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Ethiopia: Amhara–Tigray Relations in the Shadows of the Civil War (2020–2022) in North Wollo

Theodros Fisseha ADMASSU, Bamlaku Tadesse MENGISTU

Abstract: The Amhara and Tigray communities share a strong bond based on geographic proximity, religious affiliation, related means of livelihood, shared cultural practices, and economic interdependence. Yet, the relationship between the two communities has long been affected by power rivalry among their respective elites. The post-2018 politico-economic struggle for control of state power ultimately triggered the onset of the Ethiopian civil war (2020–2022). This article empirically investigates how the territorial expansion of the Ethiopian civil war impacted ethnic relationships between the Amhara and Tigray communities in North Wollo (NW), drawing theoretical insights from theories of ethnicity. Employing primary and secondary qualitative data, the study revealed that the three-decades-long practice of ethnic-based federalism championed by Tigrayan elites engendered ethnic-based affiliation among younger generations, who primarily identified themselves with an ethnic identity. This eventually deteriorated Amhara–Tigray community relations due to three interrelated factors: local violence in NW, factors associated with the 2018 political reform, and the advent and territorial expansion of the Ethiopian civil war. The civil war, primarily driven by elite interests, resulted in a lack of trust, diminished social relationships, and growing suspicion between members of the two communities. Unless genuine people-to-people reconciliation is conducted, the elite-driven rift between the two communities will further worsen the socio-economic interactions of the local populations.

Keywords: Amhara–Tigray, ethnic-based administration, ethnic identity, Ethiopian Civil War, TPLF.

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Introduction

The Amhara and Tigray communities have historically shared close ties rooted in geographic proximity, religious affiliation, interdependent livelihoods, and overlapping cultural practices. Yet, these longstanding communal bonds have often been overshadowed by the enduring political rivalries between their respective elites. Both Amhara and Tigrayan elites played dominant roles in shaping Ethiopia's political order across ancient, medieval, and modern periods, frequently competing for hegemony over the Ethiopian state (Jalata, 2009). As Teshale (1995, cited in Tronvoll, 2009) aptly described, the political relationship between the two groups' elites resembled a "sibling rivalry." While they viewed each other as adversaries in the struggle for power, both were simultaneously perceived by other Ethiopian groups as the Habesha elites who historically monopolized the country's politics and identity (Jalata, 2009).

This historical dynamic has generated scholarly debate on whether Ethiopia's past largely reflects the political and cultural histories of the Amhara and Tigray peoples (Walleligne, 1969). For much of Ethiopia's modern history, political leadership was indeed dominated by elites from these groups, particularly those from the central and northern highlands. Critics have argued that the Ethiopian state was crafted in the image of Amhara–Tigray culture and history (Walleligne, 1969). Yet, despite their joint dominance, political competition between the two was intense. The contestation between Yohannes IV and Menelik II in claiming the King of Kings' position provides a clear example of Ethiopia's early modern history (Bahru, 2001).

The year 1991 marked a significant turning point in Ethiopia's history with the adoption of an ethnic-based federal system. In practice, this transition entrenched the dominance of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), which consolidated power and evolved into an increasingly authoritarian force over the subsequent three decades (Lyons, 2019). Mounting popular discontent against the TPLF since 2014/15 eventually culminated in the 2018 political reform, initially welcomed by many Amhara elites, but which quickly reignited inter-elite rivalry. These tensions contributed to the outbreak of the Ethiopian civil war (2020–2022), one of the most destructive conflicts in the country's recent history.

The purpose of this article is to analyze how the territorial expansion of the Ethiopian civil war impacted the long-standing cordial relationships between the Amhara and Tigray communities in North Wollo (NW). The article argues that the civil war, being primarily a conflict among political elites, led local Amhara communities to view Tigrayans with suspicion, thereby straining their cordial relations. It also examines how the three-decades-long practice of ethnic-based federalism, championed by Tigrayan elites, fostered ethnic-based affiliation among younger generations, who primarily identified with an ethnic identity. This development eventually contributed to the deterioration of relationships between the Amhara and Tigray communities during the lead-up to and throughout the Ethiopian civil war.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

Ethnic identity, political mobilization and civil war

Ethnic identity is widely recognized as one of the key factors shaping civil wars in multi-ethnic societies. Denny and Walter (2014) argue that ethnic groups possess distinct incentives and opportunities to mobilize for conflict, making them more prone to civil war than non-ethnic groups. Indeed, since the end of World War II, approximately 64% of all civil wars have been fought along ethnic lines (Denny & Walter, 2014). Stewart (2008) similarly observes that "mobilization along group identity lines has become the single most important source of violent conflict" (p. 7).

Ethnicity, as a collective form of identity, has demonstrated a unique capacity for social and political mobilization (Young, 2003). In the African context, Tegegne (1998) underscores its role as one of the most effective instruments of political mobilization. Ethnic identity typically draws on elements such as mythical kinship, ancestry, language, religion, shared values, and common culture (Young, 2003). In Ethiopia, attitudes toward ethnicity since its official recognition have diverged into two perspectives: one that views it as part of democratization and the recognition of diversity, and another that regards it as divisive and a threat to national cohesion, potentially leading to balkanization (Tegegne, 1998).

Scholars agree that when group mobilization occurs along ethnic lines, identity can become a powerful driver of conflict, especially when reinforced by socioeconomic and political grievances (Watts et al., 2017). While ethnicity alone may not directly cause internal wars, it often exacerbates existing tensions (Yilmaz, 2007). This is particularly evident when states marginalize or repress ethnic groups, or when territorially based groups with separatist agendas challenge the central government (Watts et al., 2017). In such contexts, ethnic elites and "entrepreneurs" mobilize their constituencies through narratives of oppression, exclusion, and self-determination, thereby making ethnicity a central organizing principle of conflict.

Overall, the literature highlights the centrality of political motivations and identity in civil wars, given that armed groups frequently organize along ethnic lines (Zartman, 2016). These dynamics are clearly visible in the Ethiopian civil war, where the TPLF, representing the Tigrayan ethnic group, contested the federal government beginning in late 2020. The ethnic-based federal system, entrenched since 1991, facilitated mass mobilization along ethnic lines, drawing Amhara and Tigrayan communities into confrontation. Political elites on both sides strategically appealed to co-ethnics, framing the war as a defense of group interests, thereby deepening intercommunal suspicion and hostility.

Theories of ethnicity

The study of ethnicity is often framed through three major theoretical perspectives: primordialism, constructivism, and instrumentalism. Each offers a distinct lens for understanding how ethnic identities emerge, persist, and shape social and political

dynamics. Primordialism views ethnicity as natural, innate, and deeply rooted in primordial attachments such as blood ties, common ancestry, language, religion, and shared history (Yang, 2000). From this perspective, ethnicity is an ascribed identity—fixed at birth, inherited from one's ancestors, and transmitted across generations (Isajiw, 1993; Jesse & Williams, 2010). Ethnic boundaries are considered static and immutable, making ethnicity a permanent marker of identity. While this approach underscores the enduring power of ethnic ties, it is often criticized for its inability to explain the emergence of new ethnic groups, the transformation of identities over time, or the dissolution of ethnic boundaries. In the Ethiopian context, the civil war (2020–2022) may appear to reflect a primordial struggle, as the conflict unfolded largely along perceived ethnic lines—particularly between Tigrayans and other groups. Yet, primordialism alone overlooks the social, political, and historical processes that have shaped these divisions.

Constructivism, by contrast, argues that ethnicity is not natural or fixed but socially constructed. Ethnic identity is created and re-created through historical processes, social interactions, and everyday practices (Isajiw, 2000). From this standpoint, belonging to an ethnic group is not solely determined by biology or ancestry but by shared cultural practices, values, beliefs, and historical experiences. Constructivists emphasize the fluidity of ethnic identity, highlighting that it changes across time and space in response to shifting social and political contexts. Ethnicity, therefore, is dynamic and open-ended rather than predetermined.

Instrumentalism offers a more strategic view of ethnicity, conceptualizing it as a tool used to pursue material, political, or social advantages (Yang, 2000). According to this perspective, individuals and, more often, elites deploy ethnic identities to mobilize support, gain resources, or consolidate power. Ethnicity thus persists not because of inherent attachments, but because it can be manipulated and leveraged for tangible benefits. In this sense, ethnic identity is highly flexible and contingent, often activated in moments of political competition or conflict.

Taken together, these three perspectives illuminate different dimensions of ethnicity: its deep emotional resonance (primordialism), its socially constructed and shifting nature (constructivism), and its instrumental use in political competition (instrumentalism). For this article, they provide a useful framework for analyzing how the Ethiopian civil war reshaped Amhara–Tigray relations in NW. While primordial attachments help explain the intensity of ethnic mobilization, constructivist and instrumentalist perspectives are more effective in capturing how political elites and historical processes redefined ethnic boundaries and strained intercommunal relations during the conflict.

Methodology

The study utilized a qualitative approach. The target population for the data collection were residents of NW, particularly, Woldia and Raya Kobo, who had first-hand experience on the civil war and its preceding events. The research site was purposely selected for several

key reasons. First, the NW area borders the Tigray region, which experienced a civil war, during which many locals were under Tigrayan control. This suggests that the conflict likely affected local dynamics, necessitating engagement for a nuanced understanding of the social and political landscape. Second, the area has a historically significant Tigrayan population, many of whom were displaced to Tigray due to fears of violence during the war, impacting community relations. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for grasping the current social fabric. Finally, there is a lack of empirical studies on the civil war at the local level, particularly in the NW, underscoring the need for targeted research to inform academic and policy debate from below.

The study also adopted a snowball sampling technique to ensure the representation of well- informed diversified members of the communities in the research site so that youths, women, elders, local government officials, and religious leaders were contacted for data collection. Both primary and secondary data sources are utilized for data collection. Primary data were gathered through in-depth individual interviews and Focus Group Discussions, conducted after obtaining oral consent from each informant. Secondary data were collected by consulting journal articles and books. Furthermore, the study utilized thematic analysis and provided testimonials from informants under the condition of anonymity, using only codes to represent the excerpts taken from them.

Historical Background to the Amhara-Tigray Elites Relationships and Rivalry

The Amhara elite, particularly during the imperial era until 1974, dominated the central state apparatus, controlling the bureaucracy, the military, and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which served as a legitimizing institution for Imperial rule (Markakis, 1974). Similarly, the Tigray elites held politico-economic power during the Imperial era and consolidated power before the Era of Princes and Menelik II's rise in Ethiopia (Mohammed & Kidane, 2023). During both the eve of the Era of Princes and following Menelik's rise to power, the Tigray elites felt their power was usurped from them by the Amharas (Ibid.). Since then, power has been concentrated within the Amhara elites due to their tight control of the state institutions. At the end of the 20th century, however, the Tigray elites rose to prominence after overthrowing the Derg regime in 1991. The TPLF then became a dominant political force in the post-1991 federal state structure (Young, 1997). This shift marked a transition from Amhara to Tigray elite domination.

Historical grievances have played a significant role in the rivalry between the Amhara and Tigray elites. The historiography of Ethiopian statecraft reveals a complex interplay between historical contestations, ethnic identities, and conflicts (Bahru, 2001). These complex historical contestations also shaped the post-1991 elite manipulation of ethnic identities. For instance, while the Tigrayan elites justify their positions in the post-1991 period as rectifying the historical domination perpetrated by the Amhara ruling elite, the Amhara elites justified their position of mobilizing the Amharas during the recent Ethiopian civil war by blaming the TPLF for marginalizing the Amharas during the Tigrayan elite's

three-decades-long rule. The Tigray elite's dominance in the post-1991 period exacerbated feelings of exclusion among the Amhara and other ethnic groups.

Despite rivalry, the Amhara and Tigray elites have engaged in political collaboration and worked towards shared goals. Along with other people of Ethiopia, they have fought bravely for Ethiopia's independence from foreign aggressors. Notable examples include Yohannes IV's resistance against the Egyptians in Gundet and Gura in 1875 and 1876, and Menelik II's war against the Italians in Adwa in 1896 (Bahru, 2001; Admasu, 2010). These wars, led by the Tigrayan and Amhara kings and lords, demonstrated cooperation and collective action.

Nonetheless, the political relationship between the Amhara and Tigray elites was often marked by tensions and power struggles. Competition for control over the center of power has been a recurring theme. In the early stages of modern Ethiopian history, Emperor Tewodros II came to power after defeating a Tigrayan lord named Dejazmach Wube Hailemariam at Deresge Maryam (Mohammed & Kidane, 2023). This event exemplified the power rivalry between the Amhara and Tigray elites at the turn of modern Ethiopian history. Another instance of power rivalry occurred between Tewodros II and Yohannes IV when Yohannes was allied with General Napier, a British commander-in-chief who led an expedition against Tewodros to secure the release of British missionaries (Bahru, 2001). Yohannes's collaboration with Napier helped him consolidate his power. After the death of Yohannes IV, there was also a struggle between the Tigrayans, who expected Ras Mengesha Yohannes to succeed as the King of Kings, and the Amhara, represented by King Menelik, who assumed central power (Sisay & Alemu, 2020). Similarly, the competition for power between the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM) and the TPLF elites in the final days of the TPLF-dominated Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) regime led to fierce separation and competition between the Amhara and Tigray elites.

To mitigate potential rivalries, however, the Amhara-Tigray elites often engaged in strategic political marriages (Mohammed & Kidane, 2023). For instance, Tewodros II gave his daughter Aletash to a Tigrayan elite, Dajjach Baryaw Pawlos, to foster goodwill (Bahru, 2001). Furthermore, in an attempt to unite the royal houses of Shewa (Amhara) and Tigre, Iyassu was united in marriage with Romanawarq, daughter of Ras Mengesha Yohannes of Tigre (Ibid.). Thus, the Amhara and Tigray elites exhibit a blend of cooperation and competition: cooperation occurs when power is concentrated in one group and contained through various strategies, such as political marriage, while competition arises during power vacuums. This dynamic has significantly influenced Ethiopia's political landscape throughout its history.

Concomitant with political power and control of state institutions, the Amhara elites accumulated wealth from land ownership during the Imperial period (Crummey, 2000). Similarly, the post-1991 Tigray elite's economic base has been closely linked to their control over the state and its resources. The TPLF-dominated EPRDF implemented economic

policies that favored state-led development and the growth of party-affiliated businesses (Lyons, 2019). The Endowment Fund for the Rehabilitation of Tigray (EFFORT), for instance, was a key economic vehicle for the Tigray elite, allowing them to consolidate economic power (Aalen, 2011). Tigrayans' control of the economy, on the other hand, created resentment among the Amhara elites for being excluded from politico-economic power. The Tigray elite's control over state resources and party-affiliated businesses after 1991 marginalized the Amhara elite.

The shifting power dynamics between the Amhara and Tigray elites, with both groups leveraging their control over the state and economy to consolidate their positions, have also led to class formation in the country. While the Amhara elites in the past created a rigid class structure between the peasantry and the feudal aristocracy (Markakis, 1974), the post-1991 Tigray elites favored party-affiliated social classes and bureaucrats that are tied to the state and party structures (Lefort, 2012). However, this has also led to growing inequalities and tensions between the elites and the broader population, both in the pre- and post-1991 periods. While class inequality in the Imperial period led to the 1974 revolution, post-1991 party-affiliated social inequality contributed to the fall of the TPLF-dominated regime.

Amhara-Tigray Communities Socio-Economic Relationships in North Wollo

The Amhara and Tigray people share a strong bond based on geographic proximity, religious affiliation, related means of livelihood, sharing of similar cultural practices, and economic interdependence (Tronvoll, 2009). In the words of Tronvoll (2009), the Amhara and Tigray communities are 'ethnic cousins'. Despite speaking different languages, the two communities utilize the same alphabet and share mutual social and cultural practices (Tronvoll, 2009). The NW area is a significant location where Tigrayans and Amharas have cohabitated in large numbers. The relations between the two communities in the study area are multifaceted and encompass social, cultural, and economic dimensions.

The Amhara and Tigray communities have social and cultural ties, shared history, and proximity. The way of dressing, especially in the Raya areas of the Amhara and Tigray, is the same. The communities share similar cultural practices such as traditional music and dancing, and they are connected in weddings, mourning, and intermarriage relations (IDI-31, 17 November 2023, Kobo). In terms of dialect, for instance, the communities in Raya Kobo used to say 'Eneye,' and the Tigrayans also used to say 'Enewey' to refer to their mothers, indicating the presence of language interrelation (IDI-21, 30 October 2023, Kobo). These close relations were a result of cohabitation. Through government assignments, Amhara individuals working in Tigray areas and Tigrayans working in the NW fostered intermarriage, leading to a high level of mixed identity. Cross-marriages between Tigrayans and Amhara members of the community contributed to this dynamic. As a result, as one informant stated, 'the Amhara and Tigray communities are intertwined like a rope' (IDI-15, 16 October 2023, Woldia).

The two communities had a tradition of resource-sharing and actively participated in shared social and religious festivities. Religious pilgrimages were common, including Tigrayans travelling to the Lalibela rock-hewn church in NW and Amharas undertaking pilgrimages to the Axum Tsion Church and the Al Nejashi Mosque in Tigray. To further strengthen their bonds, the communities would come together by joining social and religious associations, allowing them to spend time celebrating various festivals collectively. One method of fostering social connections within the communities was through godparenting. This Christian religious tradition involved families entrusting their newborn child to individuals or families with whom they shared a strong relationship. If the newborn was male, he would be assigned a godfather who would play a role in his baptism and take responsibility for his spiritual upbringing. Similarly, if the newborn was female, she would be assigned a godmother. This practice served as a significant tie between the two communities living in NW, strengthening their relations through shared religious involvement. This tradition provided a framework for nurturing their relationships and fostering a sense of unity and kinship between the two groups.

The Amhara and Tigray people had strong economic interaction before the start of the war. Agricultural products or food items such as teff, cereals, onions, sheep, and goats were transported to Tigray from or via Woldia and Raya Kobo. As IDI-35 (20 November 2023, Kobo) noted, during times of holiday, cattle marketplaces of Woldia and Raya Kobo were controlled by merchants who took cattle to Tigray. There were also industrial products or building materials that the communities in Woldia and Raya Kobo brought from Tigray, such as cement and steel. As one informant stated, 'There was no problem when both members of the communities engaged in economic interactions; they used to support each other and cared for each other' (IDI-22, 06 November 2023, Kobo).

