% earn income from involvement in one major activity, and around 30% diversify their labor and resources in at least two activities. For example, among households with remittance as an additional source of income, other available adult working members were found to be engaged in agricultural production, either for domestic use or as a commercial farming activity—particularly in high-return orchard farming. Similarly, some households reporting salaries from public sector jobs also reported engagement in farming activities.

Based on the income sources in the survey data, households are categorized into five major income and labor-specific strategies. According to the numerical share approach, households with 60% or more of their total income from one source are classified into that dominant livelihood group (Lopez, 2008). The remaining 40% of income in that classification may be earned from diversified livelihood patterns. This criterion identifies the major income-earning strategies for households in Swat as follows: self-employed in agriculture, self-employed in business/trading, and formal wage employment that includes jobs in the public sector. Private jobs, including jobs in other cities or countries, and households that rely on daily wages, form the informal sector. A more explicit employment classification for each livelihood group is summarized in Table I.

**Table I:** Household employment classification in Swat

Major employment category	Subcategory	Description
Agricultural production	Cash and staple crops	Fruit and vegetable farming and production of wheat, rice and maize
Self-employment in business	Ownership of retail shops and services including production activities	Retail stores for consumption goods, trading and service including tourism-based businesses like hotels and restaurants, taxi drivers, handicrafts etc.
Formal jobs	Jobs in the government sector	Stable wage work, people in teaching, working in government offices, hospitals etc.
Private sector jobs	Jobs usually less paid locally than public jobs, also includes remittance from within and outside the country	Jobs in private factories and organisations, in other small business activities, NGOs
Daily wage work	Work without formal contracts	Labour work in construction, tourism, services and agriculture, on daily wage basis

**Source:** Authors' field survey data

The household data were further analysed to inform the livelihood classification of Table I. The mean, minimum and maximum income earned during the pre-survey year were calculated and are presented in Table II, which provides standard statistical details of livelihood classification, alongside annual income.

**Table II:** Livelihood strategies and annual income from strategy choice in Swat (Pak Rupees)

Livelihood Strategy (LS)	Obs.	% of Sample	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	S.D
Daily wages (informal work) <b>LS 1</b>	25	9.1	174,576	48,000	355,200	81,899
Self - employment in business <b>LS 2</b>	73	26.6	269,159	60,000	840,000	171,949
Agricultural production <b>LS 3</b>	91	33.1	95,018	11,200	572,700	91,587
Public sector jobs (formal) <b>LS 4</b>	42	15.2	342,418	84,000	768,000	168,735
Private sector jobs + remittance <b>LS 5</b>	44	16	409,590	84,000	1,632,000	354,458
<b>Total</b>	275	100	260,462	11,200	1,930,000	245,151

Exchange rates at the time of survey can be taken as 88 PKR = 1 US \$

**Source:** The authors survey data

According to the details in Table II, agricultural production is the dominant livelihood choice for 33% of households—simultaneously, the mean income levels for those households are the lowest. Moreover, it was observed during the survey that agriculture was the most labor-intensive livelihood portfolio (both for subsistence and cash crops). It provides much subsidiary wage work such as planting saplings, pruning, harvesting, picking, weeding, packing, and drying fruits. Orchard farming in Swat historically had a high per-unit income per *jareeb* (approximately 10 *jareeb* per acre) compared to other agricultural crops. The war and subsequent large-scale displacement of households negatively impacted maintenance practices, and affected trees' fruit-bearing capacity and soil fertility. This resulted in low farm production in the post-war year.

Self-employment in business constituted the second major livelihood choice, forming the primary income source for approximately 27% of the sampled households. Swat, an all-year-round tourist destination, creates numerous business opportunities for the local population. However, in the post-war period, small entrepreneurs struggled to revive business activities and regain their pre-war dynamism. Most small businesses relied on tourist inflow, which was much lower than in pre-war years.

LS 4 (public sector jobs) and LS 5 (private sector jobs) are relatively high-return income activities. Foreign remittance-based jobs are included in LS 5. These jobs had no direct impact from the war and were uninterrupted; thus, they seem to provide higher income compared to other livelihood groups. Although public sector jobs were mostly discontinued during the war period, their formal structure prevented salary losses. Public servants were later paid salaries by their respective employers. Another livelihood strategy (informal work) based on daily wages showed visible post-war effects on income: the mean returns in this activity are greater than those from agricultural income, but the maximum returns are the lowest.

### **3.4. Cluster analysis**

Cluster analysis is a statistical data reduction method that summarizes large observations into a smaller number of distinct groups or clusters. The formal definition of groups or clusters is mostly performed intuitively (Everitt et al., 2011). The central idea in group-based identification is that common features enable the agglomeration of individual observations into small groups based on similarity along predetermined dimensions (Brown et al., 2006). The items (or variables) or people in each cluster are similar to each other and contrast with those in other clusters.

We applied this statistical tool to further validate the household classifications in Swat. As studies explaining cluster partitioning note, this method requires establishing the number of clusters a priori (Bernhardt et al., 1996). Observations are randomly assigned to each of the k-clusters at the initial analysis stage and then reassigned with an iterative method so that the within-cluster variance is minimized and the between-cluster variance is maximized. This method does not require deciding on a distance measure; it uses Euclidean distances, an extension of Pythagoras' theorem (Sarstedt & Mooi, 2011). They further regard k-means as superior to hierarchical methods because it is less affected by outliers and irrelevant clustering variables.

The available household data from Swat adequately fulfilled the fundamental requirement of k-means: predefining the number of clusters. The classification (as discussed earlier) is based on more than 60% of household income being earned from the dominant livelihood strategy. The clustering algorithm produced five robust clusters (i.e.,  $k = 5$ ): the output minimizes the variability within clusters and maximizes the variability between clusters.

## **4. Empirical strategy**

The effects of asset endowment on livelihood choices are observed next—by using a multinomial logit model (MLM). In this model the livelihood strategies (LS 1 ... LS 5) are used as limited dependent variables and as a function of household characteristics. MLM is appropriate for determining where the outcomes can be hypothesised to be dissimilar (Hausman & McFadden, 1984; McFadden 1974). As the previous livelihood classification and cluster analysis distinctively identified five mutually exclusive livelihood strategies in Swat, this makes MLM applicable. A general formulation of the multinomial model given by Dourian et al. (2010) is:

$$P_j = \frac{\exp(\beta x_j)}{\sum_j \exp(\beta x_j)} = \text{for } j = 0, 1 \dots j \quad (1)$$

where  $P_j$  is the probability of selecting portfolio  $j$ , from a set of  $J + 1$  portfolios (here  $j + 1 = 5$ ), and  $x_j$  is a vector of variables influencing the choice of portfolio. The parameters  $\beta$  are estimated for the reference portfolio, i.e., agriculture in this particular analysis.

On the basis of the above, the equation used for the forthcoming livelihood analysis becomes:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Livelihood outcomes} = & \beta_1 \text{Livelihood choices} + \beta_2 \text{Natural capital} + \\ & \beta_3 \text{Human capital} + \beta_4 \text{Social capital} + \\ & \beta_5 \text{Physical capital} + \beta_6 \text{Financial capital} + \varepsilon \end{aligned} \quad (2)$$

#### 4.1. Model Specifications

The parameters selected for human capital include household size, which determines labor availability. Furthermore, the total number of men and women in the working age category (16 to 60 years) also captures the labor endowment in the model. Other human capital variables include the mean age of household members aged 16 to 60 years who were employed in the one-year pre-survey period. The average educational attainment of the same household group is also included in the model. Studies by Alwang et al. (2005) and Jansen et al. (2006) regard the education of the household head as a contributing variable in identifying livelihood strategies. However, in the cultural and social context of this study area, they may not be the main earner in the household. The mean years of education for household members are recorded in some studies (Jansen et al., 2006), but this could improperly reflect the formal educational status of households in the Swat district. This is because, as survey data reveal, about eight percent of children of both genders are either currently enrolled in or have been enrolled in madrassas. Madrassas teach religious education and provide accommodations and food to those enrolled. The formal educational syllabus is not part of madrasa education. Household members enrolled in madrassas reported this as education, but educational attainment for some members in religious seminaries and for others in formal educational institutions was difficult to compare in the study area.

Moreover, the proportion of females aged 16 to 60, considered similar to the male labor endowment in labor markets, is included. Gender is often found to constrain the patterns of income diversification pursued by the household, either directly due to the total or partial prohibition of women working outside the home, or indirectly by giving girls less access to schooling than boys (Ellis, 1998). This observation was validated during our survey in Swat and established its relevance for the study area, as less than 1% of female members reported working outside the home in formal employment.

Physical capital was destroyed or severely damaged on a large scale in Swat. Public utilities and infrastructure such as communication networks, bridges, electricity supplies, health facilities, and educational institutions became the targets of militants. Physical capital becomes much more significant in determining post-conflict livelihood choices (Dourian et al., 2010). Alwang et al. (2005) use predictors of physical capital, which include distance to key facilities and access to paved roads in livelihood analysis. Their approach is modified in this study, based on more detailed in-hand information from the field survey—a variable representing scores for household access to various basic public utilities was used. These



scores are based on a list of 15 basic household facilities and public utilities in Swat. The list contained the basic assets required for sustainable living in Swat. The scores for households range from 0 to 15. For example, if a household had access to or was using 10 out of 15 assets, it received a score of 10. Another physical capital variable represented the monetary value of the household's productive assets, including machines, tools, and other useful household items. Households were found to have few assets, and the calculated mean values were quite low. The total asset values in Pakistani rupees were divided by 1000 to make the unit coefficient values in the MNL model results more meaningful: a one-unit change represents a change of Rs.1000 in asset values. Otherwise, the unit change in the original currency values would be very small and could be difficult to interpret.

The variables for financial capital are included. A lack of financing can create barriers to entry into high-return activities and hinder the enhancement of human capital. Moreover, financial constraints prevent the adoption of proactive management practices in farm-based livelihood selection, such as the timely and suitable use of different farm inputs and investment in farm care practices. In response to a survey question, households considered a lack of finances to be a major constraint on remunerative outcomes. Following Brown et al. (2006), determinants of financial capital, such as self-reported access to credit and receipt of remittance payments, are included.

Social capital is represented differently in studies of livelihood choices. For example, Alwang et al. (2005) regard participation in agricultural organizations in Africa, while Jansen et al. (2006) focus on membership in various formal groups and organizations. This study's environment lacked a strong presence of formal groups and associations, while horizontal dimensions of social capital are widespread in Swat. Mostly, family, relatives, and friends are the main sources of, and hope for, financial help and other assistance during difficult household circumstances. Therefore, expressions of confidence and trust in many people who can be helpful during difficult household circumstances, and confidence in more than three people outside the immediate family—who can provide financial assistance during a crisis—are included as variables.

Natural capital, like physical capital, is significantly affected during violent conflict. In a predominantly agrarian setting, such effects become more damaging for households that rely on agriculture. The displacement of more than one million people from Swat left farms and orchards unattended, while explosives and shells damaged land, crops, and fertility. Livestock perished. Moreover, the availability of canal water—the major source of irrigation—was disrupted. Although farm size is used in many studies as a proxy for natural capital (e.g. Barrett et al., 2000; Brown et al., 2006; Dercon & Krishnan, 1996), production patterns like subsistence or orchard farming matter more in Swat. In a largely mountainous region, most farms are smaller than those in the plains of the country. Even the smallest unit—one acre of land—can provide a reasonable income. The specific fruits and off-season patterns of vegetable farming make per *jareeb* farm earnings higher than those in other areas. In this context, land ownership rather than land size is used in the

model. Variables that represent natural capital include ownership of land and access to canal water for irrigation purposes.

#### ***4.2. Results and discussion***

The numerically largest household group among the classifications above participates in agricultural production and receives earnings from subsistence crop cultivation or orchard farming. Household cluster (3) was selected as the base category to analyze whether livelihood diversification into other earning and occupation categories—apart from agricultural self-employment—can be regarded as systematically different from other livelihood choices. The outcome of the analysis, parameter estimates, and the relative risk ratios (RRR) for the multinomial logit model are presented in Table III.

RRR can be interpreted as how many times (or (RRR-1) percent) a one-unit change in the corresponding variable will increase or decrease the likelihood of choosing an outcome relative to the base outcome (agriculture in this article). For example, if the age of employed household members increases by one unit (year), the relative risk of diversification into comparatively low-income daily wage work relative to earning all income from agricultural farming is expected to decrease by a factor of 0.93 or 7% (parameter estimate), given that the other variables in the model are held constant.

The results in Table III show that pursuing daily wages in Swat is negatively related to the age of the working household members. Daily wage work is mostly available in construction or tourism-related businesses and is often physically more demanding—sometimes requiring longer hours than formal employment. This makes it difficult for older people to become involved in this form of income generation. Moreover, in the construction and rebuilding activities that followed the war, most of the contracts were awarded to the military, and their regularly employed workforce provided construction labor.

The tourism industry was estimated to employ 40,000 regular and irregular workers before the conflict—most of whom remained out of work even after peace was restored (World Bank, 2009). Another parameter, land ownership, increases the likelihood of preferring agricultural production relative to the alternative strategy of daily wage work.

Self-employment in businesses (LS2) consists of small-scale enterprises to medium-sized business establishments. It includes a variety of family-based businesses such as shops, retail outlets, and businesses providing essential services. As expected, the surveyed businesses in Swat significantly rely on household size and labor endowment to decrease labor and business running costs—avoiding, as much as possible, the hiring of formal or informal wage workers from the labor force. The RRR value for household size is 1.285. This implies a positive association between an increase in household size and the likelihood of continuing self-employment in business compared to agricultural production. One additional family member increases the probability of pursuing self-employment in business rather than adopting the alternative strategy of agricultural production.

**Table III:** Multinomial logit regression of livelihood strategies in Swat.  
Parameter estimates and Relative Risk Ratio (RRR)

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	RRR
<i>Daily wages versus Agricultural production</i>			
<b>Human Capital</b>			
Household size	0.028	0.225	1.029
Total HH members (age 15 to 60)	0.254	0.261	1.289
Average age of employed members	-0.071	0.036	<b>0.930*</b>
Average education of employed members	-0.086	0.079	0.916
Percentage of Female 15 +	-0.017	0.033	0.982
<b>Physical Capital</b>			
Access to Public Facilities	-0.094	0.145	0.910
Household Asset Value	-0.000	0.000	0.999
<b>Financial Capital</b>			
Remittance	-15.104	959.9	2.76e-07
Got credit/loan for any purpose	-0.539	0.853	0.583
<b>Social Capital</b>			
Association with family and community	1.174	0.792	3.235
Financers in need	-0.460	0.761	0.630
<b>Natural Capital</b>			
Land ownership	-6.316	1.158	<b>0.001**</b>
Canal water availability	0.055	0.714	1.057
<i>Self-employment in business versus Agriculture production</i>			
<b>Human Capital</b>			
Household size	0.251	0.131	<b>1.285*</b>
Total HH members (age 15 to 60)	-0.037	0.171	0.962
Average age of employed members	-0.039	0.023	<b>0.961†</b>
Average education of employed members	0.066	0.051	1.068
Percentage of Female 15 +	-0.005	0.023	0.994
<b>Physical Capital</b>			
Access to Public Facilities	0.018	0.086	1.018
Household Asset Value	0.000	0.000	<b>1.000*</b>
<b>Financial Capital</b>			
Remittance	0.078	0.544	1.082
Got credit/loan for any purpose	-0.679	0.504	0.497
<b>Social Capital</b>			
Association with family and community	0.525	0.505	1.690
Financers in need	0.525	0.542	0.996
<b>Natural Capital</b>			
Land ownership	-4.765	0.747	<b>0.008*</b>
Canal water availability	-0.346	0.460	0.707

Variable	Coefficient	Std. Error	RRR
<b>Human Capital</b>			
Household size	-0.009	0.144	0.990
Total HH members (age 15 to 60)	0.105	0.185	1.111
Average age of employed members	-0.025	0.026	0.974
Average education of employed members	0.289	0.067	<b>1.335*</b>
Percentage of Female 15 +	-0.132	0.024	0.986
<b>Physical Capital</b>			
Access to Public Facilities	0.037	0.092	1.038
Household Asset Value	0.000023	0.00001**	1.000
<b>Financial Capital</b>			
Remittance	0.959	<b>0.508</b>	<b>2.610†</b>
Got credit/loan for any purpose	-1.252	0.518	<b>0.285*</b>
<b>Social Capital</b>			
Association with family and community	0.959	0.547*	2.611
Financers in need	0.102	0.586	1.108
<b>Natural Capital</b>			
Land ownership	-2.712	0.830	<b>0.066*</b>
Canal water availability	-0.523	0.497	0.592
<b><i>Private jobs + Remittance versus Agriculture production</i></b>			
<b>Human Capital</b>			
Household size	0.0196	0.127	1.019
Total HH members (age 15 to 60)	0.335	0.164	<b>1.398†</b>
Average age of employed members	-0.055	0.21	<b>0.945**</b>
Average education of employed members	0.015	0.053	1.015
Percentage of Female 15 +	-0.032	0.023	0.968
<b>Physical Capital</b>			
Access to Public Facilities	0.045	0.088	1.046
Household Asset Value	0.00002	0.000011	<b>1.000*</b>
<b>Financial Capital</b>			
Remittance	0.064	0.544	1.066
Got credit/loan for any purpose	-1.470	0.502	0.229**
<b>Social Capital</b>			
Association with family and community	0.027	0.516	1.028
Financers in need	0.796	0.592	2.217
<b>Natural Capital</b>			
Land ownership	-3.642	0.777	<b>0.026**</b>
Canal water availability	0.631	0.489	1.880
Prob > chi 2	0.000		
Pseudo R <sup>2</sup>	0.3335		
Observations	275		

Statistically significant at 10% (†), at 5% (\*) and at 1% (\*\*)

Source: The authors' survey data

Since land ownership in Pakistan is considered a common diversification option and safe investment, as land prices rarely fall. Moreover, agricultural activity can be pursued on a part-time basis. The empirical results confirm this option and show a significant negative association between land ownership and small business holding as a livelihood strategy. Land ownership decreases the likelihood of pursuing self-employment in business compared to the alternative strategy of agricultural production.

Public sector employment (LS 4) is considered a preferred livelihood choice in Pakistan, particularly among lower- and middle-income groups. Economic fluctuations do not affect salaries, and public sector employment is also associated with pensions and other work-related benefits. Households in Swat show similar opinions. In response to a survey question about what was considered the best livelihood option, 39% of households selected public sector employment. Education is crucial for better employment, and the estimation results confirm this well-established empirical finding. An increase in the average education of employed household members significantly increases the likelihood of pursuing public sector employment relative to agriculture-based strategies. Household asset value is positively associated with this relatively rewarding livelihood choice. The remittance parameter is positively associated with public sector jobs. This explains why receiving remittances significantly increases the probability of pursuing public sector jobs relative to agriculture-based livelihoods.

Remittances remain a preferred and stable source of income in post-conflict Swat. During the field survey, it was noted that households whose members work in other countries—mostly employed in the Middle East, a common destination for workers from the Northern Province—consider it a good diversification option. Another result reveals that access to credit and sourcing options increases the likelihood of adopting the agricultural production strategy. Although public sector jobs provide employment security, they are not very rewarding in terms of salary in Pakistan. Moreover, the cost of living is consistently rising, while salaries in the public sector do not increase accordingly to match inflation rates. Particularly in the post-war environment, the cost of living increased further, which was associated with rehabilitation and reconstruction expenditures. The ability to diversify into the pre-conflict rewarding option of agriculture appears to depend on households' relatively greater financial liquidity, through access to credit and remittances. This finding is consistent with previous studies on the importance of financial capital for livelihood diversification (Barrett et al., 2001; Brown et al., 2006; Dercon & Krishnan, 1996). Agricultural production, as a complementary choice alongside public jobs, is very practical in the regional context. Moreover, it creates the possibility for surplus household members to engage in farming work. Finally, for this livelihood cluster, the parameter for social capital is positively associated with the likelihood of pursuing this strategy. More social relations and horizontal interactions increase the likelihood of pursuing public sector employment.

Employment in the private sector includes jobs in Swat, as well as in other cities and countries. This choice is significantly associated with human capital indicators. More

household members in the working-age group increase the probability of pursuing this livelihood option. Larger households presumably benefit from returns to scale in various household tasks. A number of studies emphasize that household size should not have an impact on labor supply if all markets are perfect (Rahut & Scharf, 2012). The finding that household size has a significant impact on diversification behavior suggests that labor markets in Swat are imperfect. Moreover, this livelihood choice is negatively associated with the average age of a household's working members. An increase in age decreases the probability of adult members working in private jobs or away from Swat. Alternatively, younger household members appear to prefer this livelihood option. Moreover, physical asset value is significant; those with more physical assets are likely to pursue livelihoods in this comparatively rewarding non-farm sector. Regarding access to and availability of credit, it significantly decreases the likelihood of pursuing private jobs compared to agricultural farm work, similar to the results with public sector employment. There is no inconsistency in the results regarding land ownership and livelihood portfolios; all show a statistically negative association. Land ownership drives the likelihood of choosing agricultural production as a household livelihood option, suggesting that households without land are constrained from adopting this strategy.