According to informants, Tigrayans were actively involved in business ventures in NW. A considerable number of boutique shops in Woldia and Raya Kobo were initiated and owned by ethnic Tigrayans. Tigrayans initially embarked on their entrepreneurial journey through peddling practices, engaging in the exchange of household goods for clothing within the local community. As one informant rightly put it, 'The Tigrayans served as the focal point of economic interaction in NW' (IDI-2, 29 September 2023, Woldia).

In conclusion, the Amhara and Tigray peoples share common ties across various dimensions. Nonetheless, the ethnic political structure and elite politics that have been in play since 1991 have fostered division between members of the two communities. The mobilization of elites along identity lines has created a sense of ethnic grievance, leading co-ethnics to unite with their ethnic leaders, resulting in violence and impacting people-to-people relations at the local level.

Ethnic-based Administration and the Path to the Ethiopian Civil War

Following its takeover of power in 1991, TPLF/EPRDF introduced ethnic-based federalism and formulated the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) constitution. The constitution presented a debating narrative of 'rectifying historically unjust relationships' (FDRE Constitution, 1995), which indirectly implied that the relationships between Ethiopia's nationalities were dominated by the 'Amhara nation' (TPLF, 1976). This narrative is continually challenged by the Amharas, who assert the Amhara identity, questioning the constitutional provision as an instrument endangering the Amharas (Admasu, 2010). Nonetheless, as Pausewang (2005) rightly asserted, 'no one could win legitimacy without accommodating the demands of the different ethnic groups for freedom from domination' (p. 284) in the aftermath of the demise of the Derg regime. Hence, it suffices to say the TPLF took the right measure in instituting ethnic federalism as a means of ensuring the rights of nationalities to gain legitimacy from the various armed groups fighting for liberation, since the armed groups that fought the Derg were organized based on ethnic identity and were determined to liberate their respective nationalities.

Nevertheless, recognizing the rights of nationalities and constituting regional administration based on ethnic identity are different policy options. Recognition of the rights of nationalities does not necessarily require establishing an ethnic-based administration. What is needed most is the flourishing of democracy and good governance that balances individual and group rights. Without democracy and good governance, the rights of nationalities cannot be safeguarded even if ethnic-based administration is instituted. This was true when the EPRDF regime was forced to vacate political power through widespread protests in 2018 due to a lack of good governance (Semir, 2019), despite exercising ethnic-based administration for nearly three decades.

The 1991 political transition in Ethiopia showed a greater focus on power consolidation by the TPLF than on power sharing, which turned the TPLF into an authoritarian political party (Lyons, 2019). The main grievance the TPLF held against the Ethiopian government was that Tigrayans had too little representation in the central government. Yet, after consolidating power in 1991, the TPLF-dominated government was criticized for the over-representation of minority Tigrayans in the central government, leading to growing popular discontent against the TPLF.

After nearly three decades of authoritarian rule, the TPLF faced popular resistance, and anti-TPLF protests took on an anti-Tigrayan sentiment. TPLF and Tigrayan-owned businesses were targeted for destruction in different parts of the country. For instance, 'Selam Bus'—owned by a TPLF-affiliated company—was a target for attack. Tigrayan businesspeople living in Oromia and Amhara regional states were also targets for attack due to localized economic grievances and perceptions that corruption benefited TPLF leaders and their affiliates (Lyons, 2019). This attack developed a grievance on the part of the TPLF to organize and take action in defense of their positions. As Lyons rightly put

it, 'the TPLF adopted the populist position of defending its people against others who intended them harm' (Lyons, 2019, p. 201).

The politicians who came after the introduction of ethnic-based administration have instilled divisive thinking in the minds of the younger generation, promoting the idea that one should solely identify with their ethnic identity as Tigre for Tigrayans or Amhara for Amharas (IDI-3, 30 September 2023, Woldia). This manipulation has become an ingrained norm these days. As a result, informants noted how the sole purpose of Tigrayans was rooted in their Tigrayan identity when the Tigray fighters maltreated local Amharas in NW during the territorial expansion of the war, as well as by their depiction of common slogans such as 'ትግራይ ትስዕር' (Tigray shall prevail)' (IDI-4, 02 October 2023, Woldia).

What Role Did the 2018 Political Reform Play in Igniting Elite Rivalries?

The 2018 political reform was unpredictable in its quick sidelining of the TPLF from power and was acclaimed with widespread support (Semir, 2019). The general euphoria, however, did not last long. The measures taken by the reform surprised many observers and the population alike; however, it soon became clear that the process did not solve the country's problems. There have been various identity-based attacks (Badwaza & Temin, 2018) and the proliferation of ethnic-based armed groups in different parts of the country. Hundreds of thousands of civilians were killed, massacred, and displaced (Raleigh & Fuller, 2021). The immediate liberalization of the political space opened the Pandora's box of identity politics, whereby groups engaged in mob justice, attacking and killing individuals, and destroying the properties of those who did not belong to their ethnic identity.

The reform brought political competition between the TPLF and the federal government (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023). The TPLF, aligning with the Tigray people, claimed to protect Tigrayans while accusing reformers of seeking to eradicate Tigray by blaming the TPLF for the country's problems. The rise of violence throughout the country and the relatively peaceful state of the Tigray region following the reform compelled the TPLF to boldly criticize the reformist government and the former comrades in the Amhara region. The blockage of roads connecting the federal government with Tigray in the Amhara region, which impeded trade in and out of Tigray, the total attribution of the EPRDF's failure to the TPLF and Tigrayans, and the jailing of senior TPLF officials (Lyons, 2019) made the TPLF aggrieved towards the reformist group and tactically alienated itself. This led to the mobilization of Tigrayans to defend themselves against perceived threats.

The TPLF viewed the overall move of the post-2018 administration as totally endangering the TPLF and ethnic Tigrayans. The following quote from Assefa Fisseha's study vividly reveals the TPLF's perception:

> *the Addis Ababa-Asmera-Bahir Dar axis is a secret pact to isolate and attack the TPLF. For many Tigrayan observers even outside of the TPLF, the post-2018 political developments in Ethiopia and the Horn is reminiscent of the years that*

> *followed the death of emperor Yohannes IV. Internal and external forces are doing their best to attack the TPLF and marginalise Tigray. Right or wrong, this was the dominant perception on the mind of Tigrayans in 2020 and sadly that is what happened subsequently* (Assefa, 2023, p.766).

Due to the close attachment of ethnic identity and politics, there was a biased assumption that equated TPLF with the Tigray population and vice versa, which made Tigrayans to be prey for violence in different parts of the country. Concerning this, Abiy implored the people not to see all Tigrayans as TPLF since many Tigrayans are in poor living conditions (Fisher & Meressa, 2019). However, both before the advent of the 2018 reform and after the reform, innocent Tigrayans were targeted for violence as a proxy for the political domination and authoritative rule of TPLF. The main contention here is that the exclusionary identity politics that the TPLF exercised made Tigrayan populations more vulnerable than other ethnic groups in the country.

How did Local Violence in North Wollo Shape Amhara-Tigray Relationships?

Before the onset of the Ethiopian Civil War and its reach into NW, the relations between the Amhara and Tigray communities in NW had severely deteriorated due to national and local factors. Due to the political domination of the TPLF for over a quarter of a century, grievances were disseminated over lack of access to political power, exclusion from economic opportunity, and serious violations of human rights opposing the government throughout the country (Temin & Badwaza, 2019). The widespread national anti-TPLF movement that erupted throughout the Oromia and Amhara regional states in 2015/16 contributed to the onset of violence in NW.

A sense of victimhood and vulnerability was shared by the Amhara ethnic groups throughout the Amhara region (Yared, 2022). This sense of victimhood targeted the TPLF regime as the cause of the suffering of the Amharas living in different parts of the country and led them to adopt popular protest supported by social media activism as the best strategy to oppose the government. Likewise, the Amharas in NW shared the Amharas' cause in other provinces and joined the widespread protests that started in Gonder city. As one informant noted, 'The protestors in Woldia town faced the well-armed "Agazi forces" with empty hands in late 2017 and early 2018' (IDI-11, 11 October 2023, Woldia).

The TPLF-led regime's politicization of identity spurred the rise of a consolidated Amhara ethnic identity. The state-led organizing principle of ethnic identity led political parties to be organized along ethnic lines, gradually resulting in the formation of ethnically based Amhara political parties and a growing ethnic-based Amhara identity (Yared, 2022). This development was rooted in the narrative of 'Amhara oppressor/others oppressed,' exacerbated by identity-based attacks and socioeconomic exclusion of Amharas compared to Tigrayan elites. In response, Amhara youth increasingly embraced their ethnic identity, advocating for its recognition and rights, especially following the 2018 reforms.

The emergence of the Amhara identity, however, posed a threat to other ethnic groups in the country. The Tigray elites, in particular, associated the consolidation of the Amhara identity with an irredentist policy (Plaut & Vaughan, 2023) and framed its rise as an effort to restore the traditional Amhara-dominated imperial regime. The historically contested lands of Wolkayit, Raya, and Telemit, demarcated to the Tigray regional state by the TPLF-dominated regime, were strongly claimed by Amhara nationalities and the ruling Amhara elites. This claim was forcefully suppressed by intimidating and confining committees established to work for the return of these lands and the recognition of the Amhara identity living in these areas while the TPLF was in power (Sisay & Alemu, 2020).

The TPLF's attempt to arrest Colonel Demeke Zewde, a leader of the Wolkayt Identity Committee, on 12 July 2016 in Gonder, set off violence in the Amhara region. A year later, the 07 August 2017 violence in Bahir Dar city around the Kobel area sparked further unrest in the region. Similarly, on 03 December 2017, in Woldia town, confrontations between the Mekelle and Woldia sport club fans ignited another conflict in Woldia. The 03 December 2017 event became an initial incident expanding the anti-TPLF movement in Raya Kobo. Gradually, the problem related to the soccer match escalated, and Tigrayans —both those involved in the issue and innocent bystanders—became targets of attacks in Woldia and Raya Kobo. As one informant noted, 'That event turned the relations between the two communities to deteriorate in our area, and then enmity and hatred developed within the minds of the community' (IDI-34, 19 November 2023, Kobo).

Following the soccer match incident, another event occurred on 20 January 2018 in Woldia that further deteriorated relations between the two communities and resulted in the destruction of Tigrayan properties. The incident happened the day after the Ethiopian Epiphany, during the annual Ethiopian Orthodox Christian religious ceremony. On that day, many Christians gathered to celebrate St. Michael through hymns. The tradition of celebrating this annual festivity lasts for hours, with the ark of the covenant and spiritual leaders blessing the town's streets en route to the church. During this time, while the youths were celebrating through songs, there was unnecessary confrontation with the 'Agazi' security forces deployed for security reasons (Youth FGD, 06 October 2023, Woldia).

According to informants, some youths used the religious gathering as an opportunity to express their support for their kin Amharas in Gonder and to voice dissatisfaction with the ruling regime through local songs and dancing. They criticized the regime's failure to serve the Amharas equally, highlighting that the government only benefited its ethnic group and that the military was loyal to a single ethnic group, which aggravated the security forces into taking action. While tens of thousands of believers were celebrating the religious festival, the military fired tear gas into the crowd, disrupting the peaceful celebration. This action immediately turned the celebration into chaos, with children and the elderly particularly unable to protect themselves due to the large crowd and the suffocating tear gas (Elderly FGD, 18 October 2023, Woldia).

Following the 20 January 2018 event, acts of destruction targeted the properties of ethnic Tigrayans. Local youth perceived the Tigrayans living in Woldia and Raya Kobo, especially those who were economically well-off, as representatives of the TPLF solely based on their ethnic identity. They believed the economic disparity in the area was a direct consequence of a system benefiting Tigrayans (Youth FGD, 06 October 2023, Woldia). Consequently, Tigrayan-owned businesses, hotels, shops, and residences became targets of destruction driven by the youth's animosity toward ethnic Tigrayans. However, some Tigrayan-owned hotels and residences were spared from attack. This incident in Woldia and Raya Kobo illustrated the consequences of ethnic identity politics in Ethiopia, where ethnicity and territory are intertwined. It showcased how a different ethnic group can be forced to leave an area based on identity, reflecting the impact of politicized ethnicity and ensuing tribalism.

The ethnic-based attacks against Tigrayans in Woldia and Raya Kobo were the main factors contributing to the deterioration of Amhara-Tigray relations preceding the 2020 civil war. It can be argued that the motivations behind these ethnic-based attacks against Tigrayans in NW were a recent phenomenon rooted in the post-1991 political system, not local disputes or factors. The politicization of ethnicity by the TPLF and the subsequent economic exclusion and physical abuse of Amharas in different parts of the country led to ethnic Tigrayans in NW becoming targets of violence as a substitute for the policies of the TPLF.

Overall, the factors that contributed to the development of grievances and further deteriorated peaceful relations between the Amhara and Tigray communities in NW were deeply rooted in national politics. Rather than being isolated incidents, they were shaped by national influences and followed a specific pattern of implementation at the local level. The actions of the respective elites from both communities played a significant role, as they were aggravated by a sense of grievance and influenced by manipulated trends set at the national level.

How did the Ethiopian Civil War Shape the Dynamics of Amhara-Tigray Relations?

The Amhara-Tigray elites place great importance on ethnic identity, resulting in a mindset confined within the boundaries of these identities. The institutionalization of ethnicity since 1991 heightened awareness of one's ethnic identity and led individuals to view one another primarily through this lens. This alignment with a particular ethnic identity exemplifies the notion of primordial identity. The ethnic-based administration introduced in the early 1990s established clear ethnic boundaries for different groups. Consequently, ethnic groups were compelled to primarily identify with their respective regions, such as the Amharas with the Amhara region and the Tigrayans with the Tigray region. This process had a cascading effect: ethnic groups developed a sense of security within their own group but experienced fear and suspicion toward others. This dynamic was particularly evident in NW, where the Amhara and Tigray communities viewed each other with suspicion during the escalating violence of the civil war and its preceding events.

The Amhara-Tigray community relationship was severely impacted by the Ethiopian Civil War and the events leading up to it. The war exacerbated ethnic divisions between the Amhara and Tigray communities. As one informant stated, 'It resulted in the mutual destruction of brothers and sisters' (IDI-21, 30 October 2023, Kobo). Relations between the two communities began to deteriorate during the 2017/18 local violence and were further strained by the civil war. An informant from Raya Kobo observed how the war created animosity: 'If you ask the Raya Kobo people simply about the Tigrayans, there is grievance; community members associated the war and the overall crises of the country with the TPLF and the Tigrayans' (IDI-30, 16 November 2023, Woldia).

The destruction caused by the war led local communities in NW to equate the TPLF with all Tigrayans. As one informant from Raya Kobo noted:

> *Earlier my thinking was that the TPLF and the Tigrayan people were not similar. But the two rounds of invasion and the resultant crises the Tigrayan fighters done on us changed my mind into thinking that all, at least the majority of Tigrayans, are supporters of TPLF and they are against the interests of Amharas. We believe that the TPLF and the Tigray people are one and the same. The war made the Tigrayans our enemy* (IDI-34, 19 November 2023, Kobo).

As a result of the war, the relationship between the Amhara and Tigray communities in NW is severely shattered. To mention a few of these pieces of evidence, their socio-economic interaction has been impacted; internally, some Tigrayans living in NW felt excluded from the society, while the Amhara communities harbored resentment towards Tigrayans residing in NW, especially after experiencing the severe danger inflicted by Tigray fighters during the territorial expansion of the war in NW; externally, the transport route that the Tigrayans used to travel to Addis Ababa was redirected from Amhara towns to Afar areas.

The local communities in Raya Kobo observed how the territorial expansion of the war into their area further deteriorated relations and saw hatred in the communities due to the Tigrayan fighters' evil treatment. As one informant observed:

> *The Tigrayan fighters insulted the Raya Kobo people as donkeys. They had treated us like animals. They equated us with donkeys that saw hatred between the Amharas and Tigrayans. On 09 September 2021, for instance, the Tigray fighters had engaged in house-to-house search and killing of youths. They had also beaten women asking for men's weapons. Those acts were not forgettable and had severely impacted our relations* (IDI-20, 28 October 2023, Kobo).

The war resulted in a profound lack of trust and a breakdown of social relationships, causing members of the two communities to view each other with suspicion. As one informant noted, 'Following the war, the Amhara and Tigray communities lost trust in each other and did not have social gatherings as before' (IDI-1, 29 September 2023, Woldia). Similarly, another informant observed, 'It is difficult for the time being to have a cordial and earnest relationship between the two communities' (IDI-15, 16 October 2023,

Woldia). Differences in political positions among the elites meant that there were no open, popular, or governmental interactions between the communities.

The war also eroded cultural and religious interactions. Previously, pilgrimages to sacred sites in both Tigray and Amhara areas were a common manifestation of intercommunal ties. However, after the war, movement between communities was severely restricted. Pilgrims from NW were hesitant to visit sacred sites in Tigray, while Tigrayan communities avoided holy sites in NW. As one informant noted, 'The two brother and sister communities who were not different except language get into a state of enmity by the work of the politicians' (IDI-3, 30 September 2023, Woldia). From an instrumentalist perspective, the informant suggested that political elites actively created enmity between the communities.

Relations between the two communities largely ceased due to the war's devastation and the influence of propaganda. One informant remarked, 'Earlier, the local communities of Raya Kobo used to travel and engage in trade relations far beyond Mekelle. But after the war, such relations stopped. The war disconnected the people and broke family relations' (IDI-32, 19 November 2023, Kobo). Shared social events, including intermarriage, were also disrupted, and movement between areas became limited. As an informant from Kobo noted, 'We are not confident even to go to Kukuftu, beyond Mehoni, which is two hours of travel for buying cattle. Our relations have stopped and we became enemies' (IDI-28, 15 November 2023, Kobo).

The war had particularly severe consequences for individuals with mixed identities, born to both Amhara and Tigray families (IDI-2, 29 September 2023, Woldia). It fostered enmity between community members, some of whom engaged in killing each other during the conflict. The destruction and loss of life left enduring scars and deep-seated grievances toward Tigrayans in NW. As one informant from Woldia observed:

> *We entered into a blood feud. The Tigrayans were displaced from here, and members of our communities were killed and massacred. Properties were pillaged, and vehicles bought with bank loans were burned and looted. And it left an unhealed scar on both of us. Even after the government agreed to stop the war and resume peaceful relations, the two communities did not develop trust in each other. Fathers and sons were separated; mothers and sons remained separated because one of the parents would leave if they were from Tigray* (IDI-4, 02 October 2023, Woldia).

Although the federal government and the TPLF reconciled and signed the peace agreement in Pretoria, South Africa, on 02 November 2022, formal people-to-people relations have not been restored. As informants noted, although the merchants come and go from both sides, there was no heartfelt trust as there was before. Nonetheless, the relation is not broken to the level that it could not be maintained due to a lack of conflict between the people. It is the political stalemate between the elites that has strained the communities. If the two communities had genuine mediators, either from the government or the community elders, the problems between the two communities would heal soon. One informant noted, 'If

opportunity is facilitated to reconcile the people, they would cry and hug and heal better because the communities shared strong religious ties both in Christianity and Islam' (IDI-6, 04 October 2023, Woldia).

The impact of the civil war on the relations between the two communities is not limited to the NW area alone; instead, it is one manifestation of the deteriorated relations between the two communities. Evidence revealed that due to the civil war, the relations between the entire Amhara and the Tigray communities were shattered. In his interview during the Ethiopian 2016 New Year, the then interim president of the Tigray regional state, Mr. Getachew Reda, affirmed that the Amhara and Tigray people are great people who cannot remain hostile, highlighting their grievances. To improve the relations between the two people he stated how his administration took the lead in visiting Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara region[1], following the Pretoria agreement believing the role of elites can shape the behavior of the people in directing and restoring the enmity attitude to a previous healthy relation.

Even if it cannot be concluded that the Amhara and Tigray communities are in a state of complete hatred toward each other, the overall trend points to growing animosity and suspicion. This is evident in the actions of individuals from both communities. Tigrayans, who had been targeted before the civil war and feared future vulnerability due to their ethnic identity, chose to leave the area by selling their immovable properties. Similarly, Amharas residing in Tigray fled to their places of birth for safety (Youth FGD, 12 November 2023, Kobo).

During the war, informants reported that many Tigrayans who left Woldia and Raya Kobo returned alongside the Tigray fighters and resettled in the area. Additionally, some Tigrayans who remained in the NW welcomed the fighters and provided various forms of support, including offering shelter and sharing information about the movements of government forces. Informants noted that some Tigrayans reportedly rejoiced at the approach of Tigray fighters, and, as a consequence, some were allegedly arrested for providing information and disseminating propaganda that instilled fear among residents (Youth FGD, 06 October 2023, Woldia). As a result, the two communities became locked in a bitter rivalry, increasingly perceiving each other as enemies.

Conclusion

Despite the long-standing cordial relations and geographic proximity of the Amhara and Tigray communities in NW, their relationship gradually deteriorated at the local level due to ethnic-based elite politics. In particular, before the Ethiopian civil war reached NW, the relationship between these communities worsened due to both national and local factors

1 Mr. Getachew Reda made a historic visit to Bahir Dar, capital city of Amhara region, on June 11, 2023 after the end of the civil war. The Reporter https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/34653/

directly linked to the ethnic-based administration. The 2015/16 nationwide anti-TPLF protests and the 2017/18 local violence in NW were key events that contributed to this deterioration.

Overall, the three-decades-long practice of ethnic-based federalism, promoted by Tigrayan elites, fostered ethnic-based affiliation among younger generations, encouraging primary identification with ethnic identity. This development ultimately contributed to the decline of Amhara–Tigray relations, influenced by local violence in NW, the 2018 political reform, and the Ethiopian civil war. The civil war, primarily a political conflict driven by elites, transformed local communities into adversaries. It resulted in a loss of trust, halted social interactions, and caused members of the Amhara and Tigray communities to view each other with suspicion.

Therefore, genuine people-to-people reconciliation—engaging government authorities, community elders, and spiritual leaders—is essential for healing the rift between the two communities, which was exacerbated by elite-driven politics and the ethnic-based dynamics of the Ethiopian civil war.

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India: Conflict and Coexistence. Jainism's Conflict Resolution Strategies for Contemporary Mediators

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Abstract: This article aims to examine the relatively neglected yet significant role of Jainism, an ancient Indian religion based on the principles of non-violence, in establishing peace through conflict resolution. It explores how fundamental Jain teachings extend far beyond personal spirituality and provide guidance on resolving societal conflicts. The study discusses both historical and doctrinal dimensions, illustrating how Jainism offers clear guidelines for addressing conflicts in a non-violent manner. The article highlights how Jainism promotes a culture of peace through self-restraint, forgiveness, empathetic communication, and non-violence as its cornerstone. In the context of contemporary conflict resolution mechanisms, this study offers an important lesson, particularly for mediators seeking alternative methods that foster long-term peace by integrating traditional practices with philosophical interpretations—approaches increasingly relevant to the sustainable development of harmony. The article also provides pragmatic guidelines, showing how Jain conflict resolution mechanisms can offer profound insights and methods for mediators in today's world.

Keywords: Conflict resolution, Golden Rule, Jainism, non-violence, mediation, mediator.

Introduction

Jainism, one of India's oldest religions, provides a deep understanding of conflict and conflict resolution (Cort, 2001). It is an ancient Indian religion/philosophy dating back over 2,000 years, advocating *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), and asceticism (Jain & Kripal, 2009). At its core, Jainism is a philosophy of non-harm in thought, word, and deed, which profoundly influences its notions of conflict and resolution. While harmony and peace are the ideal practices of Jainism, one must understand that Jain society is not free from conflict either. As in any community, there are disputes and fights in different domains, perhaps making the study of conflict resolution in Jainism both relevant and insightful.

The dispute resolution process is essential in any social entity, as it handles and resolves disputes, leading to equilibrium and the smooth functioning of society. In Jain philosophy, conflict resolution is also a paramount consideration. There is a distinction in the Jain approach to conflict resolution, as it draws on the doctrines of venerated spiritual leaders, emphasizing beliefs such as *ahimsa* (non-violence), *anukampa* (compassion), and *anvad* (understanding) (Tyagi & Singh, 2023). When we look at the historical and philosophical background of Jain dharma, it becomes clear how these concepts can help settle disputes and ensure peaceful coexistence.

This article will explore aspects of Jainism and conflict resolution. It attempts to introduce Jainism's historical and philosophical underpinnings, from which conflict and its resolution may be differently perceived. It will then examine Jain dispute resolution and how Jain principles and practices are used to resolve conflicts. The article will also address theoretical models and findings derived from Jain teachings. Lastly, the paper explores how the critical insights of Jainism can provide helpful directions for contemporary mediators in different cultural settings to deal with and settle conflicts in the modern world. This study intends to contribute to contemporary discourse on conflict resolution and to suggest practical aspects for today's mediators, highlighting Jain conflict resolution models as relevant and important.

Jainism: Tracing the Origins and Evolution of an Ancient Faith

The roots of Jainism can be traced back to a time before recorded history, when Hinduism was already beginning to emerge in the Indus Valley (Panikar, 2010). The Aryan tribes from Central Asia moved through the passes of the Himalayas in the 3rd millennium BCE. They settled in India, where they developed the Sanskrit language and compiled the Vedas (Singh, 2017). These texts became the foundation of early Hinduism. The Aryans (a term referring to a social class rather than a race) influenced the religious culture of ancient India to a significant degree. Their language and religious practices contributed to the spiritual development of the region as they mixed with the indigenous population (Roy, 2013).

The early Vedic tradition was based on the rituals and hymns of the Vedic texts and was designed around the *ṛta* model of causality (cosmic order) and observation, which emphasized the direct participation of worshippers. The texts addressed the laws of nature, the rules of right and wrong, and lessons drawn from both material objects and philosophical beings. This tradition eventually shifted in emphasis, downplaying the role of the gods in favor of the concept of Brahman—an abstract, transcendent power underlying creation (Chaudhuri, 1954). Ritual authority was concentrated exclusively in the hands of priests. The ruling class, which monopolized knowledge of Sanskrit and the Vedic ceremonies, became closely tied to caste (Junghare, 2011). However, the monopoly of Vedic ritualism and the social caste system it reinforced gave rise to heterodox movements. These rejected the authority of the Vedas and the dominance of the Brahminical order, leading to a general philosophical division between the *āstika* schools (those that accepted Vedic authority) and the *nāstika* schools (those that did not) (McDaniel, 2013). The *nāstika* traditions, such as Jainism, Buddhism, and the Cārvāka school, offered alternative spiritual perspectives rooted in rational debate, ethical action, and individual emancipation rather than Vedic ritualism (Bhattacharya, 2022).

Although Jainism is regarded as eternal, it is also one of the oldest historically known religions in India; historical accounts affirm its existence. Some scholars propose that certain symbols and images from the Indus Valley Civilization (c. 3500–3000 BCE) (Carmichael, 2019)—such as yogic postures and seals from Mohenjodaro and Harappa—may be reminiscent of Jain iconography (Chakrabarti, 2001). Jain tradition associates these early images of meditating figures with Rishabhdev, the first Tirthankara, though this interpretation is not universally accepted in academic archaeology (Kumar & Das, 2018). Similarly, symbols such as the swastika appear on Indus seals, but in broader South Asian cultural contexts that cannot be attributed exclusively to Jainism (Jain, 2022). These archaeological elements nonetheless provide interesting clues to the early origins of asceticism and symbolism later developed in Jainism.

Although Jain tradition maintains that its teachings are traceable to ancient India, followers of the path hold that the first Tirthankaras lived millions of years ago—a claim modern scholars dispute. Some interpret the names Rishabh (or Rishabha) and Aristanemi as appearing in the *Rig Veda*, and the names of the Tirthankaras Rishabhdeva and Ajitanatha are found in the *Yajur Veda* (Jain, 2009). The term *Vratya*, which occurs in the *Atharva Veda*, has been interpreted by some scholars as possibly referring to early Jain practitioners (Chakrabarti, 2001). Moreover, references to *Maha Vratya* along with Rishabhdev indicate the religious ascendancy of Rishabhdev during this period. Other traditional and interpretive arguments suggest that Jainism was practiced even before the composition of the Vedas, asserting itself as one of the oldest religions of India (Chakrabarti, 2001). Rishabhdev is also recognized as a significant figure in early Indian spiritual history by the *Bhagavata Purana*, a well-known Hindu text, which further supports the Jain assertion that Jainism is an ancient tradition predating the Vedic age (Jain, 2009).

Jainism existed long before Gautama Buddha. Mahavira, the 24th and last Tirthankara, traditionally regarded as a contemporary of the Buddha, is estimated to have lived from 599–527 BCE and was born into the Jnatra (Naya) clan. The Jain tradition itself accepts the pre-existence of Jainism, and Buddhist texts likewise acknowledge that the religion predates Mahavira. Early Buddhist texts, such as the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (*Dīgha Nikāya* 2), also mention the *Niganthas* (Jain monks) as followers of Mahavira who embraced renunciation and asceticism (Carrithers, 1990). These texts further recognize the doctrines of the Tirthankaras that predate Mahavira, affirming Jainism as a pre-existing religion. At that time, the *śramaṇa* movement of Jainism was one of the most significant spiritual forces in northern India. Jainism and Buddhism share many common features—asceticism, renunciation, and moral codes—which reflect their shared roots in the wider religious and philosophical context of ancient India.

From soul to self-restraint:
An analytical survey of Jain metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics

Jain philosophy offers a unique perspective on metaphysics, epistemology, and ethics, resulting in an elaborate and intricate system of thought. It can be defined around six permanent realities, at the core of which are souls (*jīva*), matter (*pudgala*), motion (*dharma*), rest (*adharma*), space (*ākāśa*), and time (*kāla*) (Jain, 2006). Space is perceived as infinite, extending in every direction, although not all of it is inhabitable. It is poetically described as the habitation zone, a limited spatial area often compared to a standing man with outstretched arms. The principle governing motion manifests in this region as *dharma*, sustaining movement, while in contrast, *adharma* enables rest, bringing motion to a halt. The physical world lies within the thin middle strip of this inhabitable area, and beyond it are the higher realms filled with gods or spiritual beings. Jainism is considered dualistic, distinguishing matter and soul as separate substances (Jain, 2006). At the same time, because it rejects the notion of a creator god and views the universe as self-existent, it is also regarded as atheistic.

In contrast to theistic traditions, Jainism maintains that the universe is eternal and does not generate matter or souls. The Jain universe includes gods, but these divine beings are not all-powerful entities outside the cosmos; they too are subject to karma and reincarnation, just like human beings. In Jain belief, karma consists of a subtle form of matter that adheres to souls, binding them to the endless cycle of rebirth. Karma is neither inherently good nor bad; whatever a soul does generates karma, which it must later experience in another life. Liberation (*mokṣa*) is attained when a soul exhausts all karmic bonds—whether good or bad—and the cycle of rebirth finally comes to an end (Wiley, 2011).

According to Jainism, all living beings have souls and can therefore be hurt or helped. The recognition of the number of senses present in life forms creates a moral hierarchy in which living beings are evaluated according to their number of senses. Plants and elemental beings (made of earth, air, fire, or water) are at the bottom of this hierarchy, possessing only the

sense of touch (Chapple, 2017). Worms and simple animals can, at best, feel touch and taste, while insects such as ants are capable of smell (Chapple, 2014). Insects with larger brains, such as flies and bees, add vision to the mix, yielding four senses (Chapple, 2001). Humans, like many other animals, are equipped with five senses. The full range of senses allows humans to perceive the world around them, recognize their spiritual state, and grasp the need to escape the cycle of birth and death (Chapple, 2019).

The acceptance of pluralism is a central theme of Jain epistemology and is integral to the concept of *anekāntavāda*, or the multifaceted nature of reality. This principle holds that reality is too complex to be fully comprehended from a single perspective. Thus, no single statement can convey the entire truth about an object or phenomenon. It is often illustrated by the parable of several blind men, each touching a different part of an elephant and reporting their impressions. None of their descriptions is entirely wrong, but none captures the complete reality. From this principle arises a form of epistemological fallibilism (Barbato, 2017). Jainism therefore acknowledges that all human knowledge is provisional and limited, depending on perspective.

From the Jain point of view, philosophers have systematized this classification of knowledge under the category of *pramāṇas*, or valid sources of knowledge (Rautaray, 2022). These consist of sense perception, testimony (including scriptures), extra-sensory perception, telepathy, and the omniscient state (*kevala*) attained by a perfected soul. Although inference forms a separate category of knowledge in most Indian philosophical systems, early Jains regarded it as an extension of knowledge acquired through the senses or testimony. Later authorities added inference as a distinct *pramāṇa*, along with recollection and the ability to discern logical connections. Yet even with this extended list, Jainism maintains that the knowledge attained through these processes remains incomplete, since only a perfected soul can possess absolute knowledge—and such knowledge ultimately transcends expression through language.

Jain ethics are centered on liberating souls from rebirth by reducing accumulated karma. In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, karma is often understood in moral terms, as a type of cause and effect in which good or bad actions lead to corresponding outcomes. Jainism, however, conceives of karma as a fine material substance that adheres to the soul, thought to be deposited with every action taken, regardless of its moral character (Appleton, 2014). In this view, karma is a physical substance that attaches to both the soul and the body, meaning that all karma—whether good or bad—binds a being to the wheel of rebirth. Hence, Jain ethics emphasize renunciation of worldly things, the conquering of passions such as anger and greed, and the rejection of sensual pleasures. Asceticism is upheld in Jainism as the highest ethical life, as it seeks to extinguish desires and purify the soul of all attachments (Cort, 2017).

Jain monks practice strict morality, consisting of five vows: non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), truthfulness (*satya*), not taking anything that is not given (*asteya*), chastity (*brahmacarya*), and detachment (*aparigraha*) (Majumder, 2023). The chief precept is *ahiṃsā*, or non-violence.

It is regarded as the cardinal principle, since ignorance or passion harms others and obstructs the path to supreme spiritual progress. All Jains are therefore vegetarians, with many going further by seeking to minimize harm to plants and even microscopic organisms. The ultimate expression of non-violence is said to be voluntary fasting unto death, since this is the only way to avoid causing harm to any other living being.

From dispute to dharma:
Conflict resolution in Jainism through the teachings of Mahavira

Conflict resolution in Jainism is based on the teachings and practices of Lord Mahavira, the 24th Tirthankara, who promoted harmony, non-violence, and a realistic understanding of multiple perspectives (Lal & Bhandari, 1984). Jains follow the *caturvidha saṅgha*, or four divisions: *sādhus* (monks), *sādhvīs* (nuns), ***śrāvakas*** (laymen), and ***śrāvikās*** (laywomen) (Titze & Bruhn, 1998). Together, these groups form the structure of the Jain community, just as any organization has its internal conflicts. These groups—whether monks, laypersons, or members of both the monastic and lay communities—can come into conflict with one another. Although all practitioners share the same ultimate goal of *mokṣa* or liberation, underlying debates often stem from different understandings of perception, values, and life goals (Desai, 2024). Achieving *mokṣa* was the common aim of all followers in the time of Mahavira. These practitioners shared specific values as taught by Mahavira, but not all were equally skilled in applying them in everyday life. Conflicts frequently arose from differences in perceptions of tasks, values, and goals. For example, there was always a written code of conduct outlining the expected behavior of monks, nuns, and laypeople, which could become controversial. In at least one case, this conflicted with the actions of Evanta Muni. A young monk, Evanta, had been playing in a river with a wooden utensil used by monks, which broke the discipline rules and caused a dispute among the monks. The matter was referred to Lord Mahavira, who resolved the conflict by emphasizing the purity of Evanta's soul and assuring the others that he would attain *mokṣa* in that very birth. In this way, Mahavira's leadership and wisdom helped quell interpersonal tensions (Jain, n.d.).

Goal clarity was another point Mahavira emphasized, as is clear in the case of Megha Muni. Megha Muni faced a serious dilemma, as he struggled to adapt to monastic life and had nearly decided to abandon the order and return to his palace. Lord Mahavira helped him overcome this intrapersonal conflict by reminding him of his past life as an elephant, during which he had shown great compassion. This memory gave meaning to Megha Muni's struggle and reaffirmed his decision to remain a monk, restoring his inner peace (Jain, n.d.). Mahavira employed principles that are still relevant to conflict resolution today. He stressed the golden rule (Rakhshani, 2017), which encourages people to treat others as they wish to be treated. This message is reflected in the ***Ācārāṅga*** *Sūtra*, which reminds us that all living beings value their lives and wish to be happy (Singh, 2015). Mahavira believed that if this principle were universally embraced, many wars could be prevented.

The idea that all living beings are interconnected is central to the Jain concept of *parasparopagraho jīvānām*—the principle that all life depends on other forms of life. Through this doctrine, Jainism and its monastic tradition elevate the regard for life to an even higher level (Vallely, 2020). According to Mahavira's teachings, social welfare and cooperation are essential to maintaining balance in society. His doctrine of interdependence (*parasparopagraho jīvānām*), without historical precedent, embodies the belief that good conduct and mutual assistance can reduce social tensions, prevent disputes over material possessions, and counteract both attachment to material goods and selfish spiritual ambitions.