Summing up the empirical findings, the gender effect, represented by the number of adult females of working age in a household, is not associated with any livelihood choice. This validates the survey findings, which indicate that a significant majority of working-age women are involved in household work and do not participate in external economic activities. Likewise, social capital is positively associated with public sector jobs, and as expected, the likelihood of adopting public sector employment increases with the strength of social relations with relatives, friends, and the community. Moreover, the effects of physical capital's value are noteworthy in driving all livelihood choices except for daily wage work. This is logical since daily wage work is the least remunerative of the selected livelihood portfolios, and this creates constraints on physical asset accumulation. Additionally, it involves manual labor, and physical asset value may not influence this choice. Furthermore, public sector jobs and private sector employment offer greater rewards compared to other choices, and with more financial capital, the likelihood of diversification increases. As noted above, this is plausible, given that agriculture is considered a rewarding diversification option in Swat. Finally, in terms of the empirical interpretations mentioned in the introduction, this study is a pioneering attempt to explore the effects of assets on livelihood strategy choices in Swat. Therefore, comparisons of these results with those from other available livelihood studies on Swat are difficult. The results, wherever possible, are compared with field survey findings and explained based on information and insights gained during field discussions in Swat.

## 5. Conclusions

Households in Swat experienced violent occupation and a full-scale military operation against the Taliban, resulting in displacement for a long period. As these displaced households struggled to resettle, they faced a natural shock in the form of severe floods. Vulnerability rarely occurs on such a scale. This article focuses on these households and attempts to improve the understanding of their livelihood constraints and patterns. This study used cluster analysis to identify livelihood strategies from household survey data in Swat. The resulting partitioned data show that some livelihood strategies offer demonstrably higher income returns but are unattainable for households facing constraints in postwar asset endowment.

Conflicts, as Ibanez and Moya (2009) argue, leave a legacy of structural poverty. Justino (2009) notes that in such times, households may find it difficult to continue even their known survival strategies. This is the case for agriculture in Swat, the base comparison group. In the pre-conflict period, it was the center of an orchard industry, with related facilities for grading, storage, and processing to enable the transport of products to other parts of the country. Militancy and civil war affected farms and orchards the most, and the resulting displacement left them unattended and unprotected. Both militants and the military damaged crops and trees to pursue their objectives. If new trees are planted, most take approximately 10 years to mature and reach reasonable production levels, provided proactive agricultural practices are followed. This requires substantial capital investment, which post-war households do not have. The survey data revealed that this was also the lowest income-earning sector among the five classified household groups. This was different in the pre-war period. Households in Swat usually owned small farms but were previously able to earn reasonable amounts. For example, with one hectare (2.47 acres) of mature apple orchards, a household was able to earn an approximate yearly income of PKR 0.5 million (approximately US \$5700) in the pre-war period. The amount in PKR is much higher today due to the depreciation of the rupee. This amount could support a reasonable living in Swat.

The findings also reveal that small businesses earn slightly more than informal workers in the daily wage group. This again reflects a changed economic situation. In the pre-conflict period, Mingora—the largest city in the district—was the major market in the country for imported Chinese goods. Thousands of people were associated with this business, and many visited these markets on business trips. Such market activity was one of the major economic casualties of the Taliban. Related sectors, such as transport, hotels, and restaurants, almost collapsed. The inflow of tourists visiting for pleasant weather and sightseeing ended, and business visitors also stopped traveling to Swat.

A practical limitation in micro post-conflict studies is that they rely on cross-sectional field data. Among the studies reviewed, Justino and Verwimp (2008) used panel data for their study on Rwanda. However, even secondary data on pre-conflict information about the same households they surveyed in the post-conflict environment are needed. Conflicts are uncertain in terms of their intensity and timing—when they will begin or intensify—



locational aspects (which areas are most affected), and the displacement and rehabilitation of affected households—who may change their location if they return or may not return at all. These characteristics make it unfeasible to rely on any other form of primary data-based analysis. The exact quantitative nature of pre- and post-conflict asset and income losses is, therefore, quite difficult to estimate. Nevertheless, this article asked people qualitative questions about pre- and post-conflict losses and livelihood coping strategies. For earnings (e.g., agriculture), pre-conflict prices also rely on secondary information sources.

This article highlights various asset-based constraints as the main factors influencing livelihood diversification. Certain activities have high entry constraints in the form of skills (education) and financial capital. Improved physical capital significantly drives livelihood strategies LS 2 to LS 5, but not LS 1, which is based on daily wages. The two high-return livelihood choices, private jobs (LS 5) and public sector employment (LS 4), are more likely to diversify into farm-based income earning if they have access to credit and if remittances increase their financial liquidity. However, few formal credit-disbursement mechanisms exist in rural Swat. Some NGOs grant limited amounts, and some microcredit banks operate in the area, but the interest rates and collateral requirements put these out of reach for most people. Low physical asset values make diversification less likely; an increase in physical assets enables households to pursue known endogenous livelihood strategies. A consistent finding of this article is that ownership of land (increase in natural capital) increases the ability of households to diversify into farm-based livelihoods, which were a rewarding option in pre-conflict periods.

In terms of policy actions, this article suggests that the largest and once-rewarding livelihood option, agriculture, requires priority assistance for its revival. Nevertheless, the natural and time-tested advantage of the area as a tourist destination, associated with small businesses, must be the foremost focus of reconstruction and rehabilitation initiatives. Such concentration includes broad-based infrastructural development that supports households in overcoming asset deficiencies. Improving the household livelihoods of Swat is highly important. Otherwise, persistent vulnerability creates economic and social discontent, which may become fertile ground for future organized discontent, sympathies for militants, and violence. As news of forced attacks is very common these days.

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# Romania: Management of Consular Crises. Case Studies and Perspectives (2020–2023)

Valentin MACEC, Cătălin BABA

**Abstract.** Consular crises are exceptional events that require rapid and effective interventions to protect Romanian citizens abroad who are in danger. These crises can be triggered by various factors, including natural disasters, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or global security events. In recent years, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) has faced the challenge of managing multiple crises simultaneously, coordinating diplomatic efforts and evacuation operations in collaboration with international partners and EU structures. Between 2020 and 2023, Romania dealt with a series of major international crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, evacuations from Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine, earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalation of violence in Israel and the Gaza Strip. The purpose of this study is to analyze Romania's response to consular crises, focusing on intervention mechanisms, interinstitutional coordination, and collaboration with international partners. The study aims to provide a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) and their impact on protecting Romanian citizens in high-risk areas. The methodology includes an analysis of official documents, MAE reports, and public statements, alongside relevant case studies for each major crisis. This approach evaluates the response capacity of the Crisis Cell and the Consular Department, as well as the effectiveness of European mechanisms such as the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Integrated EU Crisis Response Mechanism.

The results indicate a substantial increase in Romania's intervention capacity, highlighted by the

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 51, April 2025, pp. 41–63

DOI: 10.24193/cs.q.51.3  
Published First Online: April 03, 2025

repatriation of thousands of Romanian citizens, the facilitation of transit through humanitarian corridors, and enhanced collaboration with international organizations. Interinstitutional cooperation and decision-making flexibility were essential to the success of these operations. The MAE's management of consular crises during 2020–2023 demonstrated the importance of a rapid, well-coordinated response supported by international partnerships. The experience gained underscores the need for continuous adaptation and improvement of crisis intervention procedures. Romania's efforts during this period serve as an example of best practices in consular crisis management and may serve as a model for other EU member states facing similar challenges.

**Keywords:** Consular crisis, Romanian consular crisis, civil protection, international cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**JEL Classification:** F51, F52, H84, K33, R41

## Introduction

Consular crises were significant points of tension in international relations, particularly during the 19th century, when diplomatic conflicts among major powers intensified amid disputes over the protection of citizens abroad (Hofius, 2022). These crises were often triggered by the arrest or allegedly unjust treatment of foreign nationals, prompting governments to exert pressure on host states to protect their citizens and safeguard national interests.

During this period, competition among the major powers—France, Great Britain, the Russian Empire, and the Ottoman Empire—led to numerous consular incidents that served as pretexts for diplomatic or even military interventions (Ozavci, 2023). A notable example is the Ottoman Empire, where European great powers exploited their consular status to interfere in the empire's internal affairs under the guise of protecting Christians or their own citizens. These conflicts frequently escalated into international crises that tested the regional balance of power.

Another key aspect of consular crises was their use as tools for propaganda and political legitimization (Chernobrov, 2022). States involved in these crises often used them to strengthen their positions on the international stage or to justify expansionist or influence-driven actions. While diplomacy and negotiation played a vital role in resolving these crises, the lack of swift solutions sometimes led to armed conflicts or the imposition of coercive measures on the affected states (Rosyidin & Dir, 2021).

As international law solidified and diplomatic relations became more firmly regulated, the frequency and severity of consular crises diminished (Butt, 2024). However, such situations continue to arise in the contemporary world, albeit in different forms, still reflecting the

complexities of international relations and the ongoing need for effective mediation and negotiation mechanisms.

In Romania, consular crises marked tense moments in the country's foreign relations, particularly during the 18th and 19th centuries and the early 20th century, when the state's political and legal status was heavily influenced by the major powers. These crises stemmed from foreign consular interventions in domestic affairs, the protection of foreign citizens and merchants, and the conflicts between empires vying for influence over the Romanian Principalities.

The purpose of this study is to analyze Romania's response to consular crises within the framework of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) during the period 2020–2023, focusing on intervention mechanisms, interinstitutional coordination, and collaboration with international partners. The study aims to provide a detailed evaluation of the effectiveness of the measures adopted by the MAE and their impact on safeguarding Romanian citizens in high-risk areas.

The methodology used involves analyzing official documents, MAE reports, public statements, and case studies from each major crisis. This approach assesses the response capacity of both the Crisis Cell and the Consular Department, as well as the effectiveness of European mechanisms, such as the Civil Protection Mechanism and the Integrated EU Crisis Response Mechanism.

## **Historical Context and Causes of Consular Crises**

Before the formation of the modern Romanian state, Wallachia and Moldavia were under Ottoman suzerainty, yet they enjoyed significant autonomy (Berindei, 2011). Amid the influence of the Habsburg and Russian Empires, the European great powers used the consular institution both to protect their subjects and to expand their political and economic control over the region (Ardeleanu, 2025).

Consulates from France, Britain, Russia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire became key players in the political and economic life of the Romanian Principalities (Jelavich, 2004). These consulates not only represented their respective states' interests but also exerted influence over local rulers, intervening in their appointments and managing internal affairs. Conflicts among these consulates often led to diplomatic crises, some of which had significant consequences for Romania's political status.

Table 1 summarizes the main consular crises in the Romanian space from the 18th to the 19th century, highlighting the actors involved, the causes of the conflicts, and their consequences. These diplomatic episodes mirror the competition among major powers for influence in the Romanian Principalities, the role of foreign consuls in crisis management, and their impact on the region's political and territorial evolution.



Table 1. Consular Crises in the Romanian Space

Period	Consular Crisis	Actors Involved	Causes	Consequences
18th c. – early 19th c.	Russo–Ottoman Consular Crisis in the Romanian Principalities	Russian Empire, Ottoman Empire, local rulers	The Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca (1774) allowing Russia to protect Orthodox Christians in the Ottoman Empire; tensions over privileged treatment for Russian merchants	Increased Russian consular influence; repeated conflicts with the Ottomans and Austrians; pretexts for Russian military interventions and occupation of the Principalities
First half of the 19th c.	British and French Consular Crisis during the Organic Regulations period	France, Great Britain, Russia, Ottoman Empire	Increased Russian influence after the Treaty of Adrianople (1829); accusations of abuses by the Russian administration against British and French merchants	Diplomatic conflicts; support for liberal reforms and 1848 revolutionary movements (e.g., Edouard Thouvenel); tensions between Russia and Western powers
1859	Consular Crisis during the Union of the Principalities	France, Russia, Austria, Ottoman Empire	Austria's and the Ottoman Empire's opposition to the double election of Alexandru Ioan Cuza; France's support for the union	Diplomatic pressure and consular interventions; France's contribution to the international recognition of the Union
1877–1878	Consular Crisis during the War of Independence	Romania, Russia, Ottoman Empire	Russia's attempts to maintain influence over Romania; disputes over territories south of the Danube (Cahul, Bolgrad, Ismail)	Tensions between Russia and Romania after independence was achieved; diplomatic negotiations over new borders of the Romanian state

### ***1. The Russo-Ottoman Consular Crisis in the Romanian Principalities (18th–19th Century)***

One of the most tense diplomatic episodes of this period was the conflict between the Russian and Ottoman Empires over the protection of Orthodox Christians in Wallachia and Moldavia. The Treaty of Küçük-Kaynarca (1774) granted Russia the right to intervene on behalf of Christians in the Ottoman Empire, thereby increasing Russian consular influence in the Principalities (Mischevca, 2023).

Russian consuls became involved in numerous conflicts with Ottoman authorities and local rulers, demanding preferential treatment for Russian merchants and settlers (Meyer, 2007). This stance led to tensions not only with the Ottomans but also with the Austrians, who were also vying to maintain their influence in the region. These consular conflicts often served as pretexts for military intervention, as evidenced by the Russo-Turkish wars, which resulted in repeated Russian occupations of the Principalities.

### ***2. The British and French Consular Crisis in the Organic Regulations Period***

In the first half of the 19th century, following the establishment of Russian administration under the Treaty of Adrianople (1829), France and Great Britain became increasingly concerned about Russia's growing influence over the Romanian Principalities (Ciachir, 2017). French and British consuls in Bucharest and Iași were frequently involved in diplomatic disputes with Russian and Ottoman authorities, accusing them of mistreating their merchants and subjects (Mitea & Mitea, 2025).

A notable example is the case of British consul Robert Gilmour Colquhoun, who exposed corruption within the Russian administration in the Principalities and supported the liberal reforms proposed by Romanian boyars (Jianu, 2011). French consul Edouard Thouvenel also actively supported the 1848 revolutionary movements, which led to direct conflicts with Russian and Ottoman authorities, who sought to limit French influence in the region (Arıkanlı, 2022).

### ***3. The Consular Crisis during the Union of the Principalities (1859)***

The process of uniting Wallachia and Moldavia under the rule of Alexandru Ioan Cuza was marked by significant consular tensions, particularly among France, Russia, Austria, and the Ottoman Empire. Napoleon III's France supported the union, while Austria and the Ottoman Empire opposed it (Özesmer, 2022). Austrian consuls pressured local leaders to prevent Cuza's double election, while French consuls actively supported the unionists. After the union of 1859, foreign diplomats continued to play a crucial role in securing international recognition of the new state, leading to several diplomatic crises among the major powers.

#### **4. The Consular Crisis during the War of Independence (1877–1878)**

Another major diplomatic point of tension arose following the 1877–1878 Russo–Turkish War, when Romania sought international recognition of its independence (Florescu, 2021). Russia, determined to maintain its influence over Romania, saw its consulates clash with Romanian authorities over the status of southern Danubian territories, specifically Cahul, Bolgrad, and Ismail.

In the contemporary international context, marked by political instability, armed conflicts, pandemics, and natural disasters, the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) has been tasked with managing multiple consular crises simultaneously. These situations required rapid interventions to protect Romanian citizens abroad, coordination of diplomatic efforts at the international level, and cooperation with European Union (EU) structures and strategic partners.

#### **State of Emergency vs. Consular Crisis**

The term “*state of emergency*” applies to exceptional non-military events that endanger people’s lives, health, the environment, or material and cultural assets (Art. 2, Para. 1, Letter a, of Government Emergency Ordinance 21/2004 on the National Emergency Management System). To return to normality, urgent measures and actions are needed, involving specialized resources and coordinated management of the forces involved. This concept is regulated by GEO 21/2004 on the National Emergency Management System, under which the MAE’s Center for Operational Coordination of Emergency Situations (COSSU) operates.

A “*consular crisis*” refers to a situation caused by natural disasters, armed conflicts, terrorist attacks, or other events simultaneously affecting a significant number of people, including Romanian citizens or nationals of other EU member states. Defined in Law No. 62/2019 on consular activity, the concept is employed in the process of granting consular assistance and protection. The notion of “*state of emergency*” also appears in this law, referring to the plans of the General Directorate of Consular Affairs for Emergencies (MDOC) and to individual cases requiring consular protection.

Within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, emergency situations are categorized primarily as:

1. Those affecting Romanian and European citizens abroad.
2. Those concerning Romania’s own missions, delegations, and consular offices (MDOC) and their personnel.
3. Those relating to diplomatic missions and consular offices accredited in Romania, including foreign citizens for whom diplomatic procedures are being undertaken.

## **Phases in Managing a Consular Crisis**

Managing a consular crisis involves several key steps, including monitoring and issuing warnings, providing public information, handling the crisis itself, and offering consular assistance. Specialized bodies such as COSSU, the GSD (Group for Special Situations), the Consular Department (DCons), and DICC-UCPPC (Department for Interinstitutional Coordination and Crisis Management—Unit for Coordination of Policies and Consular Programs) play distinct roles in executing these tasks during both crisis situations and routine monitoring periods.

At the European level, consular coordination is administered by the Consular Affairs Division—ISP,<sup>4</sup> through the COCON working group, which sets out the EU's approaches to consular matters. This group ensures consular dialogue with states such as Canada, the United States, and Australia, analyzes consular crises, monitors cooperation initiatives, and reviews relevant legislative proposals.

An essential component of crisis management is the Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism, which supports decision-making at the EU level and ensures a coordinated response to major crises. This mechanism includes roundtable meetings for information exchange, Integrated Situation Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports, and a web platform for sharing information. IPCR can be activated in full mode or limited to information exchange, depending on the severity of the situation. Currently, IPCR remains active for the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis, while the mechanisms for COVID-19 and the earthquakes in Turkey and Syria have been deactivated and placed under monitoring status.

These structures and mechanisms underscore the importance of efficient management of consular crises and emergency situations, both nationally and at a European level, to protect citizens and maintain diplomatic stability.

## **Managing Consular Crises in EU Member States**

EU member states adopt various organizational models for managing consular crises, according to each state's institutional arrangements. Some countries have specialized crisis centers at the ministerial level, while others handle such situations through consular departments or specialized structures. Table 2 compares the primary consular crisis management structures across six European countries, highlighting responsibilities, operational models, and available human resources.

As shown in Table 2, France's Crisis and Support Center operates as a distinct entity under the direct supervision of the minister's office, with exclusive responsibility for managing major events affecting French citizens. The Consular Department plays a secondary role, focusing on individual cases rather than crisis management. The staffing structure includes

Table 2. Managing Consular Crises in EU Member States

Country	Crisis Management Structure	Operation	Staff/Resources
France	Crisis and Support Center (a distinct entity under direct ministerial coordination)	Manages exclusively major crises, separate from the Consular Department	90 people in the Crisis Center + 110 in the Consular Department
Germany	Crisis Response Center within the Federal Foreign Office	Operates 24/7, monitors events, issues travel advisories, coordinates with other ministries	Includes a Citizen Services Unit for detailed assistance
Belgium	Separate Crisis Center under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Coordinates repatriations and manages international crises	Call center with 15 operators; staff increases for exceptional circumstances (e.g., COVID-19 pandemic)
Estonia	Monitoring Department in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs + Consular Department	Continuous monitoring of international events; 24/7 emergency hotline	Responsibility shared between two departments, each with specialized divisions
Poland	Operational Center within the Consular Affairs Department	24/7 operation, coordinates consular interventions	2 designated coordinators; staff added as needed
Spain	Consular Emergencies Division (in process of developing a Crisis Center)	Handles emergency situations, rapid personnel mobilization	24/7 helpline staffed by 150 volunteer diplomats

90 people in the Crisis Center and 110 in the central administration of the Consular Department.

In Germany, the Crisis Response Center within the Federal Foreign Office ensures 24/7 operation, monitoring potentially escalating events and coordinating interventions. It also manages travel advisories and oversees cooperation with other ministries and international partners. An attached Citizen Services Unit handles detailed consular assistance requests.

Belgium has a separate Crisis Center within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, responsible for managing international crises and coordinating repatriations. In emergencies, a call center with up to 15 operators can be activated, and staffing levels may be significantly increased in exceptional circumstances, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Estonia's Monitoring Department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs monitors international developments and operates a 24/7 emergency phone line outside normal working hours. In times of crisis, responsibilities are shared between the Monitoring Department and the Consular Department, which includes two specialized divisions.

Poland does not have a dedicated crisis center at the ministerial level, but its Consular Affairs Department houses an Operational Center that operates 24/7 to monitor global events and coordinate crisis responses. Two coordinators are specifically appointed for crisis management, with staffing levels adjustable as needed.

Spain has not yet established a fully developed crisis center within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, but a specialized structure is under development. Currently, the Consular Emergencies Division responds to urgent matters and can deploy additional staff rapidly if required. During recent emergencies, a 24/7 helpline, staffed by 150 volunteer diplomats, was activated to manage high call volumes.

The institutional organization for managing consular crises varies significantly across EU member states. Some countries, such as France, Germany, and Belgium, have well-defined, dedicated structures, while others, such as Poland and Spain, rely on consular departments with expanded responsibilities or flexible mechanisms that can be activated in emergencies. This diversity reflects each country's specific approach to crisis management and citizen protection abroad.

## **Institutional Structure for Managing Consular Crises**

### ***The Crisis Cell***

The Crisis Cell of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is the main body responsible for managing emergency situations involving Romanian citizens abroad. It is activated by the Minister of Foreign Affairs and coordinated at the secretary of state level. Its operations are closely linked to international events, requiring it to respond swiftly, effectively, and according to the specifics of each situation.