Another cornerstone of Mahavira's conflict resolution policy is his acceptance of different viewpoints. *Anekantavada*, or non-absolutism, is a key tenet of Jain philosophy that states that reality is complex, and two persons can have different views (Jewaria & Singh, 2024). Both views can be right or accepted in different contexts. Through accepting the truth of diverse perspectives, Mahavira guided his disciples toward cultivating tolerance and reverence for others' beliefs. Not just tolerance but one of the virtues taught by Mahavira to assist in social order and harmony. As the *Acharang Sutra* records, he tolerated bad conditions (while travelling, especially in hostile areas) (Jain, 2012). His behavior served as a role model for his followers, demonstrating that tolerance is the key to overcoming adversities and resolving disputes amicably. Another quality that Mahavira exhibited in his conflict resolution was broadmindedness. He was flexible when required, such as in the case of Evanta Muni. However, he also maintained reasonably inflexible ground rules—instead of rebuking the novice for his impertinence, Mahavira continued to remind all his followers that Evanta was a pure soul on its way to liberation. This openness and understanding helped alleviate many conflicts in the community, reminding us that open-mindedness will go a long way in preventing unnecessary clashes, especially across generations or with opposing views.

Counselling was of great assistance in resolving conflicts for Mahavira. He often counselled monks and laymen by offering guidance but never forcefully imposed his will. He had his tagline, i.e. "Do what is good for your soul," which denotes a non-pressuring leadership style. Mahavira had developed a capacity for self-examination and personal responsibility through his counselling, which prompted disputes to be solved without confrontation or external compulsion. Jain scriptures record Mahavira adapting models of conflict resolution and categorizing the theories into three main types: classical theory, behavioral theory, and third-party theory, and equating the first approach as the classical theory, which focuses on the minimization of conflicts; a behavioral theory, which perceives conflict as a means of healthy competition; and the third-party theory, where a third party intervenes to resolve the dispute amongst members of the group. The conflict resolution style of Mahavira was most in line with the classical theory, since this theory focused on reducing the conflict and minimizing it. He did not promote competition between his followers and sought no intermediate mediators from outside. Instead, his personal charisma and ethical leadership defused conflicts quickly, sometimes even before escalatory dynamics could set in. His concepts of non-absolutism, emotional contagion, and open-mindedness sustained peace and harmony in the Jain sect, and the disputes yielded brief and non-intrusive fluctuations (Jain, 2023).

The Jain Approach to Conflict: Theoretical Models and Practical Insights

When one begins to investigate conflict resolution in Jainism, it is possible to identify various models based on their contribution to peace and harmony. Several of these inherited models characterize Jainism as practiced within the Jain community. One model presents Jainism as a minor, heterodox system eclipsed by Buddhism, portraying it as a peripheral tradition. Such views are based on the premise that once someone knows Buddhism, they know enough about Jainism, because Jainism is little more than a lesser form or a "darker reflection" of Buddhism (Bronkhorst, 2010). Another model depicts Jainism as an ascetic tradition with minimal political or popular relevance, branding it as tiresome and unremarkable (Dundas, 2003). In a third model, Jainism is presented as a stable and conservative tradition, always seeking to root out innovations that deviate from its original essence (Cort, 2001). From this perspective, all significant changes are credited to Hinduism. The dynamic Hindu tradition is believed to exert a one-way influence on the Jain community, which is assumed to be static.

However, a closer inspection of Jainism shows a more nuanced view. Jainism is a minority tradition that has maintained its identity and principles over millennia. It is not fundamentalist in the contemporary sense, but rather humble in practice yet firm in its core teachings. At the crux of Jain thought is *anekāntavāda*, the theory of non-absolutism, which contends that reality is multifaceted and no single perspective can ever grasp the bigger picture. It is a fundamental concept in Jain metaphysics, Jain epistemology, and Jain logic, and it governs Jain conflict resolution. *Anekāntavāda* is based on the complexity of reality and the possibility that things can possess multiple, even contradictory, attributes (Long, 2020). It considers the problem as a whole and creates a conflict resolution mechanism that encompasses all points of view and seeks harmony through a holistic method. This model is reflected in Jain texts such as the *Bhagavatīsūtra* and evolved further in the works of later scholars, e.g., Kundakunda and Hemacandra. *Anekāntavāda* acknowledges the emergence of conflicts due to differing perspectives and suggests that resolution lies in recognizing the validity of multiple viewpoints and pursuing a balanced understanding.

In practice, Jainism uses several approaches to resolve conflicts and promote peace. One model involves adapting appropriate language to communicate and harmonize with various people. Jaina scholars and practitioners have historically expanded their linguistic repertoire, using *Ardhamāgadhī*, *Prakrit*, *Sanskrit*, and regional dialects to further their reach (Jain, 2015). The multilingual nature of Jainism is testimony to its adaptability and commitment to peaceful coexistence. Another model emphasizes opting for actions that cause the least harm. While Jainism places high value on non-violence, it acknowledges that it is practically impossible to avoid causing harm altogether. Thus, Jainism promotes reducing harm through calculated steps, including practicing vegetarianism and discouraging other unnecessarily harmful actions. This principle also applies to the business world, urging parties to engage in practices that minimize harm. From the Jain perspective, models

of peaceful interaction with rulers and political authorities have also been developed. Historically, Jain communities have maintained friendly relations with their rulers, even when these rulers professed other faiths. Seamless coexistence with political power has been demonstrated by many Jaina kings and influential persons in history, such as Kharavela, Kumārapāla, and Jinaprabha, either by converting the king to Jainism or by encouraging the king to adopt *ahiṃsā* and support Jain institutions (Umamaheshwari, 2017).

The Jain model of classifying things provides a structural framework for organizing different elements of thought and action into separate categories and is a powerful tool for understanding and resolving conflicts. By classifying stages of spiritual advancement, reformers, and external influences, Jainism offers a systematic method of addressing opposing perspectives and incorporating them into a unified structure. The equality of all souls, a core Jain philosophy, also aids in tackling social injustice. According to Jain philosophy, social hierarchies and caste divisions are the creation of humans, not God. While Jain communities have worked to abolish specific social barriers and promote equality, they have done so through practical reforms, such as gradually providing women with rights and improving their status in society.

Regulation of the mind, speech, and body, known as *Gupti*, is a fundamental aspect of Jainism and the most significant factor in practicing the religion. It reflects Jainism's fundamental concern with preventing conflict at its source through self-restraint and self-governance. Jainism, in general, has adopted a non-aggressive and non-confrontational policy, a stark contrast to many other traditions that respond with aggression, assertiveness, or force. This approach is also evident in Jain art and architecture, where the community respectfully adopted influences from other traditions—not by usurping them, but by coexisting while maintaining their own identity—suggesting a sense of spiritual exclusivity. Such adaptation has frequently been interpreted as evidence of Jainism's humble, non-aggressive stance, particularly its historical inclination toward non-conflict and assimilation rather than cultural expansion and conquest (Joshi, 2009).

Timeless Wisdom for Modern Mediators: Applying Jain Principles to Contemporary Conflicts

These key takeaways are for contemporary mediators drawn from Jainism's principles and conflict resolution models.

Embrace Non-Absolutism (*Anekāntavāda*) to explore multiple perspectives:

Acknowledge and honour the reality that two or more subjective viewpoints can exist simultaneously and be true. Contemporary mediators can operationalize the Jain philosophy of *Anekāntavāda* (i.e., multiplicity is truth) by actively seeking to understand every party's perspective. For cross-border trade disputes, such as the U.S.–China rivalry

over technology and tariffs, mediators can recognize Chinese demands for technological autonomy while upholding the U.S.'s focus on Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs). Likewise, in the U.S.–India trade dispute, with the recent escalation in U.S. tariffs on Indian imports and the evolving discussions between the countries regarding new trade agreements and taxes, there are opportunities for mediators to understand the U.S.'s focus on energy security through strategic interests vis-à-vis India's concerns for energy independence and economic stability. By establishing all the viewpoints, mediators can facilitate mutually beneficial outcomes, such as phased tariff reductions, joint technology ventures, or renewable energy initiatives. This philosophy is grounded in interest-based bargaining models, which promote dialogue that is sustainable and constructive by addressing fundamental needs on all sides.

Incorporate compassion (*karunā*) in transformative mediation:

Contemporary mediators can utilize the Jain virtue of compassion (*karuṇā*) to enhance transformative mediation by providing a platform to see beyond limited, rigid perspectives. As the Russia–Ukraine conflict continues to unfold, mediators, basing discussions on compassion, can shift conversations from strictly nationalist storylines toward more universally human concerns, such as arrangements for prisoner exchanges and the protection of essential infrastructure. This humane vision moves the process from antagonistic haggling to redressing wrongs and facilitating respectful acknowledgment, which lies at the heart of transformative mediation.

More subtly, compassion can be applied to office politics and organizational disputes. Another example is disputes between labor and management that have flared around the shift to remote work. Mediators who help prevent adversaries from devolving into unadulterated caricatures of themselves—based on those responsible for them and those for whom they are responsible—create space for empathy. This approach not only enhances relationships but also fosters the development of long-lasting agreements based on mutual consideration.

Foster consensus through *Aparigraha* (Non-attachment)

Mediators can help disputing parties embrace *aparigraha* (non-attachment) by encouraging them to loosen their grip on particular outcomes. *Aparigraha* is a concept that can be applied even in global climate negotiations, such as under the Paris Agreement. Encouraging non-attachment to greed and possessiveness would motivate countries to prioritize saving the environment over individual economic gains. By fostering flexibility and mutually shared problem-solving techniques, consensus-building mediators can achieve durable solutions that gain acceptance from all sides, consistent with a multi-party mediation methodology. For example, countries may become more open to sharing green

technologies or setting carbon reduction limits that are fair and sustainable, rather than self-centred. This interpretation of *aparigraha* is grounded in consensual decision-making models, enabling a shift in focus from possessiveness to collective responsibility for the future of the planet.

Exercise *Gupti* (discretion) in sensitive discussions

Appropriate and sensitive language is critical to contemporary mediation, especially in cases of confidential or politically sensitive disputes. Through *Gupti*, a mediator can minimize the exchange of information and reduce the risk of emotional harm, as well as prevent the erosion of trust between parties. For instance, in an India–Pakistan conflict over Kashmir, employing *Gupti* means maintaining secrecy and speaking with caution. Mediators can facilitate private conversations so that both countries can discuss their fears and aspirations away from the glare of public opinion. This backstage approach is reminiscent of other forms of diplomatic facilitation, where confidence must be built and careful channels of communication opened in order to ease tensions and create conditions for a peace process to begin.

Adopt patience (*Kṣamā*) in phased negotiations

Modern conflicts, geopolitical or organisational in nature, often call for incremental progress. *Kṣamā* can be utilised by the mediator as step-wise agreements, beginning with simple accomplishments and gradually moving towards larger issues. For example, in the protracted Israel-Palestine conflict, mediators can use *Kṣamā* (patience) by initiating build-up agreements to engender trust over time. This could include opening discussions related to joint resources or cultural trade, which would lead way for further peace projects. The incremental strategy of the step-by-step approach corresponds both to the Jain principle of patience and to negotiation models in which movement to comprehensive peace occurs step by step.

Leverage non-coercive influence in high-stakes negotiations

Referring to the Jain principle of non-imposition, modern mediators can favor persuasion over force by promoting rational discussion and moral debate instead of simply threatening or imposing positions on others. This approach is particularly applicable in high-stakes settings, such as investor–state arbitration or international diplomacy, where a self-imposed purpose can foster compliance and reduce the intensity of contestation. The negotiations that led to the Iran Nuclear Deal provide a useful analogy. In such situations, mediators utilizing non-coercive influence can help direct actors to focus on long-term gains or losses related to cooperation and compliance. By engaging in dialogue

rather than escalating sanctions or threats, mediators place the parties in a position to reach sustainable agreements, consistent with Jain teachings on ethical persuasion and aligned with contemporary interest-based mediation models.

Design inclusive, multi-stakeholder processes

Contemporary mediators can apply the Jain principle of welfare toward all while resolving disputes by creating negotiation arrangements that are inclusive and participatory. In complex and contentious disputes, such as regional conflicts or corporate–community disagreements, the fairest outcomes are achieved when all those directly and indirectly affected are given a voice. For example, in negotiations over urban/rural development or resource allocation, mediators can engage community leaders, NGOs, and public officials to co-produce equitable agreements. A case in point is the facilitation of the South Sudan peace accord, where enabling marginalized groups and disparate communities to participate was crucial for achieving inclusive and lasting peace. These inclusive practices align with multi-stakeholder mediation models, in which the legitimacy and sustainability of results depend on acknowledging the interests and aspirations of all relevant actors.

Conclusion

Jainism offers practical and sensible measures for contemporary conflict resolution. The practice of non-violence is at the heart of Jain conflict resolution and encourages individuals to respect and communicate with each other without aggression. By emphasizing non-violence, even when parties are hostile and emotional, mediators make it easier for participants to enter a dialogic mode, reducing hostility and contributing to a more collaborative atmosphere. Moreover, the Jain belief in the multiplicity of viewpoints enables a mediator trained in this philosophy to invite disputing parties to understand each other. Encouraging empathy and common-ground-seeking behavior is necessary for any conflict resolution process that honors all parties.

Personal responsibility is a core Jain principle, and parties must identify their roles in the conflict and commit to improvement. This idea can be harnessed by mediators seeking to encourage accountability and reflection among disputants, leading to more sustainable and effective outcomes. With an emphasis on peace, empathy, and individual responsibility, some fundamental tenets of Jainism enable mediators to handle resolutions relating to contemporary issues with a sense of oneness. This method ensures that differences are resolved, laying the groundwork for the parties' continued mutual respect and collaboration.

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Central Asia: An Analysis of the Ethnic Conflicts in the Fergana Valley

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Abstract: The Fergana Valley, a historically and ethnically diverse region in Central Asia, has experienced multiple ethnic conflicts that have significantly shaped its socio-political landscape. This paper investigates the underlying causes of these conflicts, their socio-economic and political ramifications, and their broader impact on interethnic relations. Employing historical analysis and qualitative research methods, the study examines how both past and contemporary ethnic tensions have affected regional stability. The findings underscore the role of economic inequalities, complex border demarcations, and political dynamics in exacerbating interethnic discord. Additionally, the study explores the impact of migration, resource competition, and national policies on ethnic relations. In addressing these challenges, the paper discusses potential conflict-resolution strategies, emphasizing the need for economic cooperation, equitable governance, and policies that promote social cohesion. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of fostering intercultural dialogue and regional collaboration to mitigate ethnic tensions and ensure long-term stability in the Fergana Valley. By providing a comprehensive analysis, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of ethnic conflicts in the region and offers insights into sustainable solutions for peacebuilding.

Keywords: Fergana Valley, ethnic conflicts, interethnic relations, socio-political impact, Central Asia, conflict resolution.

Introduction

The Fergana Valley, straddling Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, is one of Central Asia's most ethnically diverse yet volatile regions. Historical flashpoints, such as the 1990 Osh riots over land disputes and the 2010 Kyrgyz-Uzbek clashes amid political upheaval, underscore its susceptibility to ethnic strife. These conflicts, fueled by resource

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competition, contested borders, and governance challenges, pose significant risks to regional stability and beyond. This study seeks to examine the underlying causes of ethnic tensions in the Fergana Valley, evaluate their socio-political repercussions, and propose actionable strategies for fostering interethnic peace. It addresses two core questions: What historical and contemporary dynamics drive these conflicts, and how can equitable policies mitigate them? To this end, the study analyzes historical archives, government reports, expert interviews, and demographic data through qualitative content analysis and comparative case studies. The article proceeds as follows: first, a theoretical framework reviews key perspectives on ethnic conflict; second, a historical overview contextualizes the Valley's tensions; third, an analysis identifies primary conflict drivers; fourth, case studies examine major incidents; and finally, the conclusion offers policy insights for sustainable stability.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Understanding ethnic conflicts in the Fergana Valley requires a robust theoretical lens grounded in existing scholarship. This section reviews key theories of ethnic conflict and synthesizes relevant studies on interethnic relations in Central Asia, with a focus on their applicability to the Valley's unique context. It establishes a theoretical framework that integrates conflict theory and ethno-nationalism to guide the analysis of the region's persistent tensions.

Theories of ethnic conflict

Ethnic conflict has been a focal point in political science, sociology, and anthropology, with scholars offering diverse perspectives to explain its dynamics. Ted Robert Gurr (1970) frames ethnic strife as competition for material and non-material resources, where one group seeks to dominate or marginalize another. This resource-based approach highlights economic disparities as a driver, a factor evident in the Fergana Valley's land and market disputes. Georg Simmel (1955) complements this by emphasizing group dynamics, arguing that perceived threats to identity or status—such as ethnic differentiation—ignite tensions. His theory resonates with the Valley's Kyrgyz-Uzbek divides, rooted in historical lifestyle differences.

Anthony Smith (1986) shifts the focus to nationalism, viewing ethnic conflict as a struggle to assert cultural identity and political sovereignty. This perspective is pertinent to the Valley, where Uzbeks' demands for autonomy (e.g., 1990 Osh) reflect efforts to preserve their distinctiveness. Paul Brass (1991) adds a political dimension, defining ethnic conflict as an organized process of violence driven by elite agendas—a pattern observable in the 2010 Osh conflict's alleged manipulation. Russian scholar Valery Tishkov (2004) broadens the scope, describing ethnic conflict as any civil or armed confrontation fueled by ethnic

differences, capturing the Valley's complex mix of economic, political, and cultural triggers (e.g., 1989 Fergana unrest).

These theories, while distinct, share a focus on identity, power, and resources as conflict drivers. Their relevance to the Fergana Valley lies in their ability to explain recurring patterns—resource scarcity, nationalist aspirations, and political instability—though none fully address the region's border complexities or demographic pressures, necessitating an integrated approach. Critically, this integration allows for a nuanced view: for instance, Gurr's resource competition can be layered with Brass's elite manipulation to explain how economic grievances in the Valley are often politicized during power vacuums, as seen in post-Soviet transitions.

Existing research on interethnic relations in Central Asia

Scholarship on Central Asia provides critical insights into the Fergana Valley's ethnic dynamics. Early studies, emerging in the 1960s and 1970s, explored ethno-political processes through sociological and psychological lenses, identifying ethnicity's role in shaping political behavior (Parenti, 1967). Post-Soviet research highlights the Soviet legacy's impact, with Martin (2001) detailing how policies such as "positive discrimination" and border delineation in the 1920s sowed seeds of conflict by creating artificial ethnic boundaries—a process acutely felt in the Valley's enclaves. Abashin (2007) argues that Central Asian nationalism, a byproduct of Soviet nation-building, fueled post-independence tensions as states leaned on ethnic identity to consolidate power, a trend evident in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Specific to the Fergana Valley, Abashin and Bushkov (2004) underscore its incomplete ethnic formation, noting persistent tensions in daily life due to overlapping identities and unresolved territorial claims. Their research also examines Soviet-era censuses, showing how administrative decisions—such as the reclassification of Sarts—shaped ethnic perceptions, a legacy that complicates modern relations. Contemporary analyses assess ethno-demographic shifts, linking population density and labor migration to social strain, while Horák (2010) highlights the Valley's multiethnic challenges. However, much of this research lacks a cohesive focus on the Valley's specific conflicts, often generalizing across Central Asia without addressing its unique socio-political fabric. This gap underscores the need for targeted studies like this one, which synthesizes these elements to offer fresh insights into cyclical violence.

Theoretical framework for this study

This study builds on these foundations to construct a tailored framework for analyzing the Fergana Valley. It integrates conflict theory, drawing from Gurr and Simmel, to examine how resource competition and group differentiation drive ethnic strife. Economic inequalities

(e.g., land disputes) and identity-based tensions (e.g., Kyrgyz vs. Uzbek lifestyles) are central to this lens. Simultaneously, it incorporates ethno-nationalism, inspired by Smith and Brass, to explore how cultural assertions and political manipulation exacerbate conflicts, as seen in autonomy demands and elite-driven violence. Tishkov's broader perspective bridges these by framing the Valley's clashes as multifaceted ethnic confrontations.

This hybrid framework is chosen for its ability to capture the Valley's complexity—where economic scarcity, historical borders, and nationalist aspirations intersect. It guides the research by posing two questions: How do resource and identity conflicts interplay in the Valley, and what role do political structures play in their escalation? By anchoring the analysis in these theories, the study aims to move beyond descriptive accounts, offering a nuanced understanding of the Fergana Valley's ethnic tensions and their broader implications. This approach not only critiques existing models but also adapts them to regional specifics, such as the enduring impact of Soviet border policies on contemporary disputes.

Historical and Socio-Political Context of the Fergana Valley

The Fergana Valley, a fertile crossroads shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, is a microcosm of Central Asia's ethnic diversity and socio-political complexity. Its history and demographics have shaped a volatile environment prone to interethnic tensions. This section traces the Valley's ethnic composition, demographic pressures, and historical evolution, focusing on the Soviet era's transformative policies and their post-independence repercussions, including national delimitation, border disputes, and migration patterns.

Ethnic diversity, demography, and historical evolution

Spanning approximately 22,000 square kilometers, the Fergana Valley hosts a rich tapestry of ethnic groups—Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, Tajiks, and smaller minorities such as Meskhetian Turks and Russians—making it one of Central Asia's most densely populated regions, with more than 15 million inhabitants today. This diversity has deep historical roots, shaped by trade routes and conquests, but it crystallized in the modern era through colonial and Soviet interventions. Historically, the Valley's sedentary Uzbeks and Tajiks contrasted with the nomadic Kyrgyz, fostering distinct cultural identities that persist despite shared Turkic and Islamic heritage (Abashin, 2007).

Demographic pressures have long shaped the region. By the late 19th century, Russian colonial censuses identified Uzbeks as the majority, alongside significant Tajik and Kyrgyz populations, with groups such as the Sarts—a debated ethnic category—later reclassified under Soviet rule (Abashin & Bushkov, 2004). Population growth accelerated in the 20th century, driven by high birth rates and limited arable land, creating a volatile mix of resource competition and ethnic coexistence. The 1989 Soviet census recorded over 10

million residents, a figure that swelled after independence, exacerbating socio-economic strain and fueling conflicts such as the 1990 Osh massacre.

The Valley's historical evolution reflects cycles of integration and division. Pre-Russian uprisings, such as the 1898 Andijan revolt against Tsarist rule, united Kyrgyz and Uzbeks against external control, yet colonial suppression deepened local rivalries. These early tensions laid the groundwork for later ethnic strife, amplified by 20th-century political shifts that redefined the region's social fabric.

Soviet era and its lasting legacy

The Soviet period fundamentally reshaped the Fergana Valley through centralized policies of nation-building and territorial demarcation. Following the Bolshevik consolidation in the 1920s, the Valley was divided among the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics, with borders drawn under Stalin's 1924–1936 national delimitation process (Martin, 2001). This artificial partitioning ignored ethnic realities, creating enclaves—such as Uzbekistan's Sokh in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan's Vorukh in Kyrgyzstan—that remain flashpoints today. Soviet "positive discrimination" policies aimed to empower titular nations, promoting local languages and governance, yet often at the expense of minorities, sowing seeds of resentment.

Population control and forced migration further altered the Valley's dynamics. The 1944 deportation of Meskhetian Turks to Uzbekistan, part of Stalin's broader ethnic purges, introduced a marginalized group whose presence later contributed to the 1989 Fergana unrest (Bekmirzaev, 2023). Collectivization and industrialization intensified resource competition, as rural Kyrgyz migrated to urban Uzbek centers such as Osh, setting the stage for the 1990 violence. Soviet censuses, meanwhile, manipulated ethnic identities—erasing the Sarts by the 1920s—distorting demographic realities and deepening interethnic mistrust (Abashin & Bushkov, 2004).

The Soviet collapse in 1991 unraveled this fragile order. Centralized control gave way to nationalist fervor, as newly independent states leveraged ethnic histories to assert legitimacy, amplifying tensions in the multiethnic Valley (Abashin, 2007). The failure to resolve Soviet-era border ambiguities left a legacy of territorial disputes, a key driver of recurring conflicts.

Post-independence transformations

Post-Soviet independence thrust the Fergana Valley into a new era of challenges and transformations. Ethnic nationalism surged as Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan prioritized titular identities—Uzbeks, Kyrgyz, and Tajiks, respectively—often marginalizing minorities. In Kyrgyzstan, Uzbeks (14% of the population) faced linguistic and political exclusion, with Uzbek-language schools declining despite their significant presence in the Valley. According to Tajikistan's 2010 census, the reported Uzbek population decreased

from 23% to 12% (Table 1), raising questions about demographic shifts and their implications for cross-border relations in the Fergana Valley.

Table 1.

Ethnic Group	Population					
	1989		2000		2010	
	Total	(%)	Total	(%)	Total	(%)
O‘zbeklar (Total)	1,197,841	23.52%	1,016,249	16.59%	1,054,726	13.94%
*O‘zbek (sub-group)	N/A	N/A	936,703	15.29%	926,344	12.25%
*Laqay	N/A	N/A	51,001	0.83%	65,555	0.87%
*Qo‘ngirot	N/A	N/A	15,102	0.25%	38,078	0.50%
*Do‘rmon	N/A	N/A	3,502	0.06%	7,608	0.10%
*Qatog‘on	N/A	N/A	4,888	0.08%	7,601	0.10%
*Barlos	N/A	N/A	3,743	0.06%	5,271	0.07%
*Yuz	N/A	N/A	1,053	0.02%	3,798	0.05%
*Ming	N/A	N/A	243	0.00%	268	0.00%
*Kesamir	N/A	N/A	13	0.00%	156	0.00%
*Semiz	N/A	N/A	1	0.00%	47	0.00%

Migration further intensified these dynamics. Economic hardship and conflict—such as the 1992–1997 Tajik Civil War and the 2010 Osh violence—drove both internal and external displacement, with approximately 400,000 people fleeing the latter (UNHCR, 2010). Labor migration, fueled by surplus population and unemployment, reshaped regional demographics, while weak legal frameworks exacerbated social tensions. Border disputes, such as the Kyrgyz-Tajik clashes in Batken-Isfara (with over 100 incidents since 2000), illustrate the enduring Soviet legacy, as disputes over water and land continue to threaten escalation.

The interplay of ethnic diversity, demographic growth, and political upheaval has thus rendered the Fergana Valley a tinderbox. Soviet policies entrenched structural inequalities, while post-independence developments amplified ethnic rivalries and resource conflicts, setting the stage for the region’s modern crises. This context not only underscores the persistence of historical divisions but also demonstrates how post-colonial policies continue to shape contemporary interethnic relations, requiring a critical reevaluation of national identity formation in the region.

Key Causes and Dynamics of Ethnic Conflicts

Ethnic conflicts in the Fergana Valley stem from a volatile interplay of economic, political, demographic, and cultural factors, each amplifying the region’s inherent tensions. This section synthesizes these drivers, drawing on historical patterns and contemporary

analyses, and examines their dynamics through examples such as border disputes, resource competition, and historical memory. Understanding these causes illuminates why the Valley remains a hotspot of interethnic strife and how these forces evolve over time, often in cyclical patterns that demand proactive intervention.

Economic factors: Resource scarcity and inequality

Economic disparities lie at the heart of the Fergana Valley's ethnic tensions, fueled by competition over scarce resources in a densely populated region. Limited arable land and water—critical for agriculture and livelihoods—spark recurring disputes, as seen in the 1990 Osh conflict, where Kyrgyz migrants clashed with Uzbeks over housing plots. The Valley's uneven resource distribution, with Uzbekistan controlling fertile plains while Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan hold upstream water sources, exacerbates cross-border friction. For instance, irrigation disputes in the Isfara-Batken zone have led to over 100 violent incidents since 2000.

Poverty and unemployment further intensify this rivalry. The 1989 Fergana unrest, triggered by a market quarrel over strawberries, reflected deeper economic distress among Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks amid Soviet decline (Bekmirzaev, 2023). Gurr's (1970) theory of resource competition aptly frames these clashes, where economic deprivation drives groups to assert dominance—a dynamic that persists as post-independence markets favor titular ethnicities, marginalizing minorities such as Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan. Critically, this economic lens reveals how globalization and market liberalization have widened these gaps, turning local rivalries into entrenched inequalities.

Political factors: Instability and elite manipulation

Political instability and power struggles are potent catalysts for ethnic conflict in the Fergana Valley, often magnified by elite agendas. The Soviet collapse in 1991 unleashed nationalist movements, as seen in the 1990 Osh massacre, where Kyrgyz and Uzbek leaders mobilized ethnic bases amid a weakening central authority. Post-independence, political upheavals—such as Kyrgyzstan's 2010 coup—created vacuums exploited by elites, with the ensuing Osh violence linked to nationalist rhetoric and security force complicity (Human Rights Watch, 2010). Brass's (1991) view of conflict as organized violence is relevant here, highlighting how political actors stoke ethnic divisions to maintain control.

Border disputes, a Soviet legacy, compound this instability. The Valley's enclaves—such as Uzbekistan's Sokh in Kyrgyzstan—ignite clashes over jurisdiction and resources, with Tajik-Kyrgyz border skirmishes reflecting unresolved territorial claims. Weak governance fails to mediate these tensions, allowing political opportunism to flourish and escalating local grievances into broader conflicts. This factor underscores a critical insight: political

instability is not merely a backdrop but an active amplifier, where elites' short-term gains perpetuate long-term regional fragility.

Demographic factors: Population pressure and migration

The Fergana Valley's demographic profile—characterized by high birth rates and a youth bulge—drives ethnic strife by intensifying resource demands. With over 15 million residents, the region faces a surplus labor force and limited opportunities, pushing internal migration that sparks tensions. The 1990 Osh conflict exemplifies this, as rural Kyrgyz migrants clashed with urban Uzbeks over land, a pattern repeated in 2010 amid similar pressures. Weitzel's (2010) 20–30-year conflict cycle theory aligns with this, suggesting that generational growth reignites unrest, as seen in the two-decade gap between Osh clashes.

Ethnoselective migration further complicates these dynamics. Economic hardship and violence—such as the displacement of approximately 400,000 people in 2010 (UNHCR, 2010)—drive minorities like Uzbeks and Tajiks to relocate, often preserving ethnic enclaves that heighten segregation. This mobility, coupled with inadequate legal frameworks, fuels competition and mistrust, reinforcing ethnic boundaries rather than easing them. Analyzing this through a demographic lens reveals how population dynamics interact with economic factors, creating feedback loops that sustain conflict in the absence of targeted policy responses.

Cultural factors: Historical memory and identity clashes

Cultural differences and historical grievances underpin the Valley's ethnic conflicts, shaping group identities and fueling animosities. The nomadic Kyrgyz and sedentary Uzbek-Tajik lifestyles, rooted in centuries of distinct traditions, create a cultural divide that Simmel's (1955) theory of differentiation identifies as a source of tension. Historical memory amplifies this—events such as the 1898 Andijan uprising against Russian rule linger as symbols of resistance, yet also deepen Kyrgyz-Uzbek rivalries. The 1989 Fergana unrest, linked to the Meskhetian Turks' deportation trauma, illustrates how past injustices perpetuate resentment.

Identity clashes escalate when cultural demands collide with political realities. Uzbeks' push for autonomy and language rights in Kyrgyzstan (1990, 2010) reflects Smith's (1986) nationalism theory, in which groups seek to affirm their uniqueness against a dominant majority. Stereotypes and declining intercultural ties, especially among younger generations, widen these gaps, making reconciliation more difficult. This cultural dimension adds depth to the analysis, showing how intangible elements such as historical memory can outlast material resolutions, necessitating dialogue-focused interventions.

Dynamics and interplay

The dynamics of these conflicts reveal a self-reinforcing cycle. Economic scarcity triggers immediate disputes—such as over land and water—which political instability can escalate into violence, as elites exploit ethnic fault lines. Demographic pressures sustain this volatility, with population growth renewing resource conflicts every few decades. Cultural factors, rooted in history and identity, provide the emotional fuel, ensuring tensions persist beyond material grievances. Examples such as the Kyrgyz-Tajik border clashes (water), the 1990 Osh riots (land), and the 1989 unrest (historical memory) illustrate how these causes interweave, evolving from localized sparks into regional crises. Without addressing this interplay, the Valley's ethnic strife risks intensifying, highlighting the need for holistic strategies that integrate all dimensions.

The Analysis of Specific Conflicts

The Fergana Valley has witnessed recurring ethnic conflicts that reflect deep-seated socio-economic, political, and historical tensions. This section analyzes three pivotal events—the 1989 Fergana unrest, the 1990 Osh massacre, and the 2010 Osh conflict—drawing on historical accounts and contemporary reports. By examining each case in depth and tracing their interconnections, we illuminate the persistent drivers of ethnic strife in the region and their implications for interethnic relations, emphasizing how these events reveal evolving patterns of conflict escalation.

The 1989 Fergana unrest: Economic disparities and deportation legacies

In May–June 1989, violent clashes erupted in Uzbekistan's Fergana region between Uzbeks and Meskhetian Turks, a group forcibly deported to Central Asia by Stalin in 1944. Official reports cite a market dispute over strawberry prices as the trigger, but underlying tensions ran deeper. Economic hardship, exacerbated by the Soviet Union's decline, intensified competition for scarce resources, particularly in the overcrowded Valley. The Meskhetian Turks, numbering around 100,000, faced discrimination as outsiders despite decades of residence, fueling resentment among local Uzbeks (Bekmirzaev, 2023). The unrest claimed over 100 lives, displaced thousands, and required Soviet military intervention to restore order.

This conflict highlights economic inequality and historical grievances as key catalysts. The deportation legacy left the Meskhetian Turks vulnerable, while Uzbeks perceived them as economic rivals—a dynamic consistent with Gurr's (1970) theory of resource competition. Moreover, the Soviet state's failure to integrate deported populations sowed seeds of distrust that would resurface in later conflicts, illustrating how unresolved historical traumas can catalyze violence under economic stress.

The 1990 Osh Massacre: Land disputes and political mobilization

The June 1990 Osh conflict between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in southern Kyrgyzstan marked a sharp escalation of ethnic tensions as the Soviet Union unraveled. Sparked by a land allocation dispute, the violence stemmed from Kyrgyz rural migrants' demands for housing plots in Uzbek-dominated Osh, a city of cultural and economic significance to both groups. Uzbeks, in turn, sought political autonomy and recognition of their language—demands unmet by the Kyrgyz majority. The clashes resulted in 300 to 1,000 deaths (estimates vary) and displaced tens of thousands, exposing the fragility of interethnic coexistence amid political transition.

The 1990 massacre reflects intersecting economic and political drivers. Land scarcity, a perennial issue in the densely populated Valley, intensified competition, while the weakening Soviet framework allowed nationalist sentiments to flare. Smith's (1986) nationalism theory applies here, as Uzbeks' push for cultural sovereignty clashed with Kyrgyz assertions of territorial control. This event also set a precedent for future violence by deepening mutual mistrust and highlighting unresolved border and resource issues, demonstrating how local disputes can rapidly escalate into regional crises.

The 2010 Osh Conflict: Political instability and elite influences

The June 2010 Osh conflict, occurring after the overthrow of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, reignited Kyrgyz-Uzbek tensions with devastating consequences. Official counts report 470 deaths, though unofficial estimates reach into the thousands, alongside the displacement of approximately 400,000 people, mostly ethnic Uzbeks (UNHCR, 2010). The violence followed a power vacuum, with Kyrgyz nationalist rhetoric and Uzbek call for autonomy amplifying historical grievances. Human rights reports suggest elite manipulation, including security forces' complicity or inaction, while economic disparities—Uzbeks' prominence in trade versus Kyrgyz rural poverty—fueled the unrest (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

This conflict underscores political instability as a trigger, compounded by economic rivalry and ethnic polarization. Brass's (1991) view of ethnic conflict as organized violence is evident here, given reports of political elites exploiting divisions for power. The 2010 events also echo the 1990 massacre, with land disputes and cultural demands resurfacing, suggesting a cyclical pattern of unresolved tensions that necessitates institutional reforms to break the cycle.

Interconnections and persistent dynamics

These conflicts, though distinct, reveal interconnected drivers that perpetuate ethnic strife in the Fergana Valley. First, economic inequality—whether over market access (1989), land (1990), or trade dominance (2010)—consistently sparks violence in a region marked by

high population density and resource scarcity. Second, political instability, from the Soviet collapse to post-independence upheavals, creates opportunities for nationalist mobilization and elite manipulation, as observed across all three cases. Third, historical grievances, such as the Meskhetian Turks' deportation legacy or Kyrgyz-Uzbek territorial disputes, deepen ethnic divides, reinforcing Simmel's (1955) emphasis on group differentiation.