A key responsibility of the Crisis Cell is to monitor international risk situations. This involves ongoing global analysis, identifying potential threats, and evaluating their potential impact on Romanian nationals abroad. Information is collected from official sources, diplomatic channels, security agencies, and international organizations to ensure responses are accurate and well-grounded. Based on these assessments, the Crisis Cell may issue alerts, travel advisories, or evacuation warnings for high-risk areas.

Another critical aspect of the Crisis Cell's work is maintaining constant communication with Romania's diplomatic missions and consular offices. This global network serves as a crucial support system for Romanian citizens in distress, providing real-time updates on unfolding events. Embassies and consulates play a pivotal role in evacuation operations by offering logistical resources, coordinating with local authorities, and serving as official communication channels for affected individuals.

In addition to working with national structures, the Crisis Cell maintains continuous interaction with international institutions such as the European Commission, NATO, and the UN. These partnerships create a broader framework for cooperation, allowing Romania to receive logistical support, expert assistance, and access to international protection and consular mechanisms. In numerous crises—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, and evacuations from Ukraine—this collaboration significantly enhanced the repatriation of Romanian citizens, utilizing the European Union Civil Protection Mechanism.

Carrying out evacuation and repatriation operations is one of the most complex tasks managed by the Crisis Cell. These operations require meticulous planning, immediate transport solutions, ensuring the safety of evacuees, and coordinating with local authorities in affected areas. Depending on the nature of each crisis, evacuations may be conducted by air, land, or sea, utilizing Romania's own resources, bilateral agreements, or international support mechanisms.

The effectiveness of the Crisis Cell relies on its ability to swiftly mobilize necessary resources, make flexible decisions, and collaborate closely with both governmental and international structures involved in crisis management. Its continuous operation and adaptability to diverse contexts have made it a cornerstone in providing consular protection to Romanian citizens facing critical situations across the globe.

### *The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD)*

The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD) are fundamental structures within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, ensuring the protection and support of Romanian citizens abroad, particularly in emergencies or crises. Their work is continuously adapted to global developments to respond promptly and effectively to the needs of those affected by unforeseen events (Figure 1).





**Figure 1.** The Consular Department and the Group for Special Situations (GSD)

Within the MAE, the Consular Department plays a central role in coordinating all consular services and overseeing procedures for assisting Romanian citizens abroad. These services encompass issuing travel documents, providing legal assistance, and responding to crises. Maintaining constant communication with Romania's diplomatic missions and consular offices is crucial for the department's success, ensuring quick information exchange and timely intervention when necessary.

A key component of this department is the Group for Special Situations (GSD), a specialized body that deals with urgent or exceptional cases that do not reach the level of triggering the Crisis Cell but still require a swift and coordinated response. GSD interventions cover a variety of critical scenarios:

- **Supporting Romanian citizens affected by natural disasters or accidents abroad.** These interventions involve quickly identifying those at risk, offering consular assistance, and, if necessary, facilitating repatriation. In serious incidents, GSD collaborates with local authorities and international organizations to ensure safe evacuation and access to medical care or essential resources.
- **Assisting Romanian seafarers stranded on foreign vessels.** Such individuals face significant risks amid armed conflicts, commercial disputes, or administrative hurdles that prevent them from returning home. GSD monitors these cases and, via Romania's embassies and consulates, works to repatriate affected crews. Occasionally, negotiations with local authorities or involved companies are necessary to resolve legal or logistical barriers preventing release of the seafarers.
- **Medical evacuations and emergency repatriations.** Romanian citizens overseas who suffer serious accidents, critical health issues, or who fall victim to crises receive

assistance for transportation back to Romania or to suitable medical facilities in other countries. Depending on the severity, GSD may coordinate flights, air ambulances, or other logistical solutions to ensure proper transport in optimal conditions.

Through these combined efforts, the Consular Department and GSD play an essential role in safeguarding Romanians abroad and illustrate the state's capacity to intervene effectively during emergencies. By working closely with diplomatic missions, international partners, and domestic institutions, these bodies bolster the consular assistance system and protect the rights and safety of Romanian citizens regardless of their circumstances overseas.

### **Managing Consular Crises from 2020 to 2023**

Between 2020 and 2023, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs addressed a series of major consular crises, requiring swift, complex interventions to protect and evacuate Romanians from areas affected by conflicts, natural disasters, or public health emergencies. Notable events included the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, the catastrophic earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, armed conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalation of tensions in Israel and the Gaza Strip.

These crises required the activation of the MAE Crisis Cell, coordination with international partners, and the allocation of significant diplomatic and logistical resources. Evacuation and repatriation operations were conducted under high-risk conditions, involving special flights, humanitarian corridors, and extensive consular support.

Table 3 presents a comparative analysis of the main consular crises managed by Romania from 2020 to 2023, including the measures taken and their impact on the Romanian citizens affected.

### **The COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2021)**

The period between 2020 and 2023 presented significant challenges for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) in managing consular crises, testing its ability to respond quickly and effectively when Romanian citizens were endangered abroad. Some of the most notable challenges included the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, the devastating earthquake in Turkey and Syria, armed conflicts in Sudan and Niger, and the escalating violence in Israel and Gaza.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, was one of the biggest tests. The pandemic affected millions of people worldwide, and the resulting travel restrictions created a significant crisis for Romanian nationals stranded abroad. The sudden suspension of flights and closure of borders led to an overwhelming number of requests for consular assistance, many of which were urgent and required immediate intervention to facilitate the repatriation of Romanian citizens.

Table 3. Analysis of Evacuation Operations and Consular Crisis Management (2020–2023)

Period	Crisis	Context	Measures Taken	Impact
2020–2021	COVID-19 Pandemic	Severe travel restrictions, closed borders, suspended flights, global health crisis	Activation of MAE Crisis Cell, organization of special air flights, activation of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, negotiation of transit corridors, transfer of severe COVID-19 patients to EU hospitals	12,500 Romanian citizens repatriated, 11,000 citizens assisted in transit, 86 COVID-19 patients transported and treated in European hospitals
2021	Evacuation of Romanian citizens from Afghanistan	Withdrawal of international forces, collapse of Afghan government, Taliban takeover	MAE Crisis Cell activated, evacuation of Romanian citizens and Afghan collaborators, international coordination	49 Romanian citizens evacuated, 156 Afghan collaborators rescued, 7 citizens of other states assisted
2022–2023	Crisis in Ukraine	Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine, deteriorating security, refugees, urgent evacuations	Security alert, repatriation of diplomats and citizens, support for Romanian sailors and workers, activation of consular task force	76 Romanian diplomats repatriated, 15 members of international organizations evacuated, 14 Romanian sailors rescued, 11 workers repatriated
2023	Earthquake in Turkey and Syria	7.8 Mw quake followed by a 7.7 Mw aftershock, extensive destruction, humanitarian crisis	MAE Crisis Cell activated, swift situational assessment, air evacuation, consular support	10 Romanian citizens evacuated from Kahramanmaraş, 8 Romanian citizens + 2 Poles evacuated from Adana, 50 consular assistance requests handled
2023	Crisis in Sudan	Civil war between Sudanese forces and paramilitary groups, collapsed infrastructure, blocked transport	MAE Crisis Cell activated, evacuations in collaboration with partner states (France, Sweden, Greece, Saudi Arabia, UK)	40 Romanian citizens evacuated, 7 family members of other nationalities, extensive logistical and diplomatic support
2023	Escalation of the Conflict in Israel and Gaza	Attacks and bombings in Israel and Gaza, thousands of civilians at risk	Coordinated air evacuation, diplomatic dialogue with Israeli and Egyptian authorities, extensive consular assistance	2,220 Romanian citizens repatriated from Israel (28 air flights), 250 Romanian citizens registered for Gaza evacuation, facilitation of crossing at Rafah

In response, the MAE launched one of its largest-ever repatriation operations, involving close coordination between the Crisis Cell, diplomatic missions, and international organizations. Over 12,500 Romanian citizens were successfully repatriated from both EU and third countries, often via special flights and humanitarian corridors. This complex operation addressed a wide range of challenging situations, including stranded seasonal workers, merchant ship crews, tourists, and students unable to continue their studies due to border closures and travel disruptions. The success of this operation highlighted the MAE's ability to respond swiftly and effectively under extreme pressure.

To enhance the efficiency of evacuations during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, a crucial instrument that enabled Romania to collaborate with other EU member states for organizing joint repatriation flights. This mechanism proved invaluable in facilitating the repatriation of Romanian citizens. Many Romanians were able to secure seats on special flights organized by other countries, while Romania, in turn, facilitated the repatriation of citizens from other nations on flights operated by Romanian carriers.

The successful use of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism not only assisted Romanian citizens but also underscored the importance of European solidarity during times of crisis. This cooperation ensured that stranded individuals had options for returning home despite the global lockdowns and restrictions.

Another critical aspect of this operation involved negotiating special transit corridors. These corridors were instrumental in helping Romanian citizens who were stranded in transit countries or who had lost access to transportation options. By providing these corridors, more than 11,000 Romanians were able to travel across closed borders and receive the necessary support to return home.

Furthermore, one of the most pressing concerns was the transfer of critically ill COVID-19 patients to medical facilities in the EU. With Romania facing overwhelming pressure on its healthcare system, 86 seriously ill Romanian patients were transferred to hospitals across Austria, Poland, Hungary, Denmark, the Czech Republic, Italy, Germany, and other European nations. This collaborative effort required meticulous coordination between the MAE, foreign health ministries, air ambulance services, and local healthcare units to ensure the patients received timely and appropriate medical care.

Through these collective actions, Romania demonstrated its commitment to the safety and well-being of its citizens abroad, while also showcasing the importance of international cooperation and preparedness in responding to global crises.

The COVID-19 crisis highlighted the importance of a rapid response and a well-organized infrastructure for managing consular emergencies. Through effective resource mobilization and close cooperation at the national and international levels, Romania provided support to its citizens in need, demonstrating its ability to handle large-scale crises and protect Romanian nationals abroad, no matter where they were located.

## **Evacuation of Romanian Citizens from Afghanistan (2021)**

The withdrawal of international forces from Afghanistan and the sudden collapse of its government in August 2021 led to one of the most severe humanitarian and security crises of recent years. Amid mounting violence and the Taliban takeover, thousands of foreign nationals and Afghans sought to leave the country, and Kabul's Hamid Karzai International Airport became the focal point of complicated evacuation operations. Against this backdrop, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated its interinstitutional Crisis Cell to evacuate Romanians remaining in Afghanistan, as well as vital Afghan collaborators—those who had worked alongside Romanian forces deployed in the area of operations.

The operations carried out by Romania successfully evacuated 49 Romanian citizens, including diplomatic personnel, employees of international organizations, and Romanians working in Afghanistan. These evacuations took place in an extremely uncertain and perilous environment, requiring robust diplomatic efforts to guarantee safe passage to the airport.

Additionally, Romania placed great emphasis on evacuating crucial Afghan collaborators, including translators, guides, security personnel, journalists, human rights activists, and judges who faced severe reprisal risks from the Taliban. In total, 156 Afghan citizens were rescued with Romanian assistance and transported out of Afghanistan, later joining relocation or protection programs.

A key factor in the success of these operations was cooperation with international partners to secure safe exit routes and adequate logistics for evacuees. Romania also supported the evacuation of seven foreign nationals from allied states, reinforcing the shared efforts to handle this crisis.

These operations were highly complex, demanding coordination among many domestic and international institutions, including the Ministry of National Defense, which provided aircraft for transporting evacuees. Romania's embassies in the region were critical in facilitating evacuations and providing essential logistical support.

The Afghanistan crisis highlighted the necessity for an immediate, effective reaction to emergencies, as well as seamless collaboration among state institutions and global partners. Romania's actions reaffirmed its commitment to safeguarding its citizens and the local partners who had supported its missions, giving them a chance for a fresh start in a safe environment.

## **The Crisis in Ukraine (2022–2023)**

The crisis in Ukraine, sparked by the Russian Federation's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, represents one of the most severe European security crises in decades. This conflict directly affected Romanian citizens living in Ukraine, including diplomats, members of

the Romanian ethnic community, and others temporarily in the country. Faced with a large-scale war, Romania's MAE had to implement swift, effective measures to protect and evacuate its citizens while ensuring consular assistance.

From the outset of the escalating conflict, Romania issued a travel warning advising its citizens to leave Ukraine as soon as possible. On February 21, 2022, the alert level was raised to its highest—an urgent “Leave the country immediately” notice. This decision was based on security analyses by the MAE Crisis Cell, working with Romanian intelligence, security services, and international partners. Romanian embassies and consulates in Ukraine stayed in constant contact with Romanian citizens, offering updates and logistical support for evacuation.

As hostilities escalated, Romania evacuated its diplomatic personnel from Kyiv and Odessa due to heightened security risks. This step was taken to protect their lives and allow consular activities to continue from safer locations, including border regions. Even after evacuation, Romania's Embassy in Ukraine and Consulate General in Odessa continued assisting ethnic Romanians and citizens who needed help, maintaining dialogue with local authorities and international bodies engaged in the humanitarian response.

Alongside diplomatic protection, Romania assisted in the evacuation and repatriation of a significant number of Romanian citizens and international organization staff. Between February 14 and March 6, 2022, 76 Romanian diplomats and 15 staff members of international organizations such as the OSCE, UN, EUAM, and EUBAM were repatriated under strict safety conditions and in close cooperation with Ukrainian, European, and international partners to identify secure routes.

A particularly challenging aspect of these efforts was rescuing Romanian sailors stranded aboard ships in Ukrainian ports, many of which were targeted by attacks on maritime infrastructure. Through careful coordination among the MAE, Romania's Embassy in Kyiv, the Consulate General in Odessa, and maritime authorities, 14 Romanian sailors, plus a Bulgarian sailor, were evacuated safely from Ukraine. Romania also helped repatriate 11 Romanian employees from the Krivoy Rog mining plant, securing safe corridors and arranging transportation home.

In parallel, the MAE activated a specialized task force within the Consular Department, operating continuously to address evacuation requests and assist Romanian citizens in distress. Working closely with diplomatic missions in the region and with European and international bodies, this task force supported evacuations and humanitarian relief efforts.

The Ukraine crisis underscored the value of fast, well-coordinated responses to major security threats. By efficiently mobilizing diplomatic, logistical, and consular resources, Romania managed to protect its citizens and evacuate them from an active war zone, demonstrating its growing capability to respond to international emergencies.



## **The Earthquake in Turkey and Syria (2023)**

The devastating earthquake of February 6, 2023, with a magnitude of 7.8 Mw, followed by a 7.7 Mw aftershock, severely impacted southern and central Turkey, as well as northern and western Syria. This natural disaster caused extensive loss of life, infrastructure destruction, and a large-scale humanitarian crisis. In this dramatic context, Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MAE) activated emergency mechanisms to identify, protect, and evacuate Romanian citizens in the affected areas.

From the earliest hours following the earthquake, the MAE Crisis Cell went into operation, maintaining constant contact with the Romanian Embassy in Ankara and the Romanian Consulates General in Istanbul and Izmir. This swift mobilization allowed a rapid assessment of the situation of Romanian citizens in the affected regions and the launch of procedures needed for evacuation and consular assistance.

One of the primary actions undertaken by the MAE was the urgent evacuation of Romanian citizens from the hardest-hit areas. In Kahramanmaraş, located at the epicenter of the earthquake, several Romanian citizens requested assistance for evacuation. Thanks to Romanian authorities' intervention, they were safely evacuated with support from the Romanian Air Force, which provided transport aircraft via the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. A total of 10 Romanian citizens were evacuated from this region (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Emergency Evacuation of Romanian Citizens from the Most Affected Areas

Another evacuation operation took place in Adana, where a group of eight Romanian citizens and two Polish citizens found themselves in difficulty due to the destruction caused by the earthquake. The Romanian Embassy in Ankara, working with local authorities and supported by logistical assistance from Romania, organized their transport to safe zones and, later on, their repatriation under secure conditions.

In addition to these evacuations, the Romanian Embassy in Ankara handled a considerable number of consular assistance requests from Romanian citizens affected by the



earthquake, as well as from their families in Romania. In total, over 50 such requests were registered, including inquiries about relatives in Turkey, repatriation assistance, or help recovering documents lost in the disaster.

Romania's response to this crisis took place in close cooperation with Turkish authorities and international intervention mechanisms, including the European Union, which activated its crisis-response mechanism to coordinate aid for Turkey and Syria. Romanian diplomatic and consular efforts proved critical in facilitating the safe evacuation of Romanian citizens and in providing help to those affected by this tragedy.

The earthquake in Turkey and Syria once again highlighted the importance of a rapid, coordinated reaction in managing consular crises, demonstrating the MAE's capacity to intervene effectively in emergency situations and protect Romanian citizens in difficulty abroad.

### **The Crisis in Sudan (2023)**

In April 2023, violent clashes between the Sudanese Armed Forces and paramilitary groups triggered a severe security crisis in Sudan, affecting both the local population and foreign nationals within Sudanese territory. Intense fighting in Khartoum and other cities led to the collapse of basic infrastructure, blocked transportation, and closed borders, making the evacuation of foreign nationals extremely difficult. Against this backdrop, the MAE activated the Crisis Cell to coordinate the evacuation of Romanian citizens in Sudan and ensure a safe route back to Romania.

The MAE received 51 evacuation requests from Romanian citizens and their family members. Thanks to complex logistical and diplomatic efforts, Romania was able to evacuate 40 Romanian citizens and seven family members of other nationalities, organizing their departure in several stages, following different routes and relying on collaboration with international partners. Some citizens were evacuated with help from the French authorities, who operated a special flight to Djibouti. Nine Romanian citizens and one Sudanese family member boarded this flight overnight on April 23–24, 2023, while two other Romanian citizens were evacuated on a Swedish-organized flight and transported to Djibouti, where Romanian authorities subsequently took over repatriation arrangements.

Further cooperation with international partners—Greek, Swedish, British, and Saudi Arabian authorities among others—ensured that multiple groups of Romanian citizens could either fly out of Sudan or leave by sea via Port Sudan. Romania's Embassy in Riyadh, along with the Saudi Arabian authorities, also played an essential role in assisting citizens who reached Jeddah by boat. By April 26, yet another group of Romanian evacuees reached Athens on a Greek-organized flight and was safely repatriated soon thereafter.

The Sudan crisis emerged as one of the most complex evacuations the MAE managed in 2023, given the extremely difficult security conditions and the lack of safe evacuation

corridors. By effectively mobilizing resources and closely cooperating with international partners, Romania demonstrated its ability to protect and evacuate its own citizens from a conflict zone, providing them the assistance needed to return home safely.

### **Escalation of the Conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip (2023)**

The escalation of the conflict in Israel and the Gaza Strip in October 2023 produced one of the most complex and urgent consular crises handled by Romania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In the face of violent attacks and bombings in both Israeli territory and Gaza, thousands of Romanian citizens found themselves in danger—whether residing permanently in the region or there temporarily as tourists, workers, or students. In this environment, the MAE activated its Crisis Cell and initiated several measures to protect Romanian citizens and repatriate them safely.

One of Romania's most extensive evacuation operations in this context was the repatriation of a large number of Romanian citizens located in Israel. Through coordinated efforts among the MAE, airline companies, and Israeli authorities, a total of 2,220 Romanian citizens were repatriated from Israel via 28 special and commercial flights. Air transport was provided through collaboration with multiple airlines, including TAROM, El Al, and private operators. These flights were scheduled in a short timeframe, requiring careful coordination of reservations, takeoff and landing clearances, and boarding processes to ensure citizens' safe evacuation.

For Romanian citizens located in the Gaza Strip, the process was far more complicated due to heightened conflict, a lack of secure corridors, and severe movement restrictions. From the onset of hostilities, the MAE, through the Romanian Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Romanian Representation Office in Ramallah, maintained ongoing contact with Israeli and Egyptian authorities, as well as with international organizations involved in humanitarian response efforts. The goal was to secure passage out of Gaza for Romanian citizens and facilitate their transit via the Rafah crossing point. Despite difficulties and delays caused by the intense conflict, around 250 Romanian citizens signed up for evacuation from Gaza, and the MAE worked continuously to ensure their safe transfer into Egypt and subsequent repatriation.

In parallel, the MAE provided consular assistance to a considerable number of Romanian citizens in Israel and Gaza, offering updated information on repatriation options and issuing the necessary travel documents. The Romanian Embassy in Tel Aviv and the Representation Office in Ramallah operated around the clock to meet the large volume of requests from citizens in distress.

Romania's rapid and well-coordinated response underscored the state's ability to act effectively in international emergencies, protecting and supporting Romanian citizens exposed to high risks. Equally, close cooperation with international partners—especially

Egyptian and Israeli authorities—was crucial to successful evacuation operations and the creation of a safe corridor enabling the repatriation of Romanian citizens affected by the conflict.

## **International Cooperation and EU Mechanisms**

### ***The EU Civil Protection Mechanism***

International cooperation constitutes a core pillar of consular crisis management, and Romania has repeatedly demonstrated its capacity to collaborate effectively with European and international bodies to protect its citizens abroad. During major emergencies—such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Afghanistan crisis, the war in Ukraine, and natural disasters like the Turkey–Syria earthquake—Romania has relied on European Union mechanisms to enhance its response capacity, making use of shared EU resources and expertise.