The progression from 1989 to 2010 also indicates a generational cycle, consistent with Weitzel's (2010) demographic theory. Rapid population growth in the Valley generates recurring demands for jobs and housing, reigniting tensions every 20–30 years. The failure to address these root causes—border disputes, economic disparities, and weak governance—links these events into a continuum of instability, threatening future flare-ups unless systemic reforms are enacted. This analysis critically synthesizes these cases to argue that, without integrating lessons from past events, the region risks repeating historical patterns.

Impact on Interethnic Relations and Future Risks

The ethnic conflicts in the Fergana Valley have left profound scars on interethnic relations, reshaping social cohesion and political stability across Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. This section evaluates the socio-political consequences of these clashes, drawing from contemporary analyses and historical patterns. It further assesses the looming risk of the Valley becoming a "Second Balkans" and the role of demographic cycles in perpetuating instability, highlighting the urgent need for preemptive measures while critiquing the limitations of current governance approaches.

Socio-political consequences of ethnic conflicts

The recurring ethnic strife in the Fergana Valley has eroded trust between communities, entrenched divisions, and strained governance structures. The 1989 Fergana unrest, for instance, deepened Uzbek hostility toward Meskhetian Turks, reinforcing perceptions of "outsiders" as economic threats (Bekmirzaev, 2023). This event triggered mass displacement—over 60,000 Turks fled Uzbekistan—disrupting local social fabrics and leaving a legacy of mutual suspicion. Similarly, the 1990 Osh massacre widened the Kyrgyz-Uzbek rift, with violence claiming hundreds of lives and displacing tens of thousands. Uzbeks' demands for autonomy were met with Kyrgyz nationalist backlash, polarizing communities and undermining interethnic cooperation.

The 2010 Osh conflict amplified these tensions, with its scale—470 confirmed deaths and approximately 400,000 displaced (UNHCR, 2010)—and allegations of elite manipulation (Human Rights Watch, 2010). The violence not only devastated Uzbek neighborhoods but also marginalized their political voice in Kyrgyzstan, as Kyrgyz authorities tightened control. Across these cases, socio-political impacts include heightened ethnic segregation, weakened state legitimacy, and a surge in nationalist rhetoric. Economic disparities, a key

conflict driver, have worsened, with minority groups like Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan facing exclusion from trade and land ownership. Politically, governments have struggled to mediate, often resorting to repression or inaction, further eroding public trust.

These consequences align with Tishkov's (2004) view of ethnic conflict as a civil confrontation rooted in ethnic differences, where unresolved tensions perpetuate instability. The failure to address root causes—border disputes, resource competition, and historical grievances—has entrenched a cycle of mistrust, making reconciliation increasingly elusive. Critically, this reveals a governance shortfall: states' focus on security over inclusion exacerbates rather than mitigates divisions.

The "Second Balkans" risk and demographic cycles

The Fergana Valley's volatile mix of ethnic diversity, high population density, resource scarcity, and political fragility has led observers to dub it a potential "Second Balkans"—a region prone to widespread conflict akin to the Yugoslav wars. This risk stems from several factors. First, unresolved border issues, such as the Kyrgyz-Tajik clashes in the Isfara-Batken zone (over 100 incidents since 2000), threaten escalation, especially over water and land resources. Second, the spread of radical ideologies, such as those of Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, exploits ethnic fault lines, amplifying instability (Internews, 2019). Third, external influences—geopolitical rivalries or narcotics trafficking—could ignite a broader crisis, drawing in neighboring states.

Demographic cycles exacerbate this peril. Weitzel's (2010) theory of 20–30-year conflict cycles, driven by population growth, resonates with the Valley's history. Large families and a youth bulge—common in Central Asia—intensify demands for jobs, housing, and resources, as seen in the 1990 Osh land disputes and the 2010 unrest. Between 1989 and 2010, the region's population grew by millions, straining infrastructure and deepening poverty. This demographic pressure, coupled with economic stagnation, mirrors the preconditions of the Balkan conflicts, where ethnic tensions escalated into regional war. Without intervention, the Valley risks a similar trajectory, with ripple effects across Central Asia. However, this analogy must be tempered: unlike the Balkans, the Valley's shared cultural roots offer potential for unity if leveraged effectively.

Future Implications and Mitigation

The cumulative impact on interethnic relations foreshadows persistent challenges. Ethnic segregation and distrust hinder civic unity, while political exclusion fuels radicalization risks. The "Second Balkans" scenario, though not inevitable, looms large if current trends—border disputes, resource conflicts, and demographic pressures—persist. Historical parallels, such as the 20-year gap between the 1990 and 2010 Osh conflicts, suggest that without systemic change, the next flare-up may be imminent.

Mitigation requires addressing these root causes. Economic cooperation, such as joint water management, could reduce resource tensions, while equitable governance—ensuring minority representation—might rebuild trust. Strengthening intercultural dialogue and regional collaboration offers a path to social cohesion. However, the window for action narrows as demographic and political pressures mount, underscoring the urgency of proactive strategies to avert a broader crisis. This calls for a shift from reactive policies to preventive ones, informed by regional scholarship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has dissected the ethnic conflicts of the Fergana Valley, revealing a region shaped by historical legacies, socio-political upheavals, and persistent tensions. By analyzing key events, underlying causes, and their impacts, it underscores the urgent need for proactive measures to avert further instability. This section summarizes the core findings and offers practical recommendations to prevent future conflicts and foster lasting peace in the Valley, synthesizing the analysis into actionable insights while advocating for original, context-specific solutions.

The Fergana Valley's ethnic strife emerges from a complex interplay of economic, political, demographic, and cultural drivers, as detailed in prior sections. Economically, resource scarcity—land, water, and jobs—fuels competition, igniting clashes such as the 1990 Osh massacre over housing plots and the 1989 Fergana unrest over market access. Politically, instability and elite manipulation, evident in the 2010 Osh violence, exacerbate tensions, with unresolved Soviet-era borders amplifying disputes. Demographically, rapid population growth sustains a cycle of unrest every 20–30 years, as Weitzel's theory predicts, linking the 1990 and 2010 Osh conflicts. Culturally, historical grievances and identity clashes—such as the Meskhetian Turks' deportation legacy or Kyrgyz-Uzbek lifestyle divides—deepen mistrust, perpetuating a volatile status quo.

These conflicts have eroded interethnic relations, fostering segregation, political exclusion, and radicalization risks, while raising the specter of a "Second Balkans" scenario if border disputes and resource wars escalate. The Soviet legacy of artificial boundaries and forced migrations, coupled with post-independence nationalism, has entrenched structural inequalities that successive governments have failed to address. Without intervention, the Valley's demographic pressures and unresolved grievances signal an imminent risk of renewed violence, threatening not only local stability but also Central Asia's broader security.

Theoretically, Gurr's resource competition, Smith's ethno-nationalism, and Brass's elite-driven conflict models illuminate these dynamics, yet their integration reveals the Valley's unique complexity—where economic deprivation, political opportunism, and cultural memory converge. This study concludes that the Fergana Valley's ethnic conflicts are not isolated incidents but part of a recurring cycle, rooted in systemic failures that demand urgent,

multifaceted solutions. This conclusion draws on original synthesis to argue that sustainable peace requires transcending theoretical models through locally grounded policies.

Recommendations for Conflict Prevention and Peacebuilding

To break this cycle and strengthen peace, the following actionable strategies are proposed, building on the study's findings and addressing the identified causes:

1. **Economic Equity and Resource Management**

- *Joint resource initiatives:* Establish trilateral agreements among Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan for equitable water and land use, such as a Fergana Valley Water Commission to manage irrigation disputes (e.g., Isfara-Batken tensions).
- *Economic inclusion:* Launch development programs targeting youth employment and minority access to trade, reducing the economic disparities that fueled the 1989 and 2010 unrests. For example, vocational training in Osh could bridge Kyrgyz-Uzbek economic gaps.
- *Additional measure:* Subsidize cross-border markets to encourage interdependence, drawing from successful models like the EU's regional trade zones, while monitoring impacts to ensure equitable benefits.

2. **Political Stability and Inclusive Governance**

- *Border resolution:* Convene a regional task force, supported by international mediators (e.g., UN or OSCE), to demarcate and legalize contested borders, addressing enclaves like Sokh and Vorukh to prevent future clashes.
- *Minority representation:* Mandate ethnic quotas in local governance—e.g., ensuring Uzbek council seats in Kyrgyzstan—to counter exclusion and reduce autonomy demands seen in 1990 and 2010.
- *Additional measure:* Strengthen judicial independence to curb elite manipulation, with transparent investigations into events like the 2010 violence to rebuild trust in institutions, incorporating community input for legitimacy.

3. **Demographic and Migration Management**

- *Population planning:* Implement family planning and urban development programs to ease demographic pressure, such as affordable housing projects in high-density areas like Andijan and Osh.
- *Migration frameworks:* Develop legal pathways for labor migrants, reducing ethnoselective displacement and integrating returnees to prevent enclave formation post-conflict (e.g., 2010 exodus).
- *Additional measure:* Partner with NGOs to monitor migration flows and provide support, drawing from UNHCR refugee integration strategies, with evaluations to adapt to changing demographics.

4. **Cultural Reconciliation and Dialogue**

- *Intercultural education:* Revive bilingual schools and cultural exchange programs to bridge Kyrgyz-Uzbek divides and weaken stereotypes among youth.
- *Historical reckoning:* Establish a truth and reconciliation commission to address grievances like the Meskhetian Turks' deportation or the 1898 Andijan uprising, fostering shared narratives over divisive memories.
- *Additional measure:* Fund community festivals celebrating the Valley's multiethnic heritage, modeled on post-conflict Balkan initiatives, to rebuild social cohesion, with ongoing assessments of their effectiveness.

5. **Regional and International Cooperation**

- *Central Asian Pact:* Form a regional security framework to counter radicalization (e.g., Hizb ut-Tahrir) and narcotics trafficking, which exploit ethnic tensions, with joint patrols and intelligence sharing.
- *Global support:* Engage international donors (e.g., World Bank) to finance peacebuilding, leveraging their expertise in post-conflict zones such as Rwanda or Bosnia.
- *Additional measure:* Host annual Fergana Valley summits to sustain dialogue among states, NGOs, and local leaders, ensuring long-term commitment to stability through adaptive agendas.

These recommendations aim to address the root causes—economic inequity, political fragility, demographic strain, and cultural divides—while offering a roadmap for sustainable peace. Their success hinges on regional cooperation and local ownership, as top-down fixes alone cannot heal the Valley's deep wounds. By acting decisively, stakeholders can avert the "Second Balkans" risk and transform the Fergana Valley from a conflict zone into a model of multiethnic harmony. This vision requires ongoing scholarly engagement to refine these strategies based on empirical outcomes.

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Romania:
Post-Communist Intra-Party Conflicts and Resolutions

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Abstract: Over the past thirty-five years, Romanian political parties were alive and abuzz. Also their history for that period was marked by internal ideological heterogeneity, intra-group disagreements, and quite often by open conflicts. Although hard to learn, intra-party conflict management was a necessity for each party organization as, despite contentious internal affairs, each party elite needed to maintain coherence of the overall organisation's coherence, stabilise membership and be able to campaign coherently in elections. This article examines the two major Romanian political parties that have been in continuous operation since 1990: The Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partidul Social Democrat) and The National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Naţional Liberal). It analyses intra-party conflicts in terms of ideological disputes and competition for power within groups. The conclusions are that despite the turmoil in Bucharest party headquarters, there was a surprising degree of organization stability at the level of each party throughout the period, far greater than ordinarily recognized in the literature or in the op-eds of political pundits.

Keywords: Party Elite Conflict, Intra-Group Disagreements, Ideological Differences, Strategic Conflict.

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Introduction

The collapse in 1989 of the Romanian one-party communist regime zeroed in on the rebirth of multi-party politics. The new party-diverse political reality was marked by the onset of a complex and turbulent transition towards democracy, market economy, institutional restructuring, and intense public debates regarding Romania's political future. Some of the new entities that filled the vacuum left by the fall of the Romanian Communist Party had deep historical roots and were to some extent frozen in time, while others were novel constructions designed to navigate the evolving political environment (Marian, 2013). People with limited or no recent nor relevant multi-party electoral experience engaged in a herculean task aimed to craft afresh society-large organizations able to advance national programs, public policy proposals, and an international agenda for the country.

Relevant to the macro history of politics in Romanian in the decades that followed is not who was in the sparring in each election or government crisis but who were the medalists. The two most significant political parties to emerge and establish dominance in the post-communist period were the Social Democratic Party (PSD – Partidul Social Democrat) and the National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Național Liberal). Despite stiff elite-level conflict, leadership heterogeneity, and quite often open conflict, both parties played a central role in shaping Romania's political trajectory from 1990 onwards.

This paper aims to map the conflicts of the elites of these two parties, exploring how internal divisions, ideological struggles, and power disputes shaped their evolution over the past three and a half decades. We will focus on: i) the origins and backgrounds of internal conflicts, including the historical contexts in which they emerged and the personalities involved, ii) the nature of these conflicts, distinguishing between purely ideological clashes, strategic disagreements, and power struggles that shaped party dynamics, iii) the key events that triggered or escalated these disputes, including electoral contests, leadership challenges, and policy debates, iv) the resolutions, if any, that brought these conflicts to a close, including expulsions, formal splits, or reconciliations, v) the long-term consequences for party structure, voter base, and the broader Romanian political system, highlighting how these episodes impacted party stability and electoral performance.

In this context, the PSD and PNL stand as critical case studies for understanding the fragility of party unity in emerging democracies and the broader challenges of consolidating political organizations in the face of rapid social and economic transformation. These conflicts are not merely historical footnotes but are integral to explaining the contemporary dynamics of Romanian politics. As such, they provide valuable insights into the persistent challenges of party cohesion, ideological alignment, and elite competition in post-communist Europe.

Political Context: New Highly Personalized Party Elites

The new party elites came on stage by the bushel and a flurry of political parties were quick to be created. The process was contaminated by a strong feature of the former communist regime: the 'individual leader is the source of the authority' (Huntington 1992, 581). This

feature was visible at the level of the leadership of most of the new parties which coalesced around highly visible figures in the Romanian society among which the most relevant were: Ion Iliescu and Petre Roman, leaders of the National Salvation Front (FSN – Frontul Salvării Naționale; the party that emerged from the political structure that overthrew the communist regime), Corneliu Coposu, co-founder and leader of the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (PNȚCD – Partidul Național Țărănist Creștin Democrat), Radu Câmpeanu founder and leader of the National Liberal Party (PNL – Partidul Național Liberal), Sergiu Cunescu founder of the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democrației Sociale în România), Domokos Géza, founder and leader of Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (UDMR – Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România), and Victor Surdu of the Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (PDAR – Partidul Democrat Agrar din România). All these founding figures of the new parties were either former low-ranking members of the communist regime political elite or came from families with a history in pre-communist politics. In the early 1990s a form of dynastic multi-party arrangement replaced what Vladimir Tismăneanu (1985) identified as the 'dynastic socialism' of the former Romanian Communist Party.

In the first years of multi-party political life, this tendency of high personalization of the party leadership exploded into internal conflicts and splits. The large and political eclectic National Salvation Front (FSN) was split among an Ion Iliescu extension which following a tortuously long path ended up becoming the Social-Democratic Party (PSD) and a Petre Roman grouping that resulted in a liberal oriented party which eventually merged more than twenty years later with National Liberal Party (PNL). In a parallel development, the old social-democrats of the pre-communist regime times mobilized around a Sergiu Cunescu, a political figure active in the old ranks of the party in late 1940s, and formed Social Democratic Party 'Constantin Titel Petrescu' (PSD-CTP – Partidul Social Democrat Constantin Titel Petrescu), after the name of the last leader of the party imprisoned by the communist regime in early 1950s.

The roots of the PSD can be traced back to the National Salvation Front (FSN), the political organisation that seized power amid the December 1989 anti-communist revolution. The FSN was initially intended to be a temporary governing body and was presented as such. It was not expected to participate in the first free elections, held in 1990. However, under the leadership of Ion Iliescu (who was part of the Communist Party nomenclature), the FSN quickly transformed into a political party seeking to establish itself as a major force in Romanian politics. This was especially the case after it won the first post-communist multi-party elections in May 1990 by a huge majority. In 1992, former prime minister Petre Roman won the internal party elections and became president of the FSN. Following this result, Ion Iliescu and his supporters split from the party to form the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN – Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naţionale), which absorbed three other parties in 1993 and rebranded as the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democraţiei Sociale din România). In 2001, under Adrian Năstase's leadership, the PDSR merged with the smaller left-wing PSDR (Partidul Social Democrat Român) to

form today's PSD (Partidul Social Democrat). This political move further consolidated the PSD's position as the dominant force on the left and in the Romanian political party system.

During its roughly 35 years of political activity, and especially after the 1990s, the PSD was influenced by strong leaders who established themselves at both the party and national levels. Key figures such as Adrian Năstase and Liviu Dragnea combined left-wing economic views with conservative values, whereas leaders such as Mircea Geoană and Marcel Ciolacu attempted to moderate the party's ideology and reduce Eurosceptic and conservative views.

The National Liberal Party (PNL) has a historical background dating back to 1875, it is the oldest party in the history of the modern Romanian state. Re-established in January 1990, by Radu Câmpeanu and other liberal figures that survived the communist regime, the party positioned itself as a pro-market, right-leaning alternative to the remnants of the communist political elite. Initially, the party attracted a diverse group of intellectuals, former political dissidents, and, by that time, grey-haired members of the pre-communist liberal tradition. Early in its existence, the party experienced internal factionalism with multiple splinter groups emerging due to disagreements over ideology coherence, leadership style, and organizational strategy. Radu Câmpeanu conflicted with the liberal elite gathered in his party and split to form in 1993 a new structure called 'Câmpeanu' National Liberal Party (PNL-C – Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu'), while in a parallel development other liberals coalesced around a scion of the old pre-communism liberal dynasty, the Brătianu, and founded the eponymous 'Brătianu' Liberal Union (UL-B – Uniunea Liberală 'Brătianu').

Other prominent figures in the early years of PNL included Mircea Ionescu-Quintus, who later became an influential leader of the party, and Dinu Patriciu, who played a significant role in shaping the party's economic policies. The internal struggles led to the early creation of breakaway factions, yet by the late 2000s, PNL had consolidated its position as the main center-right party in Romania featuring a mainly classical liberal ideology on economics, combined with rather conservative social values. The post-communist political period saw PNL both trying to counterbalance the influence of PSD in Romanian politics either by participating in right-wing, anti-PSD coalitions or by governing together with PSD and thus forming strong governing majorities.

Intra-Party Conflicts in New Democracies

Conflicts within political parties have multiple dimensions and are triggered by factors such as ideological incongruence, disloyalty and tensions between elected officials, members or various party associated interest groups (Gherghina, Close, and Kopecký, 2019). The concept of intra-party conflict itself is analyzed with a variety of theoretical approaches. Recent literature developments to the topic tend to concentrate on two main approaches for discussing conflict, the structural approach and the behavioral approach (Bolleyer and Kölln, 2024). Through the structural lenses the party is a social system in which conflict

arises when individuals or groups with various roles, hierarchical positions, and strategic goals seek to renegotiate their positions. Through the behavioral lenses the party is merely an instrument for attaining external or societal goals and conflict arises when individuals or groups seek to influence the ideology and policies of the party. Resolutions of party conflicts also vary, from internal negotiations, leadership change, to more radical consequences, such as the split of the party, or in the extreme cases party disbandment. Party splits and party disbandment have serious implications at society level, like government stability (Ceron, 2015). Organizational instability and party splits raised more serious problems in young democracies (Mainwaring, 2016). However, Ibenskas and Sikk (2016) analyzed eleven Central and Eastern European countries and showed that party splits, as a form of intra-party conflicts, were not strongly correlated with inter-party and intra-coalition conflicts.

The high degree of variability in modern democratic arrangements ushers in each party system having its own pattern of peculiarity. Romania is a fourth-wave democracy with a party system similar to the other Central and East European young democracies (McFaul, 2002). Given the distinctive features of the CEE space (Pop-Eleches, 2015), potentially high levels of party instability and intra-party conflicts are to be expected. In this context we should expect that Romania is not the odd case out and thus fits into a pattern of party level conflicts and instability. Additionally, in Romania's care, party splits may even be generated by larger features of the political system. Although not clearly stated in the Constitution, Romania is a hybrid political system (a semi-presidential republic) and, alongside other similar systems, has to deal with high political instability, generated especially by intra-executive conflicts involving the president and the prime-minister (Sedelius and Mashalter, 2013). Due to the inherent design of semi-presidentialism, it is reasonable to examine it as an external influence factor of intra-party conflicts and party-level splits; for example, during a cohabitation period, the president could stir things up in the prime-minister's party (or other coalition parties), ultimately leading to a split and thus weakening the governing coalition and the prime-minister's support (Marian and King, 2011).

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework we propose starts from the assumption that an internal party conflict is a development in the normal life of the party in which at least two different groups perceive their agendas as negatively impacting each other. Core to such agendas are votes, public offices, public policy (Kolltveit, 2023) but also, in some cases, ideological clarifications (Isotalo, Mattila, and von Schoultz, 2020). In our model, the conflict development (1) takes place in a specific party background, (2) has a specific nature, (3) is affected by key events and dynamics, (4) has a resolution, and (5) it ends with a number of consequences for the party life. This analytical framework is intended as a heuristic framework to identify and map internal party conflicts. We project this framework on all internal conflicts we were able to identify for the timeframe in-between 1990 and 2025 for both Romania's liberal and social-democratic parties. For each of the two parties we

propose a narrative that ensures consistency for the reader to follow each string of party internal conflicts. However, both those party cases illustrate the magnitude of the systemic shocks the Romanian political life experienced in the transition to democracy process.

Social Democratic Party Conflict Episodes

The story of the social-democrats in Romania is a piece of magical realism. It is a story of a reformed national communism with a sense of social fantasy. It is a ghost story – the ghost of communism – that is not about the ghost itself, but about power struggles, with the ghost being just a small part of the party's everyday life.

Episode-1.
Two Ghost: Post-Communism versus Democracy

(*Background of the conflict*) Following the 1989 Revolution, the National Salvation Front (FSN) led by Romania's president Ion Iliescu and prime-minister Petre Roman, emerged as the national dominant political force. Initially, FSN functioned as a provisional government encompassing many political leaders across the aisle, but by the spring of 1990 it was transformed into a political party that comprised mainly second- and third-layer former communist cadres aligned with Ion Iliescu. By 1992, the alliance between Iliescu, representing the more traditional and state-centric left, and acting prime minister Petre Roman, who embraced economic liberalism and modernization, began to fracture. This reflected growing ideological and generational divisions within the party, now strained by the pressures of institutionalization and democratic consolidation.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was a power struggle with a strong ideological component. Iliescu advocated for a controlled transition and state-guided limited reforms, whereas Roman pushed for more aggressive liberalization and market reforms. Their rivalry was also personal, rooted in competing leadership styles and visions for the post-communist left. The tension was internal, though amplified by growing societal demands for reform and political pluralism.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In early 1992, the leadership conflict came to a head. At a decisive FSN Congress, Petre Roman was elected president of FSN, triggering a break with Iliescu and his supporters. In response, Iliescu and his faction formed the Democratic National Salvation Front (FDSN – Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale), effectively splitting the party. The new formation gathered the majority of FSN's parliamentary group and the party's traditionalist base.

(*Resolutions*) The episode concluded with an organizational split that reshaped the structure of the Romanian social-democracy. Iliescu's FDSN established itself as a separate entity and rapidly became dominant on the left of Romanian politics. Roman retained a diminished FSN, which eventually slowly evolved into a moderate-liberal oriented political formation.

(*Consequences*) The formation of FDSN allowed Iliescu to consolidate a loyal and ideologically coherent party base, which later became the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR), which was finally labelled the PSD. It marked the emergence of a stable left-wing political force. Roman's political influence declined in the aftermath.

Analytical observations: This conflict reveals the fragility of post-revolutionary coalitions and the difficulty of maintaining unity in ideologically broad formations. It underscores how elite fragmentation and power struggles can lead to foundational realignments. The episode also demonstrates the importance of institutional control—Iliescu's faction succeeded in consolidating power through control of party structures and aligning with broader societal preferences for stability over rapid liberalization.

Episode-2.
Social-liberals versus the Ghost of National Communism

(*Background of the conflict*) In the aftermath of the 1996 parliamentary and presidential elections, FDSN now transformed into the Party of Social Democracy in Romania (PDSR – Partidul Democrației Sociale în România), under the control of Ion Iliescu, entered the opposition after losing power to a center-right coalition formed around the National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party. During this period, internal divisions deepened over how the party should position itself ideologically and strategically. Ion Iliescu, the founding figure and central authority within the party, maintained a more conservative and state-controlled approach to national politics. In contrast, Teodor Meleșcanu, a prominent party member and former foreign minister, advocated for a more modern, reform-oriented, and pro-European agenda. The defeat in the elections intensified debates over leadership and the future of the party.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was primarily ideological, centered on the party's identity and direction. Meleșcanu sought to steer the party toward what was thought of as social-liberal Western-oriented model, while Iliescu and his allies aimed to preserve a more traditional social-democratic line rooted in national sovereignty while advocating for cautious societal and economic reform. The rift was also shaped by a generational divide and differing international alignments. The conflict had an internal origin but was influenced by external pressures for modernization and European integration.

(*Key events and dynamics*) By 1997, tensions within the party had become unmanageable. After facing resistance from the Iliescu-led leadership and being denied the opportunity to implement reforms, Meleșcanu left the PDSR to establish the Alliance for Romania (ApR – Alianța pentru România), a new centrist party that supported EU membership. Although this attracted several younger members, the ApR ultimately failed to challenge the PDSR's dominance on the left.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with a clear split. Meleșcanu's departure marked for the 1997-2000 legislature the marginalization of the reformist faction within PDSR.

No institutional reconciliation took place. PDSR retained its structure and ideological orientation under Iliescu's guidance.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the split fragmented the left and diluted opposition to the governing center-right coalition. ApR struggled electorally and failed to establish itself as a major political force. In the long term, Meleșcanu's trajectory continued in other political formations, while PDSR maintained its dominant position on the left. The conflict reaffirmed Iliescu's authority but also exposed the party's limited tolerance for internal reform.

Analytical observations: This episode highlights the costs of ideological rigidity and leadership centralization. Although Ion Iliescu succeeded in retaining control, the inability to accommodate internal diversity stifled innovation within the party. The conflict also illustrates a recurring pattern in Romanian politics: ambitious reformers, when excluded, tend to create splinter parties rather than effect change from within leading to fragmentation without significant long-term transformation.

Episode-3.
European Social Democracy versus the Ghost of National Communism

(*Background of the conflict*) In 2000 PDSR was back in power in the parliament with Iliescu president of Romania, again. In 2001 the party rebranded into The Social Democratic Party (PSD). Four years later, in 2004, elections marked a turning point for PSD, which lost both the presidential and legislative races. Ion Iliescu, the symbolic leader of the party and former president of Romania, remained a central figure, while Mircea Geoană emerged as a new-generation public figure with Western diplomatic experience and reformist credentials. In 2005, amid growing calls for party renewal, PSD held a congress where Geoană challenged Iliescu for the party presidency. This event triggered one of the most significant internal leadership confrontations in Romanian social-democracy post-communist history.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was a power struggle with a significant generational and ideological component. Iliescu embodied the old guard *zoa politika* defined by centralized control, nationalism, and continuity with the party's early post-communist identity. Geoană represented a modern, reformist vision aligned with European social democracy. The contest was internal but influenced by broader social and political pressure for modernization and European integration.

(*Key events and dynamics*) At an extraordinary party congress in 2005, Mircea Geoană won the presidency of PSD by defeating Iliescu in a closely watched internal vote. The result surprised many and reflected a shift in the party elite toward generational change. Iliescu, dissatisfied with the outcome, publicly criticized the new leadership, calling some members a "group of clowns."

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with Geoană achieving an institutional victory and Iliescu being marginalised, though not completely excluded. Although Iliescu continued to hold

honorary positions, real power shifted to the new leadership, and his influence in the party gradually diminished. Rather than reconciliation, the resolution involved the coexistence of rival factions within a reconfigured balance of power.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the leadership change marked a symbolic break with the party's founding figure and simultaneously with the party's past. It also created internal instability, with repeated disputes between the reformist and conservative wings. Over time, Geoană's leadership proved fragile, and his inability to consolidate authority eventually led to further fragmentation. The episode opened a period of volatility within PSD that would continue throughout the following two decades.

Analytical observations: This episode underscores the challenges of generational transition in the case of a dominant party with strong founding figures. Geoană's rise represented an opportunity for modernization, yet lack of broad accord over policy and ideological developments and to some extent continued influence of the old guard weakened his capacity to reform the party. The conflict illustrates how leadership transitions, even when procedurally legitimate, can produce long-term instability if not accompanied by structural renewal and internal legitimacy.

Episode-4.
The Ghost is Still There: Old Guard Last Stand

(*Background of the conflict*) By 2007, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was struggling with internal coherence and public credibility. The leadership of Mircea Geoană had failed to consolidate the party and to mount an effective opposition during the legislature that started in 2004, while the influence of veteran figures such as Ion Iliescu continued to have appeal for an old generation of leaders that was aiming for a comeback. Against this backdrop, a growing group of younger, reformist leaders began demanding generational renewal and a departure from the party's historical legacy. Ioan Rus, a respected social democrat and member of the reformist wing, became one of the most vocal critics of Iliescu's continued dominance within the party's decision-making structures.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was neither programmatic nor organizational in nature, it rather reflected interpersonal tension, generational clash, and divergent views on the party's internal democracy. While not centered on ideology or direct power competition, it focused on the role of founding figures like Iliescu in blocking internal reform and party modernization.

(*Key events and dynamics*) The disagreement between Ioan Rus and Ion Iliescu became public in 2007, when Rus criticized the persistence of 'honorary leadership' without accountability. Iliescu, in turn, defended his symbolic role and criticized the reformist wing for lacking consistency and for being overly deferential to external pressures, especially coming from the acting president, Traian Băsescu. Though there was no direct expulsion

of either of the two leaders involved, the conflict played out in party forums and the media, polarizing members and weakening internal cohesion.

(*Resolutions*) The episode did not culminate in a formal organizational rupture. However, the resolution was informal: Rus gradually distanced himself from the leadership core, while Iliescu maintained his honorary role without operational authority. The party continued under a fragile status quo, avoiding an open split but failing to resolve its structural tensions.

(*Consequences*) This episode deepened the PSD's internal fragmentation and highlighted the tension between legacy leadership and renewal. It also weakened the party's ability to present a modernized image to the electorate, contributing to further instability in the following years. The reluctance to clarify Iliescu's role left lingering ambiguity about the party's direction and legitimacy.

Analytical observations: This conflict highlights the consequences of unresolved value shifts within post-communist political parties. The cohabitation of honorary leaders and reformist actors without clear boundaries of formal party authority can lead to institutional paralysis. Furthermore, it demonstrates that internal reform initiatives often fail not due to ideological incompatibility, but due to the entrenched informal authority and symbolic power concentrated in founding elites.

Episode-5.
Individual Agency versus Centralized Party Control

(*Background of the conflict*) In the lead-up to the 2008 local elections, tensions within the Social Democratic Party (PSD) resurfaced, particularly around candidate selection processes. Sorin Oprescu, a prominent and charismatic member of the party, expressed his intention to run for mayor of Bucharest. However, the party leadership, under Mircea Geoană, opted for a different candidate, prioritizing centralized strategy and internal loyalty over popularity. This decision sparked a serious confrontation between Oprescu and the party's leadership.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was of an organizational and procedural nature, rather than ideological. It stemmed from disagreements over internal democracy, candidate selection, and the role of individual agency versus centralized party control. Oprescu felt marginalized and contested what he perceived as undemocratic practices within PSD. While not framed as a doctrinal dispute, the conflict exposed deeper tensions regarding how authority and legitimacy were exercised in the party.

(*Key events and dynamics*) After being denied the party's nomination for the Bucharest mayoral race, Oprescu decided to run as an independent candidate. This move defied PSD leadership and created media and public pressure on the party. Despite lacking formal party support, Oprescu's personal popularity and strong campaign led to his election as mayor

of Bucharest in 2008. This victory was interpreted as a rebuke to the PSD leadership and a signal of the party's disconnection from public sentiment.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with Oprescu's estrangement from PSD after his election as an independent. While no formal expulsion occurred, his confrontational stance marked a clear break from the party ranks. PSD leadership neither reversed its decision nor attempted to reintegrate him.

(*Consequences*) Oprescu's independent win in the capital underscored the party's internal weaknesses and rigid decision-making processes. The incident also weakened the leadership of Mircea Geoană by exposing his inability to manage prominent figures within the party. On a broader level, it damaged PSD's image as an inclusive and democratic organization, reducing its credibility among reform-minded voters.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates the risks of centralized control in candidate selection and the underestimation of individual political capital. It also highlights a pattern in PSD's history: sidelining popular internal actors often results in their external success and reputational damage to the party. The Geoană-Oprescu conflict serves as a case study in how procedural disputes, when unresolved, can evolve into major public defeats for party elites.

Episode-6.
Party Structures versus Loyal Individuals

(*Background of the conflict*) In late 2008, following the parliamentary elections, PSD entered a coalition government with the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal), a move seen by many within the party as controversial. Gabriel Oprea, a PSD MP and former prefect of Bucharest, was appointed Minister of Interior in the new cabinet. His tenure began amidst internal skepticism due to his perceived closeness to President Traian Băsescu and the PDL leadership. Tensions within PSD escalated as Oprea made a series of appointments and public decisions without consulting the social-democrat leadership.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was ideological and strategic, with a strong external dimension linked to the influence of President Băsescu. Oprea was accused of bypassing party structures, promoting individuals loyal to external interests, and undermining party discipline. His behavior was viewed as disloyal and contrary to the expectations of internal cohesion. The situation sparked debates about PSD's relationship with state institutions and its vulnerability to presidential interference.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In early 2009, Oprea's appointment of a controversial secretary of state triggered outrage within PSD. Senior party figures, including Mircea Geoană and Ion Iliescu, publicly criticized him. Under mounting pressure, Oprea resigned from his ministerial position and left the party. In 2010, he formed the National Union for the Progress of Romania (UNPR – Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României),

gathering disaffected members from the PSD and other parties who supported President Băsescu's agenda.

(*Resolutions*) The episode concluded with a formal departure and the creation of a new political entity. Oprea's resignation and subsequent formation of UNPR marked a clean break from PSD. There was no attempt at reconciliation, and the party leadership distanced itself from his actions and political direction.

(*Consequences*) The split weakened PSD's credibility and coherence during a delicate phase of co-governance. It exposed internal vulnerabilities and the ease with which key powerful external actors could exploit divisions within the party. The emergence of UNPR also altered coalition dynamics in Romanian politics, providing a new support base for president Băsescu aligned forces and fragmenting the left.

Analytical observations: This episode demonstrates the destabilizing impact of external political influence on internal party structures. Oprea's actions reflect the risks of appointing figures without strong loyalty to the party's core values and decision-making processes. It also exemplifies how ideological ambiguity within a party can open the door to opportunism and defection, especially when power dynamics at the national level incentivize fragmentation over loyalty.

Episode-7.
The Ghost of Factionalism

(*Background of the conflict*) By 2009, the Social Democratic Party (PSD) was still recovering from years of internal instability and contested leadership. Mircea Geoană remained the official president of the party, but his authority was frequently challenged. Adrian Năstase, former prime minister under Ion Iliescu's 2000-2004 presidency and a key figure in the party's technocratic wing, had reemerged as a powerful voice within the organization. Tensions between the two were rooted in divergent leadership styles, personal rivalries, and conflicting visions regarding PSD's future and its presidential strategy.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was a classic power struggle shaped by long-standing personal rivalries. Although Geoană was formally in charge, he faced mounting pressure from Năstase, who still held considerable sway over the party's technocratic elite. While they shared broadly similar ideological orientations, their political strategies and aspirations clashed. The conflict was entirely internal, centred on control of the party's structures and future candidacies.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In the lead-up to the 2009 presidential elections, Geoană was chosen as the PSD's candidate, despite criticism from a significant part of party leadership. After narrowly losing the election to Traian Băsescu in a highly contested runoff, Geoană's credibility was permanently damaged. Internal criticisms intensified, with Năstase openly questioning Geoană's competence and leadership. This period was marked by factional maneuvering, media attacks, and efforts to delegitimize Geoană's authority.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict did not result in a formal organizational split but ended with Geoană's gradual marginalization within PSD. While he remained a prominent figure for a time, his influence diminished significantly after the election defeat. Năstase consolidated his standing in the party's leadership core, though he too would soon face legal challenges that undermined his political trajectory.

(*Consequences*) The episode further eroded PSD's internal unity and exposed the fragility of its leadership model. The public perception of a divided party, especially during a national election, damaged its credibility. Internally, the party failed to implement meaningful reforms or strategic realignments, perpetuating a cycle of elite rivalries and unresolved structural deficiencies.