A key tool employed by Romania in these operations is the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. Coordinated at a European level, it aims to support member states in managing significant emergencies. The mechanism allows for quick activation of logistical, humanitarian, and transportation resources during crises, supporting citizen evacuations from high-risk zones and the delivery of essential aid in critical situations.

Romania has used the EU Civil Protection Mechanism on multiple occasions to coordinate evacuations and repatriations, closely cooperating with European and international partners to secure the safety of Romanian citizens stranded in conflict or disaster areas. For instance, it was pivotal during:

- **The COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2021):** Romania activated the mechanism to organize special flights for repatriating Romanian citizens and assisting other EU nationals stranded around the world due to travel restrictions.
- **The Afghanistan Crisis (2021):** The mechanism helped coordinate with EU countries conducting similar evacuation efforts from Kabul.
- **The War in Ukraine (2022):** Romania facilitated EU humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and assisted refugees crossing the Romanian border. This included leveraging logistical and financial support available through the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
- **The Earthquake in Turkey and Syria (2023):** Romania again activated the mechanism to evacuate Romanian citizens from the affected areas and to provide humanitarian aid.

By actively participating in this mechanism, Romania has both safeguarded its citizens and strengthened cooperation with fellow EU member states, exemplifying mutual solidarity in critical moments. Its successful use of the mechanism underlines the importance of a unified European approach to managing international crises and reaffirms Romania's capability to respond decisively and effectively to global challenges.

## IPCR – The EU Integrated Political Crisis Response Mechanism

The Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR) mechanism of the European Union (EU) is one of the most significant instruments by which the EU coordinates member states' responses to major crises, whether political, military, humanitarian, or public health-related. This mechanism was created to ensure a rapid, coherent EU-level political response by bringing together affected states, EU institutions, and other relevant stakeholders to facilitate decision-making and mobilize resources as needed in crisis situations (Figure 3).



**Figure 3.** The IPCR Portal—a Temporary Validation Authority Supporting National Response to Different Types of Crises (Migration, War, Pandemics, etc.)

The IPCR can be activated in full or partial modes, depending on the severity of an event. In full activation, the EU can convene roundtable meetings, produce Integrated Situational Awareness and Analysis (ISAA) reports, and use specialized online platforms to share information among EU institutions and member states. This enables a swift, coordinated political and operational approach. Partial activation focuses primarily on information exchange among states and institutions, with limited policy measures.

Romania has supported the IPCR mechanism's activation in various situations, including the Ukraine war and migration crises, recognizing that close coordination among EU institutions and member states is vital to effective, unified responses. Although the IPCR mechanisms related to COVID-19 and the Turkey–Syria earthquakes were deactivated and placed under monitoring mode, they remain ready for reactivation if necessary.

By actively participating in the IPCR, Romania affirms its commitment to collective crisis management and strengthens its operational ties with EU partners. This collaboration improves the country's access to essential resources, strategic insights, and political support, allowing for more robust responses to emergencies.

## **Conclusions**

The management of consular crises between 2020 and 2023 demonstrated Romania's capacity to respond swiftly and effectively to complex emergency situations abroad, safeguarding Romanian citizens in danger outside national borders. Prompt, well-coordinated interventions by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—through its Crisis Cell, Consular Department, and Group for Special Situations—proved crucial in repatriation and evacuation operations conducted across multiple continents.

The experience acquired during the COVID-19 pandemic, evacuations from Afghanistan, the Ukraine crisis, the Turkey and Syria earthquake, as well as armed conflicts in Sudan and Israel, highlighted the importance of a well-prepared consular structure capable of handling multiple crises at once. International cooperation and the use of European mechanisms, such as the EU Civil Protection Mechanism and the EU Integrated Political Crisis Response (IPCR), were key factors in the success of these interventions.

Adaptability and flexibility in decision-making were essential to ensure the safety of Romanian citizens. Swift interventions, quick arrangements for air and ground transport, and close coordination with international partners showed that Romania can respond effectively even under the most difficult circumstances.

In the long term, reinforcing rapid-response mechanisms, improving consular infrastructure, and developing more detailed crisis action plans will be critical to enhancing the efficiency of future crisis responses. Increased capacity for collaboration with other states and international institutions will remain a core component of Romania's consular policy.

The experience of recent years has proven that managing consular crises requires not only an immediate reaction, but also a strategic, integrated approach based on collaboration, professionalism, and efficiency. Romania has strengthened its standing as an active player in international emergency management, proving it can deliver effective support to its citizens, regardless of their location or the challenges they face.

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# Kenya: Manifestation of Domestic Violence in the Central Highlands

Lilian Wanjiku MACHARIAH

**Abstract.** Domestic violence is a pervasive social issue worldwide and a human rights concern, affecting both men and women globally. In Kenya, for instance, approximately 4 women and 1 man per 1,000 people experience intimate partner violence yearly, with intimate partner homicides affecting 1,181 women and 329 men. Despite significant efforts to combat domestic violence, cases have been increasing, taking different forms such as emotional, physical, and psychological abuse. The study was conducted in Nyeri County, one of the counties in the central highlands of Kenya. Cases of domestic violence have been rising each year in Nyeri County, Kenya. This study sought to investigate how cases of domestic violence manifest in Nyeri County. Respondents included household heads, assistant chiefs, police, religious leaders, NGOs, village elders, and sub-county administrators. Data was collected through interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions. The study found that domestic violence manifests through verbal insults, physical injuries, financial deprivation, sexual violence, and female genital mutilation, with divorce and separation often resulting from these abuses. The study concludes that both men and women in the county have suffered due to domestic violence in their families. The study recommends empowering both men and women in Nyeri County through education, awareness programs, and legal support to counter domestic violence.

**Keywords:** Domestic violence, pain, suffering, gender-based violence.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 51, April 2025, pp. 64–89

DOI: 10.24193/csqr.51.4  
Published First Online: April 03, 2025

## Introduction

In virtually all sectors, women face disadvantages in development across many societies globally. Such widespread discrimination against women stems from inequality, denial



of rights, and often gender-based violence in various forms. Domestic violence remains an endemic social problem in many, if not all, countries worldwide. As noted by Mutahi (2017), despite its widespread impact on both genders, women represent the majority of victims, while men are the primary perpetrators.

According to UNIFEM (2012, cited in Mutahi, 2017), violence against women has historically been a common feature of all human societies. Notably, in many countries and cultures worldwide, women have traditionally been subjected to severe physical, sexual, and psychological abuse within families. According to the United Nations (UN, 1993), gender-driven domestic violence affects both men and women, often resulting in physical and sexual suffering for victims.

As explained by Mongare, Obonyo, and Parsitau (2018), domestic violence, also referred to as intimate partner violence (IPV), encompasses battering, spousal abuse, dating abuse, and family abuse. These behaviors involve violence perpetrated by one partner against another within families, cohabitation, marriage, or dating relationships.

While domestic violence is a global issue, it remains particularly persistent in the United States, making it an endemic problem. According to the National Coalition Against Domestic Violence (NCADV, 2020), nearly 10 million adults experience domestic violence annually, with women and girls disproportionately affected. Domestic violence in the US is fueled by several factors, including education level, stereotypes, cultural violence, and a history of marital violence in either men or women. Reports indicate that domestic violence affects both men and women. Specifically, about 22% of women and 7% of men in the US have reported experiencing various forms of domestic violence, particularly intimate partner violence, sexual abuse, physical abuse, and emotional abuse. Despite the existence of policies and laws to address this issue, many victims have reported difficulty accessing assistance from the relevant authorities.

The African continent has not been spared from the profound impacts of domestic violence, especially on women. Notably, all regions of Africa have experienced a significant share of domestic violence, which has long constrained the socio-economic development of most, if not all, countries on the continent. For instance, in West Africa, particularly in Nigeria, domestic violence has intensified, manifesting in forms such as wife-beating, which is regarded as a means of instilling discipline (Mutahi, 2017). This is largely driven by women's profound reliance on men for survival. Additionally, these societies are predominantly patriarchal. Such cultures tend to confine women to subordinate roles, making them even more vulnerable. The persistence of domestic violence in Nigeria has been attributed to the perception of domestic violence as a private matter, weak laws, and the underreporting of cases.

As noted by Macharia and Simiyu (2023), the sociocultural dynamics in Nyeri County have created conditions that foster domestic violence. According to Njoroge (2016) and Mucheru (2014), Nyeri County has recorded numerous cases of domestic violence, many

of which are severe. Consequently, the high prevalence of domestic violence shows no signs of declining, with women disproportionately affected. As argued by Bitrus-Ojiambo and King'ori (2016), domestic violence remains highly prevalent in Nyeri. According to them, this is attributed to higher education levels, which lead to competition between partners within households, especially when both seek decision-making authority. Such confrontation leads to unnecessary conflict and may escalate into domestic violence.

## **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Nyeri County, located in the central highlands of Kenya. It serves as the administrative center of the Central Province of Kenya. The study employed descriptive and analytical research designs. The study was guided by Berkowitz's (1978) frustration-aggression theory and Bandura's (1977) social learning theory. The study population included 384 household heads, 12 assistant chiefs, 15 police officers, 30 faith-based organization representatives, 12 community-based organizations (CBOs)/NGOs, 3 sub-county administrators, and 20 village elders. This brings the total to 476 respondents. The respondents were selected using purposive sampling, simple random sampling, and census sampling techniques.

Data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, and observations. Quantitative data from closed-ended questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS version 26. Qualitative data from interviews, FGDs, and open-ended questionnaires were analyzed thematically and presented using thematic narrations and verbatim excerpts. Data collected from observations were presented using photos and descriptions.

The study focused on Nyeri County, Kenya, with the objective of examining how domestic violence manifests in the study area. The study covered all the sub-counties in Nyeri County. The study period spanned from 2010 to 2022. The year 2010 was selected because it marked the beginning of increased media coverage of domestic violence cases in Nyeri County. Additionally, 2022 was selected as it was the year the study was conducted, and cases continued to be reported. The 10-year span provided insights into the research questions. Data collection took place from March 2022 to September 2022.

## **Results and Discussion on Manifestation of Domestic Violence**

The study sought to investigate how domestic violence manifests in Nyeri County. The results are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Manifestation of Domestic Violence

Manifestation of conflicts	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Don't Know	Agree	Strongly Agree	Cumulative agreement	Rank
	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	F(%)	
Verbal insults	5(1%)	4(1%)	0(0%)	298(87%)	77(20%)	375 (98%)	1
Divorce/separation	10(2%)	0(0%)	271(71%)	95(25%)	95(25%)	366(96%)	2
Physical injuries	18(5%)	24(6%)	04(1%)	228(59%)	110(29%)	338 (88%)	3
Psychological Torture	20(5%)	319(8%)	11(3%)	218(57%)	104(27%)	322 (84%)	4
Financial Deprivation	34(9%)	47(12%)	12(3%)	194(51%)	97(25%)	291 (76%)	5
Sexual violence	54(14%)	77(20%)	23(6%)	130(34%)	100(26%)	230 (60%)	6
Female genital mutilation	102(27%)	86(22%)	84(22%)	44(11%)	68(18%)	112 (29%)	7

Source: Field data, 2022

### 1. Verbal insults

Table 1 indicates that 298 (87%) agreed that verbal violence is the most critical manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County, moreover, 77(20%) of the participants strongly agreed on the same issue. Contrarily, 5(1%) participants strongly disagreed that verbal violence is the most critical manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County while 4 (1%) of the remaining participants disagreed.

This study well indicates that verbal insults are the main manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County. Additionally, the study confirms that the most utilized verbal cues that manifest violence in Nyeri include insults and sarcasm. In an FGD with elders in Kabaru, they stressed insults and word-calling as the main types of violence in the area. The village elders pointed out that this can be detected mostly when there is a disagreement between the couples.

One of the elders stated that:

*As elders, we are used to hearing couples insulting each other after having a little misunderstanding. In case the conflict among the couples is not solved amicably or there is no mediator to help them the situation might escalate to domestic violence. A few days ago, we had been invited by certain couples to help them solve their conflict. When we reached there, we requested them to explain their problem to us as we tried to find the solution. One thing I noted as they talked, is that they insulted each other and their tone changed every now and then. There was a lot of use of insults and sarcasm (FGD with village elders, 4 April 2022).*

Verbal violence is becoming increasingly common among Nyeri County residents. The use of verbal violence depends on the context. However, it has been observed that verbal violence extends beyond individual households, especially in cases involving multiple couples. In most scenarios, this form of violence is directed at men. In an attempt to

defend themselves, men might confront their wives, thus leading to physical violence. In an interview with the assistant chief from Mahiga village in Othaya constituency, he said that:

*Verbal violence is a common thing in this village. This form of violence can occur from anywhere especially when the couples are uncontrollable. However, the nature of verbal violence might be different depending situation that led to it or the occasion. For instance, when in public the violence might be limited by societal morals while in a house the couples are unrestricted. In most cases, women are the mastermind of verbal violence which prompts men to respond physically if the situation is not controlled (personal communication with an assistant chief, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).*

Verbal violence often leads to domestic violence because when one of the couples feels defeated verbally, they look for an option. The option readily available for couples is physical violence. In this case, both men and women are victims.

According to Jones & Gardner (2002), verbal communication, to some extent, is one of the mechanisms used to express a person's inner feelings. For example, through tone, you can tell whether a person is angry, happy, anxious, or in another emotional state. In most scenarios, tone variation is often a key indicator, as a raised tone is often associated with violence (Jones & Gardner, 2002). However, tone is just one component of verbal insults that can be used as a criterion to determine whether an individual is violent. Graham-Bermann et al. (2010) support Jones & Gardner (2002) by stating that verbal insults are an indication of domestic violence. Unlike Jones & Gardner (2002), Graham-Bermann et al. (2010) focus on the selection of words in communication among different genders. The words used express how an individual feels about another person. For example, a husband and wife communicate differently when they are happy or angry. An aggressive person will use unpleasant words to hurt the other person. Unlike in interactions between nonviolent people, communication in such cases is often marked by hostility. The choice of words often includes insults, sarcasm, and hyperbole.

## ***2. Divorce / separation / isolation***

The results in Table 1 show that 10 (2%) strongly disagree, and 8 (2%) disagree that domestic violence manifests in terms of separation and or divorce. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents, 366 (96%) agreed that this is a major form of manifestation. This is an indication that there are many cases of separation, divorce, and isolation as a result of domestic violence in the study area, making divorce/separation the second highest level of manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County.

The social impacts of domestic violence cut across all societal sectors ranging from the community to household levels. The blaming of the victims, loss of duties, social stigmatization, social rejection, loss of life, violation of fundamental human rights and the perpetuation of violence as permitted by some socio-cultural norms and practices are just but a few manifestations of the grave social impacts related to violence.

Violence against individuals, whether women, girls, men, or boys, can have significant social consequences for the victims, their families, and communities. Social effects include withdrawal from the broader community, which leads to difficulties in seeking employment and education, all of which stem from lowered self-esteem. Children raised in families that experience domestic abuse are likely to adopt violent norms, contributing to a culture of violence. They grow up in violent environments, which affects their personal development and causes them to struggle with functioning normally in society. Affected individuals often feel inferior or helpless and are driven to their breaking point.

Men are also victims of domestic violence, with 18% of men reporting such violence to the authorities (Nthiana & Odhiambo, 2021). The social consequences of violence against men include broken marriages and substance abuse, including alcoholism, which can damage relationships. Society can undermine male victims by intimidating them and portraying their perceived weakness for being victims of violence by a woman. Research indicates that in Kenya, an estimated 2.1 million men experience violence daily (Nthiana & Odhiambo, 2021). This has affected their social life by making them feel inferior. For instance, men in Nyeri County have faced violence from their wives, with complaints that they fail to provide for their families and deny conjugal rights, often due to alcoholism. Through an interview with the assistant chief, he confirmed that it is indeed true that this violence against men exists. He said that:

*Valentine Mugure took a knife, stabbed his husband on the left shoulder, and cut off his private parts after asking for money from her to go on a drinking spree with friends in the early morning hours. This man has never been the same again. He cannot even sit in men's barazas* (personal communication with an assistant chief, 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2022).

The case from Nyeri highlights that men experience violence, which leads to social consequences such as broken marriages and alcoholism. Domestic violence has also impacted women and girls in Nyeri County, who face sexual harassment that results in unwanted and premature pregnancies. The social impact of this is that teenage mothers often drop out of school, significantly disrupting their social lives. A sub-county administrator in Kieni said that:

*Teenage pregnancies increased due to an upsurge in domestic violence, and we received reports from girls aged 12-18 years who were pregnant after running away from their homes because of domestic violence. They get married or go to stay with their male friends who end up mistreating them as they look desperate. However, many cases remained unreported because of fears that they would suffer shame and judgment from society* (personal communication with a sub-county administrator, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2022).

Socio-cultural norms and practices have been found to provide a haven for the perpetuation of domestic violence against both women and men. However, women are disproportionately affected by such violence compared to men. In many patriarchal

societies, outdated practices and beliefs about masculinity are often permitted. This has led to the reinforcement of gender inequality and sexism, which in turn has caused spiraling social impacts. For instance, social stigmatization and isolation directed toward victims of domestic violence, especially women, have hindered their social interactions and prevented them from assuming leadership positions.

A study conducted in Ghana revealed that women's social interactions are closely linked to their ability to demonstrate wisdom in their decisions. A woman who has experienced intimate partner violence is often viewed as unwise for permitting her partner to harm her or for encouraging violence, leading to a loss of respect. The study further found that violence against women has a profound impact on social cohesion, as it undermines the community's sense of belonging and disrupts community engagement (Dickson, Ameyaw, & Darteh, 2020). Respondents in the study noted that victims of violence, particularly women, tend to withdraw from leadership positions and communal activities, putting their leadership status at risk. The victims were also found to disengage in attending education facilities, visiting marketplaces, and the use of public means of transportation to avoid public stigmatization that results from past occurrences.

In Nyeri County, men who have gone through GBV find it hard to report or share. An elder confessed during an FGD that he has been going through pain because his wife is very violent. She fights him and threatens to tell the entire community that the man is infertile, and that the two children the family has belong to his brother. The man rarely goes to social meetings as he has no courage to be with people.

Several studies conducted in various parts of Kenya have highlighted the increase in domestic violence incidents. The factors fueling such violence, according to these studies, include unequal power relations, economic burdens, and drug and substance abuse, among others. Some studies have also attempted to link domestic violence to children's academic performance in schools. The findings from these studies show a strong connection between domestic violence and the learning progress of children. For instance, both young girls and boys from families affected by domestic violence often experience poor academic performance. This is largely attributed to the psychological trauma these children endure. Additionally, young girls who have been victims of sexual violence tend to feel demoralized, abandoned, and have difficulty concentrating in class.

### ***3. Physical injuries***

According to Table 1, 18 (5%) strongly disagree, and 24 (6%) disagree that physical forms of violence do not form a large part in the manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County. Most of the respondents were for the idea that domestic violence is highly manifested through acts of physical violence. The results indicate that 228 (59%) agreed, and 110 (26%) strongly agreed that the cases of physical violence witnessed in Nyeri County were a sign of domestic violence. However, 4(1%) of the respondents were

unable to relate the issue of physical violence and domestic violence; hence they said they did not know.

The most widely cited definition of physical violence by researchers refers to any act with the potential to inflict physical harm on the victim. According to Carlson et al. (2000), such acts can include physical beatings, pushing, grappling, shoving, and the use of lethal weapons. When people think of domestic violence, physical abuse or violence is typically the first concept that comes to mind. Physical abuse is the primary method used by abusive partners to gain and maintain control over their partners. Abusers engage in actions that instill constant fear, leaving their victims with no choice but to comply with their demands within the controlled environment they are subjected to. While physical violence is the most recognized form of domestic abuse in society, it may not always be present in every abusive relationship. Mucheru (2014) notes that if physical violence occurs early in a relationship, its intensity tends to increase over time, worsening unless addressed. Different forms of physical abuse include punching, hitting, slapping, kicking, strangling, using threatening weapons, and denying medical treatment.

Based on the results, it is evident that physical abuse is a manifestation of cases of domestic violence in the county. In an interview with assistant chiefs, they highlighted many cases they have been dealing with relating to physical abuse. According to the assistant chiefs, young marriages suffer the most since most of the people they have dealt with are from middle-aged adulthood. The following are some remarks said by one of the assistant chiefs in an interview.

*My office has handled many cases, especially by women reporting their husbands based on assaults. The young couples have been having these challenges based on the cases I have dealt with since they seem not to understand each other or their interests well. Most of these cases come from arguments or differences in conjugal rights. Most of the men who have been brought into my office feel entitled to their women, and thus in case their wives tell them they are not ready for it, it turns out to be a fight. Sometimes the arguments get ugly since some women have scars that they will never erase (personal communication with an assistant chief, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Based on the above remarks, it is evident that physical abuse in Nyeri County is rampant. One can conclude that men in this country use physical abuse to make their wives submissive. Whenever disagreements arise, sometimes the partners use physical force to instill pain in the partners. During the interviews with CBO leaders, a woman who sells groceries happened to be a victim of physical violence. She narrated how her boyfriend used a sharp machete to chop off her hands, just because he was told by a friend that she was cheating on him.

Police Officers from the National Police Service also affirmed this allegation in an interview. Most of them confirmed that they had arrested many people due to cases of physical abuse. In addition, those in charge of significant business entities also affirmed the case of physical abuse in the community. For example, one village elder who is a local investor and owns



various shops around Kamakwa center, Nyeri, confirms that he has encountered physical abuse, especially amongst his employees.

*I remember when I was at one of the businesses and noted that one of my employees was late. They were all expected to report at 0800, but she was already an hour late. Once she showed up, I had to ask for an explanation of why she was late. She explained that she was in the hospital, and looking at her, there were visible bruises on her face and hands. She explained that they got into a fight with her spouse last night. This describes how serious the issue is (FGD with Village Elders, 18<sup>th</sup> May 2022).*

Most of the NGOs in Nyeri County campaign against domestic violence. These NGOs agree with the idea of Churchill (2018) that all these victims of domestic violence have major struggles emotionally, psychologically, and mentally which affects their daily living and social interactions.

Sub-county administrators also agreed that the issue of physical harassment has been there based on the reports they get from most assistant chiefs and police commissioners in their areas. Unless something is done, the sub-county administrators agreed that these cases will continue rising, and the community will continue being affected. Most people in Nyeri County have suffered from physical abuse, especially from their immediate partners.

Residents of Nyeri County agreed that there have been cases of physical violence against women. This is mostly evident when the man is drunk and unable to defend himself. However, there are other cases where the women try to engage in physical fights with their spouses whenever they disagree. Village elders pointed out they have handled cases of domestic violence against men in their villages. In an FGD with elders from Kihome Village, Othaya Sub-county, they were sorry for the young couples they see daily struggling to have peaceful families.

Survivors of domestic violence often sustain severe injuries, and these victims can be either men or women. Domestic violence is recognized as a critical issue in both public health and human rights (Falschung, 2018). Governments worldwide have implemented various actions to address this issue, including policies and public educational programs aimed at reducing domestic violence. Domestic violence also contributes to increased death rates, as acts such as physical abuse, sexual abuse, and psychological exploitation by perpetrators can lead to victims succumbing to their injuries. For example, Majengo Slum in Nyeri County is particularly vulnerable to domestic violence due to the daily challenges residents face, including inadequate housing, poor healthcare, low education levels, and high unemployment rates (Githaiga, 2020). According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, domestic violence involves any action that deprives an individual of their freedom by inflicting injury or harm.

A study conducted by Shimba and Magombola in Arumeru, Tanzania, revealed that the majority of respondents had sustained injuries resulting from physical abuse, including

beatings, burning, attacks with weapons such as knives, and choking. Some also suffered injuries from sexually related incidents, such as rape and coerced intercourse (Shimba & Magombola, 2021). Strangulation and head injuries from being slammed against walls were also found to leave permanent marks and cause long-lasting pain. Men were identified as the primary perpetrators of these acts, with many being either intimate partners or siblings of the victims. It is tragic that women suffer at the hands of men who should be the ones protecting them.

The World Health Organization (WHO) in its 2005 report observes that woman beating is the commonest form of physical violence. For instance, it established that half of the Tanzanian women and almost three-quarters of Ethiopian women in rural areas reported beatings by their husbands or other closest partners (WHO, 2005). Another report published by the United Nations Population Fund in 2008 asserted that the right of a husband to inflict physical injury or intimidation on his wife emanated from firmly held beliefs. It goes on to note that even the societies where women tend to enjoy certain privileges, they are not free from slaps from their spouses. Another report by the United Nations Development Fund for Women revealed that certain cultural practices still render women submissive to their husbands and other males. The inferiority of women makes them undervalued and disrespected by their male counterparts (Spraos, 2008).

In some extreme cases, women are viewed as objects, which often manifests in practices such as dowry payments and wife inheritance. For instance, a study conducted by the US-based Human Rights Watch in Uganda found that some families justify the forceful inheritance of women, believing that they contributed to the bride price. After being inherited, these women lose their material wealth. The study further found that the families of the women were reluctant to repay the dowry, and if the women had brothers, they were left with limited options but to force their sister back into her matrimonial home (Kimani, 2007). In such cases, women are subjected to physical abuse, and society has normalized such actions.

The results of this study align with those of a study conducted by Dickson et al. (2020), which identified factors such as age, education level, and wealth status, among others, as justifiable reasons for Ghanaian men and women to permit wife-beating. The study further revealed that physical violence in Ghana often manifests in various forms, with slapping and attacks using sharp or blunt objects being the most common. It also found that the implications of such violence are severe, ranging from induced abortion and injuries to health conditions such as anxiety and gynecological issues (Dickson et al., 2020). Women were identified as the primary victims, and low birth weights were among the prominent factors that prompted the Ghanaian government to intervene by enacting laws to protect the rights of women and children.

#### 4. Psychological torture

Table 1 analyses cases of psychological manifestations among the residents of Nyeri County. Based on the table, 20 (5%) strongly disagree, and 31 (8%) disagree that the issue of psychological disorders in the county manifests as domestic violence. However, most respondents believe that the problem of psychological disorders prevalent in the county manifests in domestic violence. According to the results from the questionnaires, 218 (57%) respondents agree, and 104 (27%) strongly agree with this idea. In addition, 3% of the study population posed with this question claimed not to know the issue of psychological disorders in the county concerning domestic violence.

According to Kelly (2004), psychological abuse is a response to chronic verbal or physical aggression. Psychological manifestations are witnessed once the victims cannot tolerate the experiences they are going through in terms of domestic violence. Sometimes the victims of domestic violence find it challenging to continue being in such a relationship; hence either run or stay but are deformed entirely in terms of social interactions, mental health, and personal characteristics, among others. According to Tsirigotis & Luczak (2018), psychological manifestations take place in different forms, such as low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, excessive fear of the oppressor's gender, and mistrust.

From the results presented in Table 1, it is clear that there are elements of psychological manifestation in the community, meaning that the issue of domestic violence is rampant. In an interview with the NGOs and CBOs, the study found that psychological manifestation problems cannot be doubted. Based on the CBO members interviewed, most women in the county showed elements of psychological issues. Hence it can be concluded that most of the domestic violence victims in the county are women. The following is a statement made by an assistant director of KIGWA, a CBO in Kieni sub-county.

*Women empowerment is in high demand in this country. We have noted a sequential need for help amongst women of this county based on the psychological manifestations they portray. In most of the events we have held in the community, women are always on the front line. There is this belief that men are always good leaders and women should follow. Based on our conversations with some of them, it is evident that they had been harassed to the extent that they believe they are not supposed to speak or act if their husbands or men are in the picture. Therefore, there is a need to boost the esteem of these women and make them able to stand their ground and make good choices. Women need to be united and come up with substantive groups through which they can get funds for self-development, among others, and not only rely on their husbands. Some women in this area no longer have self-esteem. They cannot even lead in prayers in a village meeting because they are psychologically tortured (personal communication with a CBO leader, 28<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Religious leaders agree with the other respondents in the study that there have been a lot of psychological issues among the victims of domestic violence. It is not easy to live with an

abusive person in the same house. The spouse should be a partner, a lover and a companion. During the interviews, one pastor pointed out that:

*It becomes very stressful to have the same partner as a violator of your rights. One of the church members has become mentally ill since her husband started beating her up. She no longer has a social life. She cries a lot during the services. In fact, we had to take her to the hospital last year and she was admitted (personal communication with a religious leader, 18<sup>th</sup> April 2022).*

In an interview with some police officers from the national police service, they confirmed that women had been struggling with expression of issues in the community. Most of police officers agree with the idea of Tsirigotis & Luczak, 2018, that in most cases of domestic violence, the women being beaten or harassed by their husbands are not the ones who call for help. They are usually too stressed to come out and express what they go through in the hands of their spouses. One of the police officers made these remarks in the interview.

*Referring to the case mentioned about the arrest we made in the Majengo area, it is not the woman who was being oppressed who called in for help but a neighbor who confessed to having heard the arguments and crying for help almost daily. Based on our investigation, it was not the first or the second time that a woman was harassed by her husband. She had fresh wounds from the beatings of that night but also had other healed scars on her body, especially her neck, hands, and back. The shocking thing was that she had withheld the information concerning the harassment by her husband. One could argue that her husband had threatened her not to say anything, or she had low self-esteem to the extent that she thought the police would not have listened to her. Therefore, there is a need to address this issue of violence based on the psychological manifestations described by the events around us (personal communication with a police officer, 29<sup>th</sup> May 2022).*

It is widely recognized that physical, sexual, and economic violence often have dire consequences on an individual's psychological well-being. Imperatively speaking, psychological violence typically stems from other forms of violence. Researchers have attempted to describe psychological violence as verbal humiliation directed at one's partner and, at times, may involve forced actions to dominate or manipulate a partner. Several studies have collected and analyzed data on both physical and psychological violence and found that the prevalence rates of psychological violence are higher compared to other forms of violence (Shimba & Magombola, 2021). It can manifest in various forms, such as verbal insults, harassment, defamation, or coercion.

In Africa, defamation, a form of psychological violence, has become widespread, a situation further exacerbated by advancements in technology. With greater access to platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and Instagram, individuals have become accustomed to using their phones, making it easier for online abusers to spread and share defamatory messages. In Kenya and South Africa, for example, numerous defamation cases have been filed in various courts. While several cases have been heard and decided, many remain

unresolved, meaning that justice has not been served for the victims. Furthermore, most African countries have enacted a series of laws to regulate defamation, such as Kenya's Defamation Act.

Victims of violence often experience verbal insults, with the majority being women and young girls. Studies conducted by various researchers have shown that stigmatization and verbal attacks are frequently directed at people living with disabilities, HIV/AIDS patients, and, particularly, sex workers. These attacks typically manifest as name-calling and the degradation of the victim's social status. The situation becomes even more distressing when such abuse is inflicted by a spouse. The Metropolitan Sanctuary for Children with Disabilities, an organization that supports disabled individuals in Nyeri County, highlights the prevalence of psychological torture among people with disabilities. According to one of their officials, this form of abuse is especially painful because individuals with disabilities often lack the power to defend themselves. Their spouses subject them to psychological torment, making them feel less than human.

After undergoing other forms of violence such as physical and sexual violence, victims suffer psychological torture as revealed during the study. When an individual is physically abused and becomes disabled, he lives with permanent psychological torture. During the interviews with CBO officials, one lady who owns a daycare center narrated how her husband burned her after a disagreement. She was lucky she did not die, but she now lives with a disability.

Another form of psychological abuse is harassment, which is particularly common in workplaces where a husband and wife work together in a business. Harassment can manifest in both physical and sexual forms. Numerous studies and surveys have found that women are the primary targets of harassment, especially in the workplace. For example, a cross-sectoral survey conducted by Msimanga et al. (2023) found that women are the primary targets of sexual harassment. On average, 56% of women experienced verbal harassment, and 38% experienced physical harassment. The study further revealed that the underlying reasons for the prevalence of sexual harassment include inadequate policies to prevent it, as well as the underreporting of incidents by victims due to the fear of losing their jobs or facing further retaliation (Msimanga et al., 2023).

In Nyeri County, this is still evident. Partners take their differences to the workplace, and this is psychologically torturing. In most cases, the partners use bad language when talking to each other at the workplace. It is humiliating to have a partner insult his wife in front of customers or employees, just because they disagreed at home.

Domestic violence can also lead to significant health and psychological problems for victims. Gender-based violence (GBV) can take various forms, including intimate partner violence, rape, sexual assault, and stalking. The psychological impacts associated with GBV include anxiety, mood disorders, somatization disorders, trauma, mental disturbance, and suicidal behaviors (Sewalem & Molla, 2022). In an interview with a psychiatrist from Nyeri District Hospital, who is also an official of Maendeleo ya Wanawake, she explained that

mental distress resulting from GBV can be characterized by emotional suffering, which often includes symptoms of depression such as sadness, loss of interest, hopelessness, and anxiety, marked by tension and restlessness. These symptoms can also be accompanied by physical effects such as headaches, insomnia, and lack of energy. According to a study by the Canadian Women's Foundation (2023), women who have experienced GBV in the form of physical violence are more likely to experience major mental health issues such as depression. Additionally, 50% of these women have sought treatment for mental health problems.

Although men are the main perpetrators of GBV in Kenya, there has been a rise in cases of men experiencing the same in Nyeri County. A report by Nthiana & Odhiambo (2021) in the Star Newspaper revealed that 2.1 million men go through GBV daily. According to an interview with the village elders, men experience GBV through inflicted bodily harm, battering, and sexual violence.

Gender-based violence (GBV) in men can lead to negative outcomes such as drug abuse, alcoholism, broken marriages, and even suicide. In interviews with several assistant chiefs from Nyeri County, they raised concerns about the increasing number of suicides related to GBV in the region. They noted that many men from the Kikuyu tribe tend to suffer in silence when exposed to GBV, as they believe it is taboo for a man to be battered by a woman. This silence can lead to severe mental and physical health problems. In contrast, the assistant chiefs observed that women are less likely to experience severe health and psychological issues, as they are more likely to open up about their experiences, enabling them to seek help before the situation escalates.

A study conducted by UN (2016) found that violence against women—particularly rape, coercive sexual intercourse, female genital mutilation, early and forced marriages, polygamy, and unwanted pregnancies—are prevalent in many Kenyan societies and contribute significantly to the high rates of sexually transmitted infections, particularly HIV. Another study also highlighted that physical injuries from such violence lead to severe mental and behavioral health issues, including depression, anger, self-blame, suicidal tendencies, post-traumatic stress disorders, and stress-related illnesses, all of which result in deteriorating health conditions. Victims of domestic violence, especially women, are more likely to experience somatic symptoms related to depression, panic, and respiratory illnesses. Furthermore, unwanted pregnancies and forced abortions are also common reproductive health problems arising from a lack of negotiating power over contraceptive use.

The results of this study revealed an increase in violence against women during the COVID-19 pandemic, following the introduction of stringent measures, such as lockdowns, by governments worldwide to curb the spread of the virus. Psychological abuse was found to be the most prevalent form of violence against women, with perpetrators of intimate partner violence—particularly men—weaponizing the fear and anxiety caused by the pandemic. Some even restricted victims from carrying out basic hygiene practices, such as handwashing (Opanasenko et al., 2021). This study also found a strong relationship between psychological health and the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly affecting those



who had experienced domestic violence. These findings align with a German survey that reported an unprecedented rise in intimate partner violence, which in turn led to significant mental health burdens, even in highly industrialized Western countries.

### ***5. Financial deprivation***

Table 1 demonstrates that 34 (9%) of the participants strongly disagreed that financial deprivation is a major manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County while 47 (12%) of disagreed on the same. It is only 12 (3%) of the participants stated that they did not know the answer. On the other hand, 194 (51%) of the participants agreed that financial deprivation is a major manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County while 97 (25%) of the total participants strongly agreed.

According to Li et al. (2019), financial deprivation is a critical indicator of domestic violence in modern society, particularly within families. Financial deprivation typically occurs when couples fail to support each other financially or when one partner, usually the father or mother, is solely responsible for all financial obligations due to disagreements or family conflicts. This imbalance can lead to depression in one or both parents, which may escalate into serious confrontations. Novokshonova et al. (2019) further noted that economic hardship, exacerbated by job losses during the COVID-19 pandemic, has also contributed to an increase in domestic violence.

The results of the study revealed that some individuals deliberately deny their partners financial assistance, even when they are financially well-off. For example, during a disagreement, a father may refuse to buy food, pay bills, or even provide for the children's education. In response, the mother may resort to finding alternative means to financially support the family, which only escalates the conflict.

As shown in Table 1, domestic violence in Nyeri County is significantly manifested through economic measures. In interviews with key respondents, it was noted that spouses often use economic deprivation as a form of punishment, especially following disagreements. These conflicts are most commonly triggered when bonuses are being paid. One of the Assistant Chiefs stated that:

*Most of the women in Nyeri County are complaining that most of their men are not meeting the financial needs of their families. Even though the Othaya constituency is rich in resources such as tea and coffee, most of the families are still struggling to put food on the table. This is because when bonuses are paid there is always disagreement in the family between the spouses. As a way of showing dominance in the family, men opt to go to lavish places to enjoy life using the same money they received as a bonus of tea and coffee. This means that the family is left with nothing to cater to their needs, and this becomes a significant indicator of conflict which may escalate to domestic violence (personal communication with an assistant chief, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2022).*



Some of the men in Nyeri County are polygamous as they still hold some vital traditional African practices. There are instances where men try to make an effort to marry a second wife which brings commotion between the spouses. Women refuse to accept such moves, and as a way of revenge, men might refuse to educate their children. Since some of the women in Nyeri depend on their men, children end up being uneducated since their mothers cannot afford to pay fees on their own. In an FGD, an elder pointed out that;

*Some of the children in Nyeri County drop out of school while in primary school or sometimes they do not even go beyond class 8. This mostly is caused by their father when they neglect their parental role or even refuse to pay high school fees as a result of parental disagreement. This might affect the children for the rest of their lives since most of them become drug addicts* (FGD with village elders, 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2022).

Education plays a critical role in empowering society especially economically. Those who are educated can be creative and come up with ideas on how to improve their livelihood. With education, it is possible for one to secure a meaningful job thus improving their livelihood. Therefore, it is unfortunate that spouses use economic deprivation to punish their partners, and innocent kids suffer the consequences.

Men have also been affected by financial punishment from their partners. Nyeri County is a community that was historically matriarchal. Thus, women still have a big say in decision-making. Whenever a man does not have enough financial muscle, he has a probability of suffering financially when a disagreement arises. The empowered women take advantage and punish the men.

Domestic violence is a global issue, affecting both poor and wealthy nations. It can take many forms, including sexual, physical, economic, or emotional abuse, and can occur in various settings such as schools, workplaces, communities, and homes. Although no one should have to endure domestic violence, this research demonstrates that it impacts people of all genders in Nyeri County. In an interview with the Sub-county Administrator for Kieni West, he highlighted the increasing number of men becoming victims of domestic violence, despite being the primary breadwinners in many Kikuyu families. Domestic violence is a violation of human rights and should never be overlooked, given its serious and far-reaching consequences.

Domestic violence has led to a wide range of repercussions for the economic development of the region in which it occurs. According to data from the World Bank (nd.), most governments in the world lose between 1.2% and 2% of their GDP due to the loss of productivity from violence. The costs are also increasing due to the money spent on educating society about domestic violence in developing countries. Moreover, the economic well-being of families experiencing domestic violence is negatively affected. For instance, a young woman was sentenced to 30 years in jail for killing her husband in Nyeri County (Gichure, 2020). The man was the sole provider for the family and sold miraa to

cater to his family's needs. In this scenario, the economic loss affected not only the family but also the revenue collected from the taxes he paid to the County Government of Nyeri.

At the global level, the economic impact of domestic violence is significant. According to UN Women, violence against women costs the global economy approximately \$1.5 trillion (UN Women, 2016). Additionally, the World Bank has reported that violence against women can reduce the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by up to 3.7% in some countries (The World Bank, n.d.). The pandemic period saw a marked increase in domestic violence against both women and men, exacerbated by the challenging economic and social conditions that contributed to this surge in abuse. The Human Rights Watch, in its report, criticized the Kenyan government's response to domestic violence, particularly its failure to provide adequate support for survivors, especially in terms of financial assistance (Human Rights Watch, 2021).

The study revealed that the economic burden on survivors of domestic violence arises from medical expenses, reporting the abuse to relevant legal authorities, and productivity losses resulting from both minor and serious injuries. These losses are compounded by premature mortality, which further exacerbates the economic strain. As found by the study, this situation leads to a wastage of resources that could otherwise be directed toward more productive sectors, ultimately hindering national economic growth and development.

Across Africa, there is a rising prevalence of economic violence, driven by a variety of factors. Studies conducted in the Sub-Saharan region highlight that a significant number of men make financial decisions independently. This trend is largely attributed to deeply ingrained patriarchal norms that favor men's financial control over women's. In this context, men are often seen as the primary financial decision-makers, while women are frequently considered less capable of managing sustainable finances.

Economic abuse is a widely reported issue, with women forming a significant portion of the victims. Several studies have highlighted that many countries in the Sub-Saharan region have a high percentage of women working in the informal sector, where they are subjected to poor working conditions. These conditions include long working hours, lack of economic incentives, discriminatory practices, and an increased risk of poverty. Despite their hard work, these women often face harassment from their male partners, who deny them basic needs, particularly after conflicts.

The implications of economic violence are profound, ranging from widespread poverty to the disempowerment of women, which restricts their access to independent means of survival. Poverty, in turn, violates fundamental human rights, including access to education, food, healthcare, housing, political participation, and freedom from violence (WHO, 2013). Additionally, financial stress and tension within the household can lead to physical violence. For example, arguments over household control can escalate into wife battering. Economic abuse can also contribute to discrimination and foster sexual exploitation (Fowle, 2008).

## 6. Sexual violence

Table 1 indicates that 54(14%) strongly disagree and 77(20%) disagree that sexual violence is not a major manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County. However, the majority of the respondents 130(34%) agree, with 100(26%) strongly agreeing on the same statement. A small percentage of 23(6%) indicated that they do not know.

Muleneh et al. (2021) argue that sexual violence is a significant form of domestic violence, manifesting in various ways, including sexual harassment, child sexual abuse, sexual assault, rape, gang rape, forced pregnancy or abortion, sexual slavery, forced marriage, and prostitution. As highlighted by several researchers, sexual violence extends beyond rape, often involving sexual coercion, where the victim may be pressured into sex. Perpetrators may use their influence to force victims into sexual acts. Societal attitudes have, unfortunately, normalized violence as an accepted part of life. Within a domestic setting, sexual violence typically occurs when a partner is sexually harassed or coerced due to their gender.

The findings of the study reveal that domestic violence in Nyeri County often manifests through sexual violence. In focus group discussions (FGDs) with village elders, participants highlighted that spouses have experienced cases of sexual molestation. This occurs when a partner is forced to engage in sex without their consent. One of the elders said that:

*Women have been complaining that their husbands are sleeping with them after a fight. They forget that sex should be voluntary. They force their wives into the act even after beating them, claiming that it is their right to be given conjugal rights. Since women are physically weak, the men overtake them in bed and have their way. This makes the women feel intimidated (FGD with village elders, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

Sexual violence is becoming a weapon men use in the study area to oppress their wives. There have been reported cases where husbands force their wives into the act in a public area. Such violence humiliates the woman and makes her obey what the man says to avoid a repeat of such actions in the future. During the interviews with a police officer from Ndathi police station, Kieni East constituency, he said that:

*There is a day we were called upon to arrest a middle-aged man who raped his wife in public. They were having a conflict because the man wanted his wife to surrender her earnings so that he could go and drink alcohol. When the woman refused, they started chasing each other on the road. When the man approached the wife, he threw her on the ground and started raping her. As he was doing the heinous act, the woman was crying bitterly trying to get out of the man, but it was in vain. The man told her that he would do that in public to shame her so that next time she would obey her without questioning. It was a very embarrassing moment in the village as it happened in front of children and youths. We arrested the perpetrator, but the wife refused to come to the station, and we had to release the man (personal communication with a police officer, 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2022).*

Similar incidents have been evident where the man sexually violates the wife in front of the children so as to make sure the woman submits to his demands. This mostly happens when the man is under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. Men have been using sexual molestation to force their wives to do what they want, as they know that a woman will do anything not to be sexually ashamed.

The results of the study indicate that men have not been left out of sexual violence. Nyeri County has been on the media screens since 2010 with many cases of domestic violence against men in the county (Mutahi, 2017). During the interviews, the respondents pointed out that they have witnessed men being harassed sexually by their partners. This mostly occurs when the men are under the influence of alcohol or are mentally ill. During an interview with a Caritas leader, an organization that helps to uplift the vulnerable people in the society, he had this to say:

*Men in Nyeri County are never safe in the hands of bad women. Men are mostly harassed when they do not have the capacity to defend themselves. I remember a case I handled, where a man was harassed by his wife in public. The wife claimed that the man was very useless. She inappropriately touched his private parts and said that he could not perform. The woman continued to say that the man was better off castrated as he had not been fulfilling his duties as the man of the house (personal communication with an NGO leader, 1<sup>st</sup> June 2022).*

Africa, especially the Sub-Sahara region has long been considered the epicenter of domestic violence, including sexual violence. Most of the studies have been dedicated to the prevalent rates of sexual violence in most of the countries within the Sub-Sahara region, and have exhibited a sorry picture as the studies reveal high prevalence rates. This is attributed to factors ranging from and not limited to the poor implementation of national, regional, and even international instruments that seek to protect the victims of domestic violence, the patriarchal nature of some African societies in sexual relationships which favors the males over the detriment of the female counterparts remain the major factor that has perpetuated domestic violence (Zuo, 2018). When some men are angry, they hardly consider the woman as a partner. Rather, they perceive her as a sexual partner and can use sex to punish her. Such men also use sexual harassment to humiliate women, as revealed by the results of this study.

Research conducted by Steele et al. (2019) in Rustenburg District, South Africa, identified rape as the most common form of sexual violence. The study found that rape and other forms of sexual violence are linked to education and income disparities, gender inequality within intimate partnerships, and societal norms surrounding patriarchy and violence (Steele et al., 2019). The research further revealed that rape contributes significantly to both mental and physical health problems, including unintended pregnancy, substance and alcohol abuse, as well as psychological issues such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicide. Sadly, in some cases, the offense of rape can be mitigated through mediation, which diminishes the seriousness of the crime (Sandu, 2014).

Additionally, a study led by Kawuki et al. (2021) revealed a prevalence rate of sexual violence of 24.3% among a sample of 5,259 Ugandan rural women. The study found that sexual violence was more prevalent in rural areas due to the unique social dynamics that exacerbate domestic violence in these regions. Similarly, another study by Kawuki and colleagues identified key factors contributing to sexual violence, including educational disparities, wealth status, physical abuse by husbands, control over health-related decisions, and the frequency of husbands' drug abuse (Kawuki et al., 2021).

Most research on sexual violence has primarily focused on women, often neglecting the male victims of such violence. This has led to a significant gap in addressing sexual violence against men, who are also victims. Cultural stereotypes, which often reinforce male sexual dominance in many societies, have contributed to the underreporting and lack of attention given to male sexual violence. The forms of sexual violence against men include anal or verbal rape, infliction of pain to the male genitalia, forced sodomy, castration, and even incest. Unfortunately, much of this violence goes unnoticed due to the victims' reluctance to speak out and the widespread underreporting of such acts.

Contemporary African societies have faced complex conflicts that have resulted in unprecedented humanitarian crises, with gross violations of fundamental human rights being widely reported in conflict-affected nations. The evolving nature of warfare has seen humans being used as weapons of war, and this trend has extended into domestic settings. Sexual violence has been employed as a weapon of war, with women and young children being the primary victims. However, men and young boys have also become victims, with some coerced into perpetrating rape. Reports from countries such as the Central African Republic and the Democratic Republic of Congo have highlighted the disturbing increase in the use of men as tools of war, a practice that is unfortunately also observed within households.

## ***7. Female genital mutilation (FGM)***

According to Table 1, the results indicate that 102 (27%) of the respondents strongly disagree that FGM manifests in conflicts, while 86 (22%) disagree. Cumulatively, 29% of the respondents agree that FGM is a manifestation, with 44 (11%) agreeing and 68 (18%) strongly agreeing. The results indicate that 84 (22%) do not know whether FGM manifests during conflicts.

The results from questionnaires indicate that the majority of the respondents, with a cumulative of 49% feel that FGM is not an issue in the county, and if it is there, it is not related to conflicts. This can be attributed to the civilization and modernization that has taken place in the country. Most of the African countries have learned that FGM is dangerous (Muthoga, 2014). The government of Kenya has been working hard to make sure that every girl is safe from such oppressive and primitive practices that endanger the lives of women. As a result, cases of FGM have reduced in most parts of the country including Nyeri County.

However, there are people who still believe that uncircumcised women are immature and behave like small girls. As indicated by the results from questionnaires, 29% agree that FGM is there, and is used as a weapon against women. Muthoga (2014) argues that the ideology of using FGM as a weapon during domestic violence came up in the early 2000s, and was brought up by the *Mungiki* sect. The *mungiki* members argued that formal education was neo-colonialism and that Africa should go back to the traditional practices and forms of education. In their argument, both boys and girls should undergo circumcision for them to graduate to adulthood. They claimed that women were failing to respect their husbands because they did not go through the transition period, which they believed should be circumcision (Wachira, 2015). As a result, they campaigned for immediate circumcision of any woman who dared disagree with her husband. Consequently, many cases of FGM have been happening in the county illegally.

The results of the study agree with a study conducted by Wachira (2015) that FGM is a manifestation of GBV in Nyeri County. It is unfortunate that women are forced to go through illegal practices just to make them submit to their husbands. Some of the women report the cases, while others suffer in silence. During an interview with an assistant chief Ndathi sub-location, he agreed that there are men who have been deceived that circumcised women are humble and submissive. Thus, some force their wives to face the knife so that they can toe to the lane. The assistant chief said that:

*I have witnessed several women being forced to go through traditional circumcision. There are two brothers in this village who forced their wives to do the same. It was very bad as it was done at night without the consent of these women. The brothers said that their wives have become big-headed. They no longer treated them with respect, and they needed to dehorn them by circumcising them. One of the women bled very badly and had to be taken to the hospital. The woman reported the case to the police, and we have an ongoing case. It is unfortunate that most women who go through such heinous acts do not even report the case. The humiliation makes them remain in the house and do what their husbands want (personal communication with an assistant chief, 18<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

According to the Agikuyu culture, an adult woman who was not circumcised was referred to as *Kiriigu*. Kibicho (2006) points out that this was a shameful name that no one wanted to have. Thus, all girls would be circumcised to move to adulthood. In the modern world, women circumcision is illegal. However, men in Nyeri County have been claiming that they need to have properly “matured” women, and this will only occur if they undergo FGM (Kibicho, 2006). Such arguments arise when there is continuous domestic violence. The men start to feel like the woman did not mature properly, and that is why she is arguing with the man. During an FGD, an elder had this to say:

*Circumcision was meant to act as a bridge from childhood to adulthood. Most of the families in this village are forcing their women to go through it because they believe they are not mature. I was surprised the other day when an old woman came to my*



*house and requested me to make sure all women in this village were circumcised. She believed that the women were disrespecting their husbands because they were still immature. I reminded her that such actions are illegal, and she should never think of it or encourage anyone to do it. To my surprise, she told me that she had already circumcised two of her daughters-in-law and that they were now good wives who never argued with their husbands (FGD with village elders, 4<sup>th</sup> April 2022).*

A shocking revelation was given by a leader of a women's group who pointed out that she was forced to go through FGM after her husband claimed that she was no longer submissive. The cases have been there, and women are facing a lot of pain in silence. The respondent stated that:

*My husband brought people at night to circumcise me. He claimed that I no longer obey him. He also said that I usually behave like he is my equal. The people he came with forced me to remain silent until they were done with me, or else they would kill me. I reported the case to the police the next morning. My husband threw me out of his home (personal communication with a CBO leader, 8<sup>th</sup> March 2022).*

The results of the study further revealed that police officers have been recording cases of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) in the area, a practice closely linked to domestic violence. Many women who have reported these cases explained that they underwent FGM due to conflicts with their spouses. The Officer Commanding Station (OCS) at Ndathi Police Station mentioned that most women who experience FGM are often coerced by their husbands as a result of ongoing domestic conflicts.

Numerous studies have highlighted that Africa experiences a significant proportion of domestic violence, largely due to the socio-cultural and religious practices prevalent in many African societies. According to Adogho et al. (2021), FGM is typically performed by unqualified practitioners and involves the harmful removal of the external genitalia, either partially or entirely. It is a brutal practice that causes severe injuries to the female genitalia. For a woman to endure such physical and emotional trauma simply because of a disagreement with her spouse is deeply inhumane and dangerous to her health.

The international community, through the United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, has long recognized Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) as a gross violation of human rights and is committed to finding sustainable solutions to this menace. It is estimated that nearly 200 million women and girls worldwide have become victims, with Africa bearing the highest proportion of these cases (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2019). Researchers and health practitioners have focused much of their efforts on understanding why the prevalence of FGM is particularly high in Africa compared to other regions. Many studies, including the results of this current study, agree that FGM is deeply rooted in cultural practices. In many African societies, women are placed under the control of men. Despite pragmatic measures aimed at reducing FGM, these societies continue to uphold the practice due to deeply ingrained



societal rules that enforce women's submission to male authority. This has contributed to limited progress in addressing FGM.

A study by Ahinkorah et al. (2020) found a connection between FGM and economic status. Wealthier women are less likely to undergo FGM compared to their economically disadvantaged counterparts. The study also revealed that FGM practices are particularly prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa, where socio-cultural factors play a significant role in perpetuating the practice and discouraging victims from reporting it. The study further pointed out that circumcised women are often viewed as more valuable in certain societies, where they are seen as better suited for inheritance purposes (Ahinkorah et al., 2020). Additionally, other studies have found that Guinea has the highest prevalence of domestic violence related to FGM, while Mali ranks similarly in the prevalence of FGM among girls. In contrast, countries such as Niger, Togo, and Tanzania have reported lower rates of FGM, particularly among girls.

### **Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations**

The study sought to examine the manifestation of domestic violence in Nyeri County. The results indicated that cumulatively 375 (98%) of the household heads agreed that conflicts manifest in a verbal manner. The verbal manifestation comes in the form of insults and name-calling between the partners. The physical manifestation was ranked second, with a cumulative number of respondents 338 (88%) agreeing that there is physical abuse in domestic violence cases. People are injured through beatings, stabbings, hot liquids such as water and porridge, cut with sharp objects, or hit with blunt objects. In addition, 230 (60%) of the respondents agreed that violence manifests sexually. This is mostly denial of conjugal rights or forcefully accessing them.

The results of the study further indicated that domestic violence manifests in terms of denial of economic assistance. According to the study, 291 (76%) of the respondents agreed that partners deny each other financial assistance when there is a disagreement. This affects the daily running of a family, including food, school fees, and medical care among other necessities. Psychological torture is also among the major manifestations of domestic violence in Nyeri County. Cumulatively, 322 (84%) of the household heads pointed out that domestic violence is seen by the psychological status of the victims of domestic violence. Victims become mentally sick as a result of continuous violation of their rights and humiliation by their spouses. Some end up in the hospitals, with a few going completely mad and going to the streets. Social manifestation in terms of divorce and separation was also noted, with a cumulative agreement rate of 366 (96%). This shows that there are many broken families as a result of domestic violence.

The results of the study revealed that there is still the practice of female genital mutilation as a way of punishing disobedient women. A small percentage 112 (29%) of the respondents agreed that FGM occurs in some areas when the spouse, with the support of family or

friends, forces the woman into the practice, claiming that she will become mature and respect her husband.

The study found that the prevalence of domestic violence in Nyeri County is high, and thus concludes that both men and women in the county have been subjected to pain and suffering in their families due to the violence. There is evidence of suffering in terms of physical injuries, with many victims sharing experiences of psychological torture.

The study recommends that both men and women should be empowered in Nyeri County. Empowering one gender makes the other one vulnerable, especially in a community that has been fighting over dominance between men and women. The woman in Nyeri is more empowered by socio-cultural dynamics, and that is why the man feels endangered.

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# South Asia: United Nations Peacekeeping Operations. Challenges, Achievements & Future Directions

Abraham Ename MINKO

**Abstract.** This research assesses the efficacy of United Nations peacekeeping operations in South Asia, focusing on the challenges, achievements, and future directions of these missions. The study examines key UN interventions in the region over the past two decades, including missions in Kashmir, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. Through a comprehensive analysis of mission reports, regional dynamics, and stakeholder interviews, the research identifies critical successes and limitations of these operations. It explores how regional political factors, including the roles of major South Asian states such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh, influence mission effectiveness. The study also investigates the unique challenges faced by peacekeepers in South Asia, such as complex ethnic conflicts and geopolitical tensions. By evaluating the adaptive strategies employed by the UN and proposing innovative approaches, the research aims to enhance the overall impact of peacekeeping efforts. The findings offer valuable insights for policymakers and international organizations seeking to improve peacekeeping practices and promote stability in South Asia.

**Keywords:** UN Peacekeeping, South Asia, conflict resolution, regional dynamics, mission effectiveness.

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Conflict Studies Quarterly  
Issue 51, April 2025, pp. 90–112

DOI: 10.24193/csqr.51.5  
Published First Online: April 03, 2025

## Introduction

United Nations peacekeeping operations have played a crucial role in conflict management and resolution across various regions, including South Asia. Despite the UN's extensive involvement in global peacekeeping, the effectiveness of its missions in this region remains a subject of debate. South Asia

presents a unique set of challenges due to its deep-rooted historical conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, and complex ethnic divisions. This research critically examines the efficacy of UN peacekeeping operations in South Asia, assessing their successes, limitations, and potential improvements.

The rationale for this research stems from the significant and often contentious role that peacekeeping plays in South Asia's security landscape (Abdenur, 2019). Unlike other regions where UN peacekeeping has led to clear conflict resolution, South Asia remains a hotspot of political instability and prolonged disputes. The Kashmir conflict, for instance, continues to challenge UN peacekeeping efforts due to the ongoing rivalry between India and Pakistan. Although the UN Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) was established in 1949 to monitor ceasefire violations along the Line of Control, its impact has been severely limited. India's refusal to acknowledge the mission's relevance and Pakistan's insistence on its necessity illustrate the political deadlock that undermines peacekeeping efforts. In contrast, Nepal's experience with the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) showcases a more successful engagement, as the mission contributed to the country's post-conflict transition following the Maoist insurgency. These contrasting cases highlight the uneven effectiveness of UN interventions in the region, warranting a deeper analysis of the underlying factors (Adler & Pouliot, 2011).

This study employs a qualitative research methodology, focusing on document analysis as the primary approach to data collection and interpretation. By reviewing official UN reports, mission mandates, academic literature, and policy analyses, the research systematically evaluates the achievements and shortcomings of UN peacekeeping in South Asia. This method allows for a critical examination of historical and contemporary trends without the potential biases introduced by interviews. For example, the study analyzes key UN Security Council resolutions related to South Asian conflicts, assessing their implementation and impact. Additionally, regional policy documents from India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka provide valuable insights into how national governments perceive and interact with UN peacekeeping efforts. The use of qualitative content analysis ensures that the study remains grounded in empirical evidence while allowing for a nuanced interpretation of peacekeeping dynamics.

## **Historical Context**

The history of the United Nations' peacekeeping in South Asia is deeply intertwined with the region's post-colonial conflicts, territorial disputes, and political transitions (Aoi & Heng, 2014). Unlike in Africa or the Balkans, where UN peacekeeping missions have often been deployed in response to internal civil wars or state collapses peacekeeping efforts in South Asia have primarily been shaped by interstate rivalries, particularly between India and Pakistan. The longest-standing UN peacekeeping mission in the region, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), was established in 1949 following the first Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir. This conflict erupted soon



after the partition of British India in 1947, leading to competing territorial claims over the region of Jammu and Kashmir. Despite its mandate to monitor ceasefire violations along the Line of Control, UNMOGIP has been rendered largely ineffective due to India's refusal to recognize its relevance after the 1972 Simla Agreement, which India argues replaced the UN's role with bilateral dispute resolution mechanisms. However, Pakistan continues to advocate for the mission's presence, illustrating the political impasse that has significantly constrained UN peacekeeping efforts in South Asia (Adler & Pouliot, 2011).

While the Kashmir conflict represents the most prominent case of UN involvement, Nepal's experience with peacekeeping presents a stark contrast. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), established in 2007, played a crucial role in overseeing the country's post-conflict transition following a decade-long Maoist insurgency. Unlike UNMOGIP, which was caught in geopolitical tensions, UNMIN was invited by Nepal's government and key political actors, allowing for relatively smoother operations. The mission was tasked with monitoring the disarmament of Maoist combatants and supporting the electoral process that led to the country's transition from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic. However, its mandate remained limited, and while it contributed to stabilizing Nepal's political landscape, critics argue that its failure to address deeper structural issues—such as the integration of Maoist fighters into the national army—left gaps that later contributed to political instability. UNMIN's experience highlights both the potential and limitations of UN peacekeeping in South Asia, particularly in cases where domestic political will aligns with international peace efforts.

Beyond these major missions, the broader historical trajectory of UN peacekeeping in South Asia reflects the region's reluctance to fully embrace external intervention in security matters. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh are among the largest troop-contributing countries to UN peacekeeping missions worldwide, yet they have historically been resistant to foreign peacekeeping within their borders. India, for instance, has repeatedly opposed UN involvement in its internal conflicts, including in regions such as Nagaland and Manipur, preferring to handle such matters through national security mechanisms (Banerjee, 2013). Pakistan, despite supporting UNMOGIP's presence, has also resisted deeper UN interventions in its internal conflicts, such as the insurgency in Balochistan. Bangladesh, while not a major site of UN peacekeeping operations, has had its internal conflicts, including the Chittagong Hill Tracts insurgency, which was resolved through a peace accord without direct UN involvement. These cases demonstrate how South Asian states strategically navigate their engagement with UN peacekeeping—actively contributing troops to international missions while maintaining sovereignty over their internal security affairs (Aoi & Heng, 2014).

The historical evolution of UN peacekeeping in South Asia also underscores the changing nature of conflicts in the region. While the early peacekeeping missions focused on traditional interstate conflicts, recent engagements have been more concerned with intrastate conflicts and post-conflict transitions (Bellamy & Williams, 2013). The role of UN peacekeepers has expanded beyond monitoring ceasefires to include civilian



protection, electoral assistance, and human rights monitoring. However, the effectiveness of these efforts has been uneven, largely due to the political complexities of South Asian conflicts and the often-limited mandates given to peacekeeping missions. The mixed legacy of peacekeeping in the region suggests that while the UN has played a role in mitigating conflicts, its ability to achieve long-term stability is contingent on both regional political dynamics and the willingness of host states to cooperate.

### **Key Missions in the Region**

United Nations peacekeeping in South Asia has been characterized by a series of missions that have responded to different types of conflicts, ranging from interstate tensions to internal political transitions. Among these, the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) stands as the longest-running peacekeeping mission in the region. Established in 1949 to monitor the ceasefire between India and Pakistan in the disputed region of Jammu and Kashmir, UNMOGIP was initially tasked with observing and reporting violations along the ceasefire line. However, its effectiveness has been severely hampered by the shifting political landscape. Following the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971, which led to the Simla Agreement between the two countries in 1972, India argued that the agreement replaced the need for UN mediation, effectively rendering UNMOGIP obsolete in its view. Pakistan, on the other hand, continues to advocate for the mission's role, seeing it as an international acknowledgment of the Kashmir dispute. This political deadlock has significantly limited UNMOGIP's influence, with India refusing to grant it operational access beyond Pakistan-controlled areas, reducing its ability to fulfill its original mandate. The mission serves as a symbolic presence rather than an active peacekeeping force, demonstrating how entrenched political positions can neutralize the effectiveness of UN interventions (Bove & Ruggeri, 2016).

In contrast to UNMOGIP's restricted mandate and diminished impact, the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) presents a more engaged form of peacekeeping tailored to post-conflict stabilization. Established in 2007 following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Nepali government and the Maoist rebels, UNMIN played a crucial role in facilitating Nepal's transition from a monarchy to a democratic republic. The mission was tasked with monitoring the disarmament and integration of Maoist combatants, assisting in the management of arms depots, and supporting Nepal's election process. While UNMIN was initially seen as a success in stabilizing the fragile post-conflict environment, its limitations became apparent when the integration of Maoist combatants into the national army became a contentious issue. Political infighting among Nepal's parties, coupled with concerns over UNMIN's neutrality, led to the mission's early termination in 2011. The inability to fully resolve the integration process before UNMIN's departure contributed to lingering political instability, raising questions about whether the mission's mandate was sufficient to address the deeper structural causes of conflict. The case of UNMIN illustrates both the strengths and weaknesses of UN peacekeeping

in South Asia: while it was instrumental in supporting democratic transition, the lack of a long-term conflict resolution strategy limited its lasting impact.

Beyond these high-profile missions, the UN's involvement in Sri Lanka has been more indirect yet remains a significant example of the challenges of peacekeeping in the region. Unlike in Nepal, where the government welcomed UN involvement, Sri Lanka's approach to its internal conflict with the Tamil Tigers (LTTE) was marked by resistance to international intervention. During the final phase of Sri Lanka's civil war in 2009, allegations of war crimes and humanitarian violations prompted calls for UN peacekeeping engagement. However, the Sri Lankan government, under President Mahinda Rajapaksa, firmly rejected any UN peacekeeping presence, instead favoring a military solution to the conflict. In the absence of a peacekeeping mission, the UN's role was largely limited to humanitarian assistance and post-conflict human rights monitoring. The UN's failure to prevent civilian casualties and address the aftermath of the conflict led to significant criticism, culminating in a 2012 UN internal review that admitted the organization had failed to adequately respond to the humanitarian crisis. Sri Lanka's case highlights the limitations of UN peacekeeping in scenarios where host states actively resist external intervention, reinforcing the notion that peacekeeping is only as effective as the political will of the parties involved.

Bangladesh's role in UN peacekeeping has been distinct from the cases of India, Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka. Unlike its neighbors, Bangladesh has not been a site for UN peacekeeping operations but has emerged as one of the largest contributors of troops to UN missions worldwide. This commitment has been driven by both strategic and economic incentives, as peacekeeping deployments provide financial benefits to the Bangladeshi military while enhancing the country's global diplomatic standing. However, this raises an important paradox: while Bangladesh is deeply involved in global peacekeeping, it has faced internal security challenges, particularly concerning the Rohingya refugee crisis. Despite calls for international peacekeeping interventions to manage the refugee situation and border tensions with Myanmar, Bangladesh has preferred bilateral and regional approaches over direct UN involvement. The contrast between Bangladesh's international peacekeeping contributions and its reluctance to host UN peacekeepers domestically reflects the broader South Asian pattern of selective engagement with UN missions.

The varied experiences of UN peacekeeping missions in South Asia underscore the complexities of deploying international forces in a region deeply marked by sovereignty concerns, historical rivalries, and domestic political considerations. UNMOGIP's limited influence in Kashmir, UNMIN's partial success in Nepal, Sri Lanka's outright rejection of peacekeeping, and Bangladesh's external engagement all demonstrate that the effectiveness of UN missions is ultimately shaped by the political environment in which they operate. These cases collectively reveal that while the UN has played important roles in certain contexts, its ability to enforce peace remains constrained by the strategic calculations of South Asian states.

## **Challenges of UN Peacekeeping in South Asia**

### ***Regional political dynamics***

The interplay of historical rivalries, national interests, and strategic alliances among key South Asian states often dictates the scope and limitations of peacekeeping efforts. While the United Nations seeks to operate as a neutral actor, regional powers such as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh frequently shape the political environment in ways that either facilitate or hinder the success of peacekeeping missions (Abdenur, 2019).

One of the most significant regional conflicts impacting UN peacekeeping in South Asia is the India-Pakistan rivalry over Kashmir. Since the partition of British India in 1947, both states have laid claim to the territory, leading to multiple wars and continuous hostilities. The presence of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) since 1949 was intended to monitor ceasefire violations and de-escalate tensions. However, the mission's effectiveness has been severely restricted by the political maneuvering of both states. Pakistan has largely welcomed UN involvement, using it to internationalize the Kashmir dispute, whereas India has rejected UN mediation, insisting that the issue should be resolved bilaterally. This political standoff has turned UNMOGIP into a largely symbolic mission, with its monitoring confined to the Pakistani-administered areas of Kashmir. The limitations of UNMOGIP reflect how regional power dynamics can obstruct peacekeeping efforts, rendering them ineffective when key actors refuse to engage meaningfully.

The role of Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping adds another layer to South Asia's political dynamics. As one of the largest contributors of troops to UN peacekeeping operations worldwide, Bangladesh has been a key player in shaping global peacekeeping policies. However, its domestic politics reveal a preference for regional conflict management over direct UN intervention. This is particularly evident in its handling of the Rohingya refugee crisis. When nearly a million Rohingya refugees fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh in 2017 following military-led ethnic violence, international organizations, including the UN, called for stronger intervention. Despite these appeals, Bangladesh resisted any formal UN peacekeeping mission, opting instead for diplomatic negotiations and regional pressure through the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). While Bangladesh continues to cooperate with UN agencies for humanitarian assistance, its reluctance to allow a peacekeeping force underscores the selective engagement of South Asian states with the UN—actively supporting peacekeeping abroad while resisting direct intervention at home (Caballero-Anthony & Heywood, 2010).

Nepal's political transition provides an example of a more cooperative approach to UN peacekeeping but also exposes the limitations of international involvement in deep national conflicts (Caplan, 2019). Following a decade-long Maoist insurgency, Nepal signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2006, leading to the establishment of the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) in 2007. The mission was mandated to oversee the

disarmament and integration of Maoist combatants, support democratic elections, and assist in the transition from monarchy to a federal democratic republic. While UNMIN was relatively successful in ensuring a peaceful transition in its early years, it struggled with Nepal's shifting political alliances. Major political parties, including the Maoists, often accused the UN of favoring one side or being ineffective in resolving deeper structural issues. The failure to integrate former Maoist fighters into the national army before UNMIN's departure in 2011 left a critical gap, leading to prolonged political instability. Nepal's experience highlights how peacekeeping missions can be constrained by the fluid and often unpredictable nature of regional politics, where national actors use international organizations to their advantage while resisting deeper structural changes (Cook, 2014).

Sri Lanka's response to UN involvement further illustrates the challenges posed by regional political dynamics. During the final phase of its civil war in 2009, the Sri Lankan government rejected any form of UN peacekeeping, insisting on a military solution to the Tamil insurgency. The UN was relegated to a peripheral role, focusing on humanitarian assistance rather than conflict resolution. After the war, international organizations, including the UN, pushed for war crimes investigations and human rights accountability, but Sri Lanka's government resisted, viewing such efforts as interference in its sovereignty. The political resistance to UN intervention in Sri Lanka underscores a broader pattern in South Asia, where governments prioritize national security concerns over international peacekeeping efforts, particularly when conflicts involve internal political struggles rather than inter-state disputes (Di Salvatore & Ruggeri, 2017).

Beyond individual states, broader geopolitical factors also shape UN peacekeeping dynamics in the region. The increasing influence of China in South Asia has created additional challenges for the UN. As China strengthens its economic and strategic ties with countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), its role in shaping peace and security policies in the region grows. While China has traditionally avoided direct involvement in UN peacekeeping missions in South Asia, its economic influence often determines how host countries engage with international organizations. For example, Sri Lanka, which relies heavily on Chinese investment, has been more resistant to Western-led human rights interventions at the UN, aligning itself with China's non-interference approach. Similarly, Nepal's balancing act between India and China has influenced its engagement with UN peacekeeping, as it seeks to maintain diplomatic neutrality while leveraging international assistance.

The complex interplay of national interests, regional rivalries, and global geopolitics makes UN peacekeeping in South Asia highly challenging (Gledhill et al., 2021). India and Pakistan's long-standing hostility limits the scope of peacekeeping in Kashmir, while Bangladesh's selective approach to UN involvement highlights the strategic calculations of states that contribute heavily to peacekeeping operations but resist intervention in their affairs. Nepal's experience with UNMIN demonstrates how political instability can weaken peacekeeping effectiveness, and Sri Lanka's rejection of UN involvement underscores the

limitations of peacekeeping in the face of strong nationalist sentiments. These examples collectively illustrate that UN peacekeeping in South Asia is not just about conflict resolution but is also deeply entangled in regional power struggles, where the willingness of states to cooperate with international efforts often determines the success or failure of peacekeeping missions.

### *Geopolitical tensions and state interests*

South Asia remains one of the most politically volatile regions in the world, with unresolved territorial disputes, nuclear-armed adversaries, and external interventions influencing peace and security (Druckman & Diehl, 2013). The competing interests of major regional states, particularly India, Pakistan, and China, significantly determine the success or failure of UN peacekeeping efforts. These tensions often lead to selective engagement with the UN, where states either leverage peacekeeping missions for strategic advantages or resist international intervention to maintain their sovereignty and regional influence (Gledhill et al., 2021).

The most notable example of how geopolitical tensions undermine peacekeeping effectiveness is the Kashmir conflict between India and Pakistan. Since the partition of British India in 1947, both states have claimed Kashmir, leading to multiple wars and continuous hostilities. The establishment of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP) in 1949 was meant to monitor the ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC). However, its ability to function has been severely curtailed by India's refusal to allow UNMOGIP to operate on its side of the LoC, arguing that the mission has lost relevance following the 1972 Simla Agreement, which established bilateral conflict resolution mechanisms. Conversely, Pakistan continues to welcome UNMOGIP as part of its broader strategy to internationalize the Kashmir dispute. This divergence in state interests has rendered the UN mission largely symbolic, with limited capacity to de-escalate tensions. The deadlock over Kashmir illustrates how states use peacekeeping selectively, either restricting its role or using it as a tool for diplomatic leverage.

Beyond Kashmir, China's growing influence in South Asia has added another layer of complexity to regional geopolitics, further impacting UN peacekeeping. China's deepening strategic ties with Pakistan, Nepal, and Sri Lanka through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) have shifted regional security dynamics. As China asserts itself as a major economic and military power, it increasingly challenges Western-led UN peacekeeping norms, promoting a non-interference policy that often aligns with authoritarian regimes. In Sri Lanka, for instance, China's strong financial and military backing during the final stages of the civil war allowed the Sri Lankan government to reject international peacekeeping interventions. Even after the war ended in 2009, China shielded Sri Lanka from UN-led human rights investigations, arguing that external interventions would violate national sovereignty. This support enabled Sri Lanka to resist UN efforts for post-conflict peacekeeping and

accountability measures, demonstrating how major powers use their influence to limit the scope of UN missions when they conflict with their strategic interests.

Similarly, Nepal's geopolitical positioning between India and China has influenced its engagement with UN peacekeeping. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), established in 2007 to oversee the peace process after the Maoist insurgency, operated under challenging political conditions. India, which has historically played a dominant role in Nepalese politics, viewed UNMIN with suspicion, fearing that an extended UN presence could weaken its regional influence. As a result, India exerted pressure on Nepalese political elites to ensure that UNMIN's mandate remained temporary. The mission ended in 2011 without fully integrating former Maoist combatants into the national security forces, leaving Nepal in a prolonged state of political instability. This case highlights how regional powers manipulate peacekeeping missions to serve their strategic interests, often at the expense of long-term stability (Jones, 2015).

Bangladesh, despite being one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces worldwide, has also demonstrated strategic selectivity in its engagement with peacekeeping. While Bangladesh actively deploys troops to UN missions abroad, strengthening its international reputation and securing economic benefits, it has been hesitant to allow direct UN intervention in its internal conflicts. The Rohingya refugee crisis, which escalated in 2017 following Myanmar's military crackdown on the Rohingya minority, tested Bangladesh's stance on UN involvement. Despite calls from the international community for a peacekeeping presence to facilitate refugee protection and resettlement, Bangladesh preferred bilateral and regional solutions, seeking support from ASEAN rather than inviting a UN peacekeeping mission (Helmke, 2009). This reluctance reflects a broader trend among South Asian states, where governments strategically engage with the UN when it benefits their national interests but resist peacekeeping involvement when it threatens their political autonomy.

Pakistan's approach to UN peacekeeping also reflects a balance between strategic advantage and geopolitical positioning. As one of the largest troop-contributing countries to UN missions, Pakistan uses its peacekeeping role to enhance its global standing and military prestige. However, its commitment to peacekeeping abroad contrasts with its policies toward conflicts within its borders, particularly in Balochistan and the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), where insurgencies and human rights violations persist. Pakistan has consistently rejected UN involvement in these internal conflicts, framing them as national security issues rather than matters requiring international intervention. This selective engagement with peacekeeping allows Pakistan to benefit from the global legitimacy of participating in UN missions while maintaining strict control over its domestic security challenges (Dominguez, 2016).

The geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China also plays a crucial role in shaping UN peacekeeping efforts in South Asia. The United States has historically supported India's position on Kashmir while maintaining strategic military alliances



with Pakistan. This dual approach has resulted in inconsistent international responses to regional conflicts, limiting the UN's ability to act decisively. China, on the other hand, has used its position as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to block resolutions that could challenge its allies, particularly Pakistan. These global power struggles mean that UN peacekeeping missions in South Asia often operate within restricted mandates dictated by the geopolitical calculations of major international actors (Bove & Ruggeri, 2016).

The combination of unresolved territorial disputes, strategic alliances, and great-power competition makes UN peacekeeping in South Asia particularly challenging (Abdenur, 2019). The Kashmir conflict remains at the center of geopolitical tensions, with India and Pakistan's opposing interests limiting UNMOGIP's effectiveness. China's expanding regional influence has enabled states like Sri Lanka to resist UN interventions, while India's dominance over Nepal's political landscape has shaped the limitations of UNMIN. Bangladesh and Pakistan demonstrate a pattern of strategic peacekeeping engagement, contributing troops abroad while resisting intervention at home. These examples reveal that UN peacekeeping in South Asia is not merely a question of operational effectiveness but is deeply entangled in the region's geopolitical rivalries. As long as major state actors continue to prioritize national and strategic interests over collective security, the potential for meaningful peacekeeping remains constrained (Caplan, 2019).

### *Logistical and operational constraints*

The complex terrain, inadequate infrastructure, and bureaucratic inefficiencies within host states have all contributed to significant challenges in mission deployment, resource allocation, and operational efficiency (Gledhill et al., 2021). In a region marked by high-altitude conflicts, insurgencies, and widespread political instability, the UN has struggled to maintain supply chains, mobilize personnel, and ensure the security of peacekeepers. These logistical challenges have often delayed critical interventions and reduced the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, limiting their ability to de-escalate conflicts and protect civilian populations.

One of the most pressing logistical challenges has been the deployment of UN peacekeeping forces in contested and remote areas. The Kashmir conflict, for instance, presents a unique challenge due to the rugged Himalayan terrain, harsh weather conditions, and ongoing military confrontations between India and Pakistan. The United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), responsible for monitoring the ceasefire along the Line of Control, has often found itself unable to effectively carry out its mandate due to severe access restrictions imposed by both countries. India has limited UNMOGIP's operations since 1972, arguing that the mission is no longer necessary following the Simla Agreement. This restriction, combined with the logistical difficulties of operating in an active conflict zone, has significantly undermined the UN's ability to enforce peace agreements or investigate ceasefire violations. The lack of adequate transportation and



secure access points further complicates the movement of UN personnel, making it difficult to maintain a continuous presence in conflict-prone areas (Jetschke & Schlipphak, 2020).

Nepal's post-civil war peacekeeping mission, the United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), also faced severe logistical challenges, particularly in disarmament and reintegration efforts. Nepal's mountainous geography and underdeveloped road infrastructure created serious obstacles in monitoring the cantonments where former Maoist combatants were housed. UNMIN struggled to deploy its personnel effectively across these remote areas, relying on outdated transportation methods that slowed down critical operations. Additionally, delays in the delivery of resources, including essential supplies and communication equipment, hampered the mission's ability to function efficiently. These logistical hurdles not only limited the UN's monitoring capabilities but also weakened its credibility among local actors, who saw the delays as evidence of international inefficiency rather than the result of infrastructural constraints.

In Sri Lanka, although the UN was never able to establish a peacekeeping mission due to the government's outright rejection of international intervention, logistical barriers would have posed a significant challenge had a mission been deployed. During the final stages of the Sri Lankan civil war, intense military operations in the north and east of the country led to a humanitarian crisis, with hundreds of thousands of Tamil civilians trapped in conflict zones. The UN's inability to establish safe corridors for humanitarian assistance was partly due to Sri Lanka's refusal to allow UN personnel access to affected areas. However, logistical constraints, including a lack of secure transport routes and a hostile operational environment, would have further complicated any potential UN involvement. The government's strategic use of blockades and movement restrictions demonstrated how logistical challenges can be exacerbated by state policies aimed at limiting external intervention.

Pakistan, despite being one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces globally, faces significant internal logistical challenges that would make the deployment of a UN mission within its borders highly difficult. The tribal regions of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan, both of which have experienced ongoing violence and insurgencies, present extreme logistical difficulties due to their rugged terrain, lack of infrastructure, and security risks posed by armed groups. A hypothetical UN peacekeeping mission in these areas would struggle to establish supply lines and maintain effective communication with headquarters due to the region's poor road networks and frequent attacks on military and civilian convoys. The Pakistani government's tight control over access to these conflict zones further limits the feasibility of UN intervention, as logistical constraints are compounded by state-imposed restrictions on foreign personnel.

Another critical operational challenge for UN peacekeeping in South Asia is the issue of insufficient resources and funding. Many UN missions in the region have operated on limited budgets, which restrict their ability to procure necessary equipment, maintain transport fleets, and sustain personnel over extended deployments. In Nepal, for example,

UNMIN faced persistent budgetary constraints that affected its ability to carry out its mandate effectively. The mission's limited funding meant that it could not adequately support reintegration programs for former Maoist combatants, leading to prolonged tensions and dissatisfaction among ex-fighters. Similarly, UNMOGIP has faced chronic underfunding, which has restricted its capacity to expand monitoring operations or upgrade its communication and surveillance technologies. These financial constraints have resulted in peacekeeping missions that are often reactive rather than proactive, reducing their ability to implement long-term conflict resolution strategies (Peter, 2018).

Compounding these logistical and operational challenges is the issue of coordination between the UN and host governments (Pouliot & Cornut, 2015). Many South Asian states view peacekeeping missions with suspicion, often perceiving them as an infringement on national sovereignty. This skepticism has led to bureaucratic delays in granting permissions for troop movements, setting up operational bases, and deploying critical resources. In Nepal, government officials frequently clashed with UNMIN over the mission's role and scope, leading to inefficiencies in disarmament and peacebuilding efforts. In the case of Kashmir, both India and Pakistan have imposed restrictions on UNMOGIP's activities, limiting its ability to access key conflict zones and report ceasefire violations promptly. Such bureaucratic obstacles further weaken the operational effectiveness of peacekeeping missions, rendering them ineffective in rapidly changing conflict environments.

The challenges of logistical coordination extend beyond interactions with host states to include issues within the UN system itself. Peacekeeping operations in South Asia, like elsewhere, have suffered from slow bureaucratic decision-making processes, which delay the mobilization of troops and resources in critical moments. UN agencies often struggle to synchronize their activities with those of international humanitarian organizations, leading to gaps in service delivery and duplication of efforts. The Rohingya refugee crisis in Bangladesh, although not a conventional peacekeeping operation, illustrates these difficulties. While various UN agencies, including UNHCR and the World Food Programme, have assisted displaced populations, a lack of coordinated logistical planning has resulted in inefficiencies in aid distribution. The absence of a dedicated peacekeeping mission in the region further highlights how logistical challenges, including inter-agency competition and bureaucratic inertia, can hinder effective crisis responses.

The cumulative impact of these logistical and operational constraints has severely limited the ability of UN peacekeeping missions to achieve their objectives in South Asia. Whether in the form of access restrictions in Kashmir, transportation difficulties in Nepal, or bureaucratic resistance in Sri Lanka and Pakistan, peacekeeping operations in the region have been repeatedly undermined by logistical challenges that hinder their ability to function effectively. Addressing these issues would require stronger mandates, better coordination with host governments, increased funding, and more adaptable deployment strategies. However, as long as logistical and operational constraints remain unresolved, UN peacekeeping in South Asia will continue to face significant obstacles in maintaining stability and fostering long-term peace in the region.

## Case Studies of UN Interventions

### *Kashmir: A stalemated peacekeeping effort*

The United Nations peacekeeping mission in Kashmir represents one of the longest-running yet least effective UN interventions, illustrating the limitations of international peacekeeping in highly politicized and deeply entrenched conflicts. Established in 1949 through the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), the mission was intended to monitor the ceasefire line following the first Indo-Pakistani war over Kashmir. However, more than seven decades later, the mission remains largely symbolic, lacking the authority or resources to meaningfully influence peace processes in the region. Unlike other UN peacekeeping missions with more robust mandates, UNMOGIP functions primarily as an observer force, unable to enforce ceasefire agreements or intervene in escalations, thereby reinforcing its status as a passive bystander rather than an active mediator.

One of the primary reasons for the stagnation of UN peacekeeping efforts in Kashmir is India's rejection of UNMOGIP's continued relevance. While Pakistan has consistently supported an international role in Kashmir, India argues that the mission became obsolete after the 1972 Simla Agreement, which established a bilateral framework for conflict resolution. This agreement effectively sidelined the UN from playing any substantive role in negotiations, as India insisted that all Kashmir-related disputes must be resolved through direct bilateral talks with Pakistan. As a result, UNMOGIP personnel have been largely restricted in their ability to monitor developments on the Indian-administered side of Kashmir, significantly weakening the mission's effectiveness. Unlike peacekeeping operations in places such as East Timor or Kosovo, where the UN played a decisive role in conflict resolution and post-conflict governance, its role in Kashmir has been confined to routine monitoring, without any real influence on political negotiations or military engagements.

The failure of UN peacekeeping in Kashmir is also a consequence of the broader geopolitical dynamics between India and Pakistan. Both nuclear-armed states view Kashmir as a core national security issue, making any external intervention highly sensitive. India perceives UN involvement as a challenge to its sovereignty, while Pakistan views the UN as a potential leverage mechanism to internationalize the dispute. This fundamental divergence in perspective has paralyzed the UN's ability to engage constructively. In contrast, UN peacekeeping missions in conflicts such as those in Liberia or Sierra Leone succeeded because the conflicting parties, as well as major international actors, supported UN mediation. The absence of such consensus in Kashmir has rendered UNMOGIP largely ineffective, operating in a space where neither party fully acknowledges its authority.

The operational constraints faced by UNMOGIP further highlight the structural weaknesses of the mission. Unlike UN peacekeeping forces in other protracted conflicts, such as the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which has a more substantial mandate to maintain stability along the Israel-Lebanon border, UNMOGIP

lacks the power to intervene in active hostilities. This limitation has become even more apparent in recent years as ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) have escalated. Reports indicate that both Indian and Pakistani forces have engaged in cross-border shelling, often resulting in civilian casualties, yet UNMOGIP remains powerless to enforce any meaningful ceasefire adherence. The lack of access to critical areas, particularly on the Indian side, further weakens the mission's ability to provide accurate assessments of ground realities. Unlike UN peacekeeping missions in Cyprus or the Democratic Republic of Congo, where peacekeepers play an active role in conflict stabilization, the Kashmir mission exists in a purely observational capacity, limiting its ability to prevent violence.

The broader regional implications of the Kashmir conflict also complicate UN engagement. Beyond India and Pakistan, external factors such as China have strategic interests in the region, particularly in Ladakh, where territorial disputes intersect with the broader India-China rivalry. This further diminishes the UN's ability to influence peace processes, as any international initiative in Kashmir risks entangling itself in the larger geopolitical contest between South Asia's key powers. Unlike in Bosnia or Rwanda, where UN peacekeeping efforts were able to secure at least temporary stabilization through direct intervention, the Kashmir conflict is embedded within a web of regional power struggles, making any meaningful UN role almost impossible.

While UNMOGIP's presence in Kashmir may serve as a symbolic reminder of international concern over the conflict, its effectiveness as a peacekeeping force remains highly questionable. The lack of a robust mandate, India's political opposition, Pakistan's instrumentalization of UN involvement, and the broader geopolitical complexities have collectively rendered the mission ineffective. The case of Kashmir thus stands as a stark example of the limitations of UN peacekeeping when faced with deeply entrenched territorial conflicts, particularly in regions where major state actors resist external mediation. Without a fundamental shift in the geopolitical landscape or a change in the willingness of India and Pakistan to engage with the UN as a neutral mediator, peacekeeping efforts in Kashmir will remain a stalled, largely symbolic effort with little impact on conflict resolution.

### *Nepal: A success story in post-conflict transition*

Nepal's experience with UN peacekeeping support stands as one of the more successful examples of post-conflict transition in South Asia, demonstrating how international intervention, when carefully aligned with national political processes, can contribute meaningfully to stability and reconciliation. The United Nations Mission in Nepal (UNMIN) was established in 2007 in response to the decade-long civil war between the Nepalese government and the Communist Party of Nepal-Maoist (CPN-M). Unlike UN peacekeeping missions in more intractable conflicts such as Kashmir or Sri Lanka, UNMIN operated under a clear and time-bound mandate to support the implementation

of the 2006 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which formally ended the conflict. By focusing on specific transitional tasks, including the supervision of arms management, electoral assistance, and the reintegration of former combatants, UNMIN played a crucial role in Nepal's political transformation from a monarchy embroiled in civil war to a federal democratic republic.

One of the key factors behind UNMIN's relative success was the willingness of both the Nepalese government and the Maoists to accept UN involvement as a neutral arbiter in the peace process. Unlike in Sri Lanka, where the government outright rejected international peacekeeping in its civil war against the Tamil Tigers, Nepal's warring factions recognized the strategic benefits of UN assistance in facilitating a peaceful transition. The mission's primary function was to oversee the arms management process through the establishment of cantonments where Maoist combatants were housed and monitored while the Nepalese Army was also confined to its barracks. This mechanism was essential in preventing a relapse into violence, ensuring that both parties adhered to the commitments outlined in the CPA. Although the process faced logistical and political challenges, including delays in the integration of Maoist fighters into the national security forces, UNMIN's presence provided an essential framework for conflict resolution that was absent in other South Asian contexts.

UNMIN's role in Nepal also highlights the importance of a focused and limited mandate in ensuring the effectiveness of UN peacekeeping missions. Unlike open-ended interventions such as the UNMOGIP mission in Kashmir, which has continued for decades with little impact, UNMIN was designed as a temporary mission with a clear exit strategy. This approach allowed the UN to play a catalytic role in Nepal's transition without becoming an indefinite presence, which often leads to dependency or resistance from local actors. However, despite its successes, UNMIN also faced criticism, particularly regarding its inability to enforce political agreements or prevent post-mission instability. When the mission ended in 2011, many of the underlying tensions between Nepal's political factions remained unresolved, leading to prolonged constitutional deadlock and periodic unrest. Nevertheless, the mission's accomplishments in the crucial early years of the post-conflict transition illustrate how targeted UN involvement can facilitate peace processes when local actors are willing to engage constructively.

A major distinction between Nepal and other conflict zones in South Asia is the absence of external geopolitical interference, which allowed UNMIN to function with relatively fewer constraints. Unlike in Kashmir, where India and Pakistan's rivalry severely limits UN effectiveness, or Sri Lanka, where global powers were divided in their support for either the government or the Tamil Tigers, Nepal's civil war was largely an internal affair with minimal external intervention. While India remained an influential regional player with vested interests in Nepal's political stability, it did not actively obstruct UNMIN's mandate. This created a more conducive environment for the UN to support Nepal's transition without facing the kind of diplomatic resistance that has hindered peacekeeping

efforts elsewhere in the region. This absence of external geopolitical competition is a critical lesson in understanding when and where UN peacekeeping can be most effective.

Despite its relative success, Nepal's post-conflict transition has not been entirely smooth, and some of the challenges that UNMIN sought to address remain unresolved. The reintegration of former Maoist combatants into Nepal's security forces was a particularly contentious issue, with disagreements over the number of ex-rebels to be integrated, their rank assignments, and the broader restructuring of Nepal's security apparatus. While a portion of the Maoist fighters accepted financial compensation to leave military life, many others felt marginalized in the integration process, fueling grievances that continue to influence Nepal's political landscape. The country's journey to a stable democratic republic has also been marked by persistent political instability, with frequent changes in government, disputes over federalism, and tensions among various ethnic and regional groups. These unresolved issues demonstrate that while UN peacekeeping can provide critical short-term support in post-conflict transitions, long-term stability ultimately depends on domestic political will and governance.

The case of Nepal serves as an important counterpoint to other UN peacekeeping missions in South Asia, illustrating both the potential and limitations of international intervention in post-conflict environments. Unlike Kashmir, where the UN has been largely ineffective due to the unwillingness of key stakeholders to engage, or Sri Lanka, where no peacekeeping mission was deployed, Nepal represents a scenario where a well-structured, time-limited UN engagement contributed to a successful transition. However, it also underscores the reality that peacekeeping missions cannot resolve all structural political issues; rather, they can only facilitate conditions for a broader, domestically driven reconciliation process. In this sense, UNMIN's role in Nepal is a valuable case study for understanding how peacekeeping missions can be most effective when they are designed with clear, achievable objectives and when they operate in a political environment that allows for constructive engagement.

## **Regional Influences on Peacekeeping Effectiveness**

### ***The Role of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh***

The engagement of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh in UN peacekeeping operations has been marked by a complex interplay of national interests, historical rivalries, and strategic ambitions. While all three states are among the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces globally, their involvement is shaped by distinct political motivations, regional security considerations, and historical experiences with conflict (Salikha, 2018). Their participation not only influences peacekeeping operations in South Asia but also has broader implications for their foreign policy objectives and global standing. The contradictions between their commitment to international peacekeeping and their respective domestic



and regional conflicts highlight the nuanced role these states play in shaping UN missions both within and beyond South Asia (Von Einsiedel & Yasaki, 2016).

India has historically positioned itself as a strong advocate of UN peacekeeping, seeing it as an extension of its broader diplomatic strategy. As one of the largest troop-contributing countries, India has deployed forces in missions across Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia. However, its stance on peacekeeping within South Asia is more complicated. India has consistently rejected any UN involvement in the Kashmir conflict, arguing that the dispute is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan. This position is rooted in the 1972 Simla Agreement, which established that all disputes between the two countries should be resolved through direct negotiations. Consequently, India has largely restricted the operations of the United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan (UNMOGIP), limiting its ability to monitor ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC). Despite its outward commitment to global peacekeeping, India's reluctance to allow UN intervention in Kashmir underscores the tension between its international peacekeeping role and its regional strategic interests.

Pakistan, like India, has been a significant contributor to UN peacekeeping missions and has used this engagement to enhance its international image and diplomatic influence. Pakistani peacekeepers have been actively involved in missions in Africa, including in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Sudan, where they have played a crucial role in stabilizing conflict zones. However, within South Asia, Pakistan has been a vocal advocate for greater UN involvement in the Kashmir dispute, often calling for an expansion of UNMOGIP's mandate. This position aligns with Pakistan's broader diplomatic strategy of internationalizing the Kashmir issue, countering India's efforts to keep it a bilateral matter. While Pakistan has welcomed UN peacekeeping in other parts of the world, its push for intervention in Kashmir is driven more by its geopolitical rivalry with India than by a commitment to international peace and security. Additionally, Pakistan's internal conflicts, particularly in Balochistan and its tribal areas, further complicate its stance on peacekeeping, as the government remains resistant to any external oversight of its domestic security operations.

Bangladesh has emerged as a leading contributor to UN peacekeeping forces, consistently ranking among the top providers of troops and police personnel. Unlike India and Pakistan, Bangladesh does not have an active territorial dispute requiring UN intervention, allowing it to engage in peacekeeping without the contradictions that characterize its neighbors' approaches. The country views peacekeeping as a key pillar of its foreign policy, using it to strengthen its international reputation and secure diplomatic leverage. The participation of Bangladeshi forces in UN missions in Africa and the Middle East has also served as a means of professionalizing its military and generating significant financial benefits through UN reimbursements. However, Bangladesh's strong support for UN peacekeeping has not extended to the Rohingya crisis, where it has resisted the idea of a UN peacekeeping mission to manage the humanitarian situation in refugee camps. While Dhaka has called for greater



international pressure on Myanmar, it has been hesitant to invite UN peacekeepers onto its territory, reflecting a broader reluctance to cede sovereignty to external actors even in times of crisis.

The engagement of these three states in UN peacekeeping also reflects broader regional dynamics, particularly in how they use peacekeeping as a tool for international diplomacy (Whalan, 2017). India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have leveraged their contributions to peacekeeping missions to secure positions of influence within the United Nations, including lobbying for greater representation in decision-making bodies such as the UN Security Council. India's longstanding campaign for a permanent seat on the Security Council often highlights its extensive participation in peacekeeping operations as evidence of its commitment to global security. Similarly, Pakistan's and Bangladesh's peacekeeping roles have allowed them to cultivate strategic partnerships with major powers, including the United States and China, which have supported their peacekeeping efforts as part of broader diplomatic engagements.

Despite their shared status as top contributors, the domestic and regional policies of India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh often contradict the principles of UN peacekeeping. India's crackdown in Kashmir, Pakistan's internal security operations in Balochistan, and Bangladesh's handling of political dissent all raise questions about the consistency of their commitment to peace and stability. These contradictions highlight the complexities of peacekeeping engagement, where national interests often take precedence over the broader ideals of international peace and security. The role of these states in peacekeeping operations, therefore, must be understood not only in terms of their contributions but also in the context of their regional political strategies and internal governance challenges.

### *Contributions of South Asian troop-providing countries*

The contribution of South Asian countries to UN peacekeeping operations is among the most significant globally, both in terms of numbers and operational impact (Zaman, 2015). India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh consistently rank among the top troop-contributing nations, reflecting their deep engagement in international peacekeeping efforts. Their contributions are not only a testament to their military capabilities but also serve as a strategic tool for diplomatic influence and global positioning. Despite their commitment to peacekeeping, their motivations, operational effectiveness, and the broader implications of their engagement reveal complex dynamics that are shaped by domestic, regional, and international considerations.

India has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces since the inception of modern peacekeeping operations. Indian troops have played critical roles in missions across Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, including major deployments in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), Lebanon (UNIFIL), and South Sudan (UNMISS). India has also been at the forefront of peacekeeping reform

efforts, advocating for better training, equipment, and operational effectiveness for UN missions. Indian contingents have been widely recognized for their professionalism, with notable contributions such as the deployment of an all-female Formed Police Unit in Liberia (UNMIL), which set a precedent for greater female participation in peacekeeping. However, India's contributions to peacekeeping have often been paradoxical. While it strongly supports UN missions abroad, it remains resistant to any UN involvement in the Kashmir conflict. This contradiction reflects India's broader strategic priorities, where it seeks to enhance its global influence through peacekeeping while maintaining strict control over its internal and regional security matters.

Pakistan is another major player in UN peacekeeping, frequently deploying thousands of troops in some of the most challenging conflict zones. Pakistani forces have been instrumental in missions in Haiti (MINUSTAH), Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL), and the Central African Republic (MINUSCA), often undertaking high-risk assignments that require strong combat and peace enforcement capabilities. Pakistani peacekeepers have earned international recognition for their humanitarian efforts, including medical assistance and infrastructure development in war-torn regions. However, Pakistan's deep engagement in UN peacekeeping contrasts sharply with its domestic and regional security policies. While it champions international peace efforts, Pakistan faces ongoing insurgencies in Balochistan and its tribal areas, where state security forces have been accused of human rights violations. Additionally, Pakistan's advocacy for UN intervention in Kashmir stands in opposition to India's position, highlighting the geopolitical undercurrents that shape peacekeeping engagement.

Bangladesh has emerged as a peacekeeping powerhouse, often leading in the number of troops and police personnel deployed in UN missions. The country has built a reputation for its disciplined and effective peacekeeping forces, contributing to missions in Mali (MINUSMA), Sudan (UNAMID), and the Democratic Republic of Congo. Bangladeshi peacekeepers have been particularly active in providing logistical and medical support, playing a crucial role in stabilizing post-conflict regions. The financial benefits of peacekeeping are a significant factor in Bangladesh's commitment, as UN reimbursements provide a substantial economic boost to its military and government. Peacekeeping has also served as a tool for professionalizing Bangladesh's armed forces, fostering closer ties with the international community. However, despite its global peacekeeping role, Bangladesh has faced criticism for its handling of internal security challenges, particularly regarding the Rohingya refugee crisis. While it has called for international support, Dhaka has been hesitant to accept a UN peacekeeping presence within its borders, reflecting a broader reluctance to internationalize its domestic challenges.

The contributions of South Asian peacekeepers extend beyond combat and security operations, encompassing critical aspects such as civilian protection, infrastructure development, and humanitarian assistance (Peter, 2018). Their ability to operate in complex environments has made them an asset to UN missions. However, challenges remain, including issues related to misconduct, lack of adequate equipment, and difficulties in

adapting to evolving peacekeeping mandates. Cases of sexual exploitation and abuse involving peacekeepers from South Asian countries have been reported in various missions, leading to increased scrutiny and calls for stricter accountability measures. Additionally, the often-politicized nature of peacekeeping deployments means that troop contributions are sometimes driven by diplomatic calculations rather than purely humanitarian concerns.

Despite these challenges, South Asian troop-contributing countries continue to play an indispensable role in global peacekeeping efforts (Jones, 2015). Their engagement has helped shape the evolution of UN peacekeeping, influencing debates on operational effectiveness, peace enforcement, and mission mandates. While their contributions enhance their international standing, the contradictions between their peacekeeping roles and their domestic and regional policies highlight the complexities of balancing national interests with global responsibilities. The future of their involvement in UN peacekeeping will likely depend on both geopolitical developments and internal security dynamics, making their role a subject of continued analysis and debate.

## **Conclusion**

The assessment of United Nations peacekeeping operations in South Asia reveals a complex interplay of successes, limitations, and broader geopolitical constraints that shape their effectiveness. While UN peacekeeping has made notable contributions to stability in certain contexts, such as Nepal's post-conflict transition, its impact in other areas, including Kashmir and Sri Lanka, has been severely restricted by regional political dynamics, state interests, and deep-seated ethnic conflicts. The varied experiences of these missions underscore the reality that peacekeeping efforts cannot be evaluated solely based on operational efficiency but must also consider the larger political, social, and historical contexts in which they are deployed.

One of the most significant factors influencing the efficacy of UN peacekeeping in South Asia is the extent to which host states and key regional players are willing to engage with international interventions. In Nepal, the government and the Maoists recognized the strategic advantage of a neutral UN presence in managing the post-conflict transition, leading to a relatively successful mission with a well-defined mandate. In contrast, in Kashmir, the long-standing hostility between India and Pakistan has effectively paralyzed UNMOGIP, rendering it largely symbolic rather than functionally effective. Similarly, in Sri Lanka, the government's refusal to allow UN peacekeepers during the civil war and its post-war resistance to international scrutiny highlight the limits of UN involvement when host states perceive peacekeeping missions as a threat to their sovereignty. These examples illustrate that peacekeeping missions cannot succeed in isolation but must be embedded within a broader political strategy that ensures the cooperation of key stakeholders.

Another critical takeaway from South Asia's peacekeeping experience is the importance of tailoring UN mandates to the specific conflict environments in which they operate. Open-

ended missions with limited enforcement mechanisms, such as UNMOGIP in Kashmir, often struggle to make a tangible impact, especially when powerful regional actors actively obstruct their work. Conversely, time-bound, focused missions like UNMIN in Nepal demonstrate how a clearly defined mandate can enhance peacekeeping effectiveness. However, even in successful cases, peacekeeping alone cannot address deeper structural issues such as political instability, ethnic divisions, and governance failures. While the UN played a constructive role in Nepal's transition, long-term stability ultimately depended on domestic political negotiations, which continued to be contentious even after the mission ended.

Beyond the missions themselves, the contributions of South Asian troop-providing countries highlight another dimension of peacekeeping in the region. India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh have emerged as some of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping forces worldwide, yet their motivations for participation are shaped by a mix of political, economic, and strategic considerations. While these countries provide essential personnel and logistical support to UN missions across the globe, their own geopolitical interests often complicate peacekeeping efforts closer to home. For instance, while Pakistan is a major contributor to peacekeeping operations, its involvement in Kashmir is deeply intertwined with its national security strategy vis-à-vis India. Similarly, India's significant contributions to global peacekeeping contrast with its firm stance against third-party mediation in Kashmir. This paradox underscores the reality that while South Asian states are deeply engaged in UN peacekeeping on the global stage, their domestic and regional policies sometimes contradict the principles they support in international operations.

Looking ahead, the future of UN peacekeeping in South Asia will depend on the ability of missions to adapt to evolving conflict dynamics while navigating the region's complex political landscape. The rise of nationalist politics, increasing geopolitical rivalries, and the emergence of non-traditional security threats such as cyber warfare and transnational terrorism will further challenge the conventional peacekeeping model. In regions like Kashmir, where a long-standing conflict remains frozen with no clear path to resolution, the UN's role may continue to be limited unless there is a fundamental shift in the positions of key stakeholders. In contrast, cases like Nepal suggest that where local actors are willing to engage constructively, the UN can still play a crucial role in facilitating peaceful transitions.

The effectiveness of UN peacekeeping in South Asia reflects the broader challenges of international peacekeeping efforts worldwide. While the UN has made meaningful contributions in specific contexts, its impact is often constrained by political realities that go beyond the scope of its mandates. Peacekeeping, in its most successful form, serves as a temporary mechanism to stabilize conflict-affected areas, but long-term peace and stability require sustained domestic political commitment, economic development, and institutional reform. South Asia's experience offers valuable lessons for future peacekeeping missions, emphasizing the need for clear mandates, regional cooperation, and a nuanced understanding of local conflict dynamics to maximize the effectiveness of international interventions.

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