Analytical observations: This episode exemplifies the risks of unresolved internal competition in parties with weak mechanisms for elite consensus. The Geoană – Năstase conflict highlights the persistence of informal power networks and the difficulty of consolidating leadership without broad legitimacy. It also shows how electoral failure can quickly destabilize a party when factionalism remains unchecked, reinforcing a pattern of leadership fragility within PSD.

Episode-8.
Cadres Purge

(*Background of the conflict*) Following his loss in the 2009 presidential election and his diminished authority in PSD, Mircea Geoană continued to hold the position of President of the Senate, maintaining a degree of institutional relevance despite growing isolation within the party. Meanwhile, Victor Ponta, a younger leader with close ties to Adrian Năstase, rose through the party ranks and was elected president of PSD in 2010, representing a new generation of leadership. The relationship between Ponta and Geoană quickly became strained, especially as Ponta sought to consolidate his authority and distance the party from past electoral failures.

(*Nature of the conflict*) This episode was also a power struggle, characterized by generational rivalry and conflicting visions of party identity and leadership style. Geoană, although increasingly marginal, attempted to maintain a public profile and influence party strategy. Ponta viewed Geoană's continued prominence – especially as Senate President – as an obstacle to his authority and efforts to rebrand PSD. The conflict had internal roots, though it was exacerbated by public disagreements and media coverage.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Tensions reached a peak in late 2011, when Ponta moved to have Geoană removed from the Senate presidency, citing insubordination and disloyalty. Geoană resisted, framing the move as authoritarian and divisive. After several weeks of public tension and internal debate, PSD officially expelled Geoană from the party. This marked a dramatic end to his long standing role within the organization and generated significant media attention.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with Geoană's expulsion from PSD and the loss of his leadership role in the Senate. The resolution was unilateral and uncompromising, with Ponta and the party leadership demonstrating their control over internal structures. Geoană continued his political career outside PSD, eventually founding the Romanian Social Party (PSRO – Partidul Social Românesc) in 2015.

(*Consequences*) The episode consolidated Victor Ponta's authority and marked yet another generational shift within PSD. However, it also deepened perceptions of authoritarianism in party leadership and reduced tolerance for dissent. The expulsion of a former presidential candidate further illustrated PSD's tendency to marginalize internal critics rather than mediate conflicts. Geoană's departure fragmented the party's legacy leadership and created a new, albeit minor, competitor in the center-left space.

Analytical observations: This conflict reflects the centralization of power within PSD and the use of disciplinary measures to resolve leadership disputes. It also shows how generational transitions can be managed through exclusion rather than integration. The expulsion of Geoană signaled a broader trend in Romanian party politics: elite renewal often occurs not through negotiation or institutional reform, but through abrupt and symbolic ruptures.

Episode-9.
The Great Leap Backwards

(*Background of the conflict*) After his resignation as prime minister and PSD leader in 2015, Victor Ponta remained an influential voice within the party, despite a gradual distancing from a very centralized leadership manner under Liviu Dragnea who took the party helm in 2015. By 2017–2018, tensions between the two figures had grown sharply. Dragnea, who consolidated control over both the party and the government, was criticized for his authoritarian leadership, clientelist practices, and controversial judicial reforms. Ponta emerged as one of the most vocal internal critics of Dragnea's direction, advocating for a return to internal democracy and institutional integrity.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was a power struggle with significant ideological and strategic implications. It pitted a reformist, pro-European vision associated with Ponta against an increasingly nationalist and illiberal agenda under Dragnea. Though both came from the same political tradition, their leadership styles, rhetoric, and policy preferences sharply diverged. The conflict was internal in origin, but shaped by broader societal tensions over corruption, governance, and Romania's European trajectory

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2018, Ponta openly attacked Dragnea's leadership, accusing him of authoritarianism and undermining the rule of law. These disputes escalated in the media and in Parliament. Eventually, Ponta left PSD and founded PRO România, a new center-left party aiming to attract disillusioned PSD members but only a small portion

of social-democratic voters. Several MP's and former ministers followed him, weakening Dragnea's parliamentary support base.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict was resolved through a formal organizational split. Ponta's departure and the creation of PRO România institutionalized the rift, and no reconciliation took place

(*Consequences*) This episode marked a major moment of fragmentation for PSD. It weakened the party both internally and electorally and contributed to the erosion of its credibility among moderate and reformist voters. The emergence of PRO România reshaped for a short while the center-left and introduced a more pluralistic but also more divided political landscape. For Dragnea, the loss of Ponta and his allies exacerbated internal opposition and diminished his broader legitimacy.

Analytical observations: The Ponta – Dragnea conflict illustrates the breakdown of internal mediation mechanisms in PSD and the personalist nature of political leadership in the social-democrat's ranks. It highlights how unresolved ideological and ethical disagreements often lead to party splits rather than internal reform. The episode also reveals the fragility of party cohesion in the face of authoritarian tendencies and external societal pressures, particularly with regard to democratic norms and anti-corruption reform.

Episode-10.
A Proxy Challenger

(*Background of the conflict*) In early 2017, after PSD won a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections, party leader Liviu Dragnea was unable to become prime minister due to a prior penal conviction. As a result, he nominated Sorin Grindeanu, a relatively low-profile but loyal party member as head of the new government. However, once in office, Grindeanu began asserting his autonomy, distancing himself from Dragnea's directives and adopting a more moderate stance, particularly with regard to controversial judicial reforms which had provoked massive public protests nationwide.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was primarily a power struggle with a significant strategic dimension. It revolved around control over government policy and the relationship between the party apparatus and executive authority. Dragnea expected Grindeanu to act as a compliant prime minister, while Grindeanu resisted being a mere proxy. Tensions were fuelled by public backlash against a government initiated piece of legislation aimed at weakening anti-corruption legislation.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In June 2017, PSD leadership withdrew political support from Grindeanu, citing lack of communication and policy inefficiency. Grindeanu refused to resign, challenging the authority of the party leadership. PSD then initiated a motion of no confidence against its own government, which passed with support from a PSD loosely allied liberal leaning party, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE), and a large PSD

majority. Grindeanu was dismissed, marking the first time a ruling party toppled its own prime minister through a parliamentary procedure.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with Grindeanu's removal from office and the appointment of a new government under another proxy social-democratic figure, Mihai Tudose. Grindeanu was expelled from PSD but later rejoined the party under different leadership. There was no formal reconciliation with Dragnea, and their relationship remained politically severed.

(*Consequences*) This conflict exposed the authoritarian tendencies within PSD under Dragnea and its centralized decision-making model. The event damaged the party's credibility, particularly among urban and pro-European voters. It also destabilized the government during a sensitive period marked by civil society mobilization and international scrutiny. Grindeanu's dismissal marked the beginning of a pattern of rapid changes in the office of prime minister within PSD-led governments.

Analytical observations: The Dragnea-Grindeanu episode exemplifies the tension between party discipline and executive autonomy in Romania's semi-presidential system. It highlights how perceived disloyalty even when rooted in institutional responsibility can provoke punitive measures in highly centralized parties. Moreover, it illustrates how short-term power calculations often override governance stability and public trust in democratic institutions.

Episode-11.
Another Proxy, Another Challenger

(*Background of the conflict*) Following the removal of Sorin Grindeanu in 2017, Liviu Dragnea supported the nomination of Mihai Tudose as the new prime minister, expecting continued loyalty to the party leadership. However, Tudose, like his predecessor, soon asserted a degree of independence, particularly in matters of cabinet appointments and public communication. The growing friction between Tudose and Dragnea culminated in early 2018, just months into Tudose's term, suggesting that structural issues within PSD leadership extended beyond isolated personal disputes.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was again a power struggle with the usual mix of strategic and personal tensions. It revolved around executive autonomy, the influence of Dragnea over governmental affairs, and the handling of internal party disputes especially concerning Minister of Internal Affairs, Carmen Dan, a Dragnea loyalist whom Tudose attempted to remove. The conflict revealed deep dysfunction in the relationship between the party leadership and 'ghost prime ministers'.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In January 2018, Tudose publicly criticized Carmen Dan and demanded her resignation, a move viewed as a direct challenge to Dragnea's authority. Dragnea and the PSD leadership retaliated by calling a meeting of the party's National

Executive Committee. Facing overwhelming internal pressure and loss of political support, Tudose resigned on 15 January 2018, ending his tenure as prime minister after less than seven months in office.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict was resolved through Tudose's forced resignation, imposed by party leadership. He was replaced by the new proxy, Viorica Dăncilă, another yet close ally of Dragnea. Tudose remained in politics but distanced himself from the PSD leadership. There was no formal reconciliation between the two figures.

(*Consequences*) This episode reinforced the perception of the party being led by a master puppet, Liviu Dragnea in this case, who also acted as a de facto prime minister, exercising control over the executive without assuming formal responsibility. It damaged PSD's credibility and institutional stability, suggesting a chronic inability to maintain durable leadership. Repeated prime ministerial dismissals became a symbol of internal authoritarianism and short-term political calculation.

Analytical observations: The Dragnea–Tudose conflict exemplifies systemic issues within PSD related to centralized authority, lack of internal debate, and disregard for institutional autonomy. It demonstrates the fragility of governmental leadership under a dominant party boss and the structural constraints faced by Romanian prime ministers within clientelist party systems. It also foreshadowed Dragnea's eventual downfall, as internal dissatisfaction continued to build beneath the surface of formal loyalty.

Episode-12.
A Challenge from Below

(*Background of the conflict*) In the second half of 2018, Liviu Dragnea faced growing dissent from within the PSD lower ranks and local leaders, despite his continued control over the central party body and government through loyalists. Gabriela Firea, then mayor of Bucharest and vice-president of the party, became increasingly vocal in criticizing Dragnea's style of leadership. She was joined by Paul Stănescu, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development, who also opposed Dragnea's centralization of power and his handling of party strategy and governance.

(*Nature of the conflict*) This was a power struggle with elements of strategic divergence. Firea and Stănescu opposed Dragnea's authoritarian style and what they saw as the subordination of PSD to his personal agenda, especially amid increasing judicial pressure on Dragnea. The dissenters also objected to poor policy coordination, collapse in public trust, and the marginalization of local leaders. The conflict reflected broader dissatisfaction with Dragnea's control over both party and state apparatus.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Firea and Stănescu issued multiple public statements against Dragnea in the autumn of 2018, culminating in an open letter signed by several party leaders demanding his resignation. In response, Dragnea orchestrated a media campaign

to discredit them and used internal party mechanisms to neutralize dissent. Firea was removed from her position as leader of the Bucharest branch of the party, and Stănescu was pressured to resign from his cabinet post. Despite retaining some support, their influence within the party was significantly reduced.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with the marginalization of the Firea–Stănescu faction, as Dragnea reaffirmed his authority at the PSD National Executive Committee. No formal expulsions occurred, but the dissenters were sidelined from key positions. The resolution was coercive rather than reconciliatory.

(*Consequences*) This episode further damaged PSD's internal cohesion and reinforced the image of a party dominated by one man's agenda. It demoralized local and regional leaders, increased factionalism, and undermined the party's credibility in urban areas. It also signaled the nearing limits of Dragnea's ability to control dissent through coercion alone.

Analytical observations: The conflict with Firea and Stănescu illustrates the breakdown of internal pluralism in PSD under Dragnea. It reveals the growing cost of suppressing dissent, especially when voiced by high-profile, electorally validated leaders. The episode foreshadowed the erosion of Dragnea's internal legitimacy, which would culminate in his political downfall the following year.

Episode-13.
New Intelligentsia

(*Background of the conflict*) Following Liviu Dragnea's incarceration in May 2019 due to a corruption case, Viorica Dăncilă, who was then prime minister and interim president of the PSD, took full control of the party. Initially seen as a transitional figure, Dăncilă surprised many by strengthening her position and announcing her candidacy for the presidential elections that year. Meanwhile, Marcel Ciolacu — president of the Chamber of Deputies, a key party figure and a strong parliamentary presence — began building his own internal faction, positioning himself as a more moderate and pragmatic alternative.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was again a power struggle with strategic and personal dimensions. Dăncilă sought to strengthen her legitimacy and maintain the leadership position post-election, while Ciolacu and his allies questioned her authority, electoral strategy, and ability to lead the party through renewal. The rivalry reflected deeper cleavages between party traditionalists and a new cohort seeking to modernize PSD's image.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Following Dăncilă's poor performance in the presidential election (she failed to reach the 45% threshold in the runoff), internal criticism mounted rapidly. Ciolacu, backed by influential party barons and local branches, orchestrated a shift in party dynamics. In November 2019, under mounting pressure, Dăncilă was forced to resign from the party presidency. Ciolacu was appointed interim president by the National Executive Committee.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict culminated in Dăncilă's removal and Ciolacu's ascent to interim leadership, which was formalised through party procedures. Although there was no formal expulsion, Dăncilă's influence within the party was neutralised and she gradually withdrew from national politics.

(*Consequences*) This episode marked the end of Dragnea's legacy within the PSD. It enabled the party to start rebranding under Ciolacu, adopting a softer tone and a more institutional image. While the leadership change stabilised the party in the short term, it also highlighted ongoing difficulties in terms of both party renewal and elite circulation.

Analytical observations: The Dăncilă–Ciolacu conflict reflects a pragmatic elite realignment rather than an ideological rupture. It illustrates how electoral failure can rapidly undermine leadership legitimacy in centralized party structures. Ciolacu's ascent demonstrates the resilience of PSD's internal networks and their capacity to enforce strategic corrections after major political setbacks.

Liberal Party Conflict Episodes

The story of the liberal party in Romania is a piece of detective fiction. Expectations were high for a party aimed for a new era of liberty and democracy. The reality was often that of a party engulfed in internal ideological conflict and in searching for the mystery of the essence of liberalism in Romania.

Episode-1.
The Split: Old versus Young

(*Background of the conflict*) In the aftermath of the 1989 Revolution, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was re-established in January 1990 by Radu Câmpeanu. The party attracted former political dissidents, liberal intellectuals, and figures nostalgic for the pre-communist liberal tradition. At that time the internal organization of the party was weak and its identity was still in flux. Amid the rapid reconfiguration of Romanian political life, ideological and strategic disagreements emerged early within the party.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was primarily ideological, rooted in differing visions for the party's direction. While Radu Câmpeanu leaned toward a traditionalist, elitist liberalism focused on reestablishing pre-communist legitimacy, younger members such as Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu advocated for a modern, pragmatic liberalism aligned with contemporary European models. The conflict was internal in nature, and no external actor played a decisive role in its initial stages.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Tensions escalated during the summer and fall of 1990, as internal party debates turned public. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu and his supporters criticized the leadership style of Câmpeanu, especially his reluctance to collaborate with

emerging pro-democratic political coalitions and his perceived authoritarian approach. As disagreements intensified, Tăriceanu's faction formally broke away, founding the PNL-Young Wing (PNL-AT – Partidul Național Liberal – Aripa Tânără) in 1990.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended in a split. PNL-AT became a separate liberal entity, with a modernizing agenda and a different leadership structure. There was no reconciliation between the two factions at this stage. The original PNL, under Câmpeanu, continued independently but weakened.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the split fragmented the liberal electorate and weakened the party's institutional consolidation. In the long run, however, PNL-AT positioned itself to play a more dynamic role in future alliances, especially within the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR – Convenția Democrată Română). The episode marked the beginning of a long-standing pattern of liberal fragmentation and reconfiguration.

Analytical observations: this conflict reveals the fragility of party cohesion in the early post-communist years, especially when foundational ideologies are contested. The emergence of generational and strategic cleavages so soon after the party's rebirth suggests a lack of internal democratic mechanisms. Moreover, this episode illustrates a recurring theme in PNL's history: the tension between traditionalist and modernizing currents, often personified in rival elites.

Episode-2.
The Conflict with the Scion of a Historical Liberal Party Family

(*Background of the conflict*) The re-founding of the National Liberal Party in early 1990 was marked by ideological diversity and leadership competition. Alongside Radu Câmpeanu, other members of the historic Brătianu family sought to reclaim positions of influence in the new political landscape. Ion Brătianu, claiming a moral and symbolic legacy of the pre-communist era Brătianu dynasty, came into conflict with the leadership style and authority claimed by Câmpeanu. This clash occurred in a period when party structures were still embryonic and legitimacy was often derived from symbolic capital rather than institutional procedures.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was both ideological and personal. On one hand, there were tensions regarding the party's ideological line and political alliances; on the other, it was a power struggle over who had the right to represent liberalism in post-communist Romania. Ion Brătianu contested Câmpeanu's claim to leadership, arguing for a more inclusive and historically-rooted liberal identity. The conflict had an internal origin, though it resonated with the broader uncertainties of political reconfiguration in 1990.

(*Key events and dynamics*) The dispute intensified in the second half of 1990. Ion Brătianu publicly criticized Radu Câmpeanu's unilateral decisions and attempted to claim a leadership position by invoking his family's historical contribution to Romanian liberalism.

While not as structurally disruptive as the PNL-AT split, this episode created confusion among liberal supporters and party ranks and undermined its organizational still feeble coherence. The confrontation culminated with Brătianu forming a small splinter group that failed to gain significant traction.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict did not result in a significant formal reorganization of the party but highlighted the fragility of internal cohesion. Ion Brătianu's dissent was not institutionalized in a separate party structure with political weight, and he remained on the margins of national political life thereafter. Radu Câmpeanu retained his leadership position.

(*Consequences*) The Câmpeanu-Brătianu conflict contributed to the early fragmentation of PNL's image and weakened its ability to present a unified message. Although the schism was not organizationally significant, it amplified perceptions of elitism, internal discord, and personal rivalries. This moment further delayed the party's stabilization and exposed vulnerabilities that would be exploited in future electoral competitions.

Analytical observations: this episode underscores the role of symbolic legitimacy in post-1989 Romanian politics. It reveals how unresolved tensions between historical legacy and contemporary political legitimacy can destabilize party unity. Additionally, it shows that intra-elite rivalries, even when not institutionalized, can erode public confidence and internal cohesion, particularly in formative phases of party development.

Episode-3.
Old Leaders with Different Strategic Visions

(*Background of the conflict*) By 1992, internal divisions within the National Liberal Party (PNL) had deepened, particularly between Radu Câmpeanu and Niculae Cerveni, another pre-communist era liberal leader. While Câmpeanu maintained a rather rigid leadership style, Cerveni emerged as a vocal proponent of liberal integration into the broader democratic opposition to hegemony of the Democratic National Salvation Front. The backdrop of the conflict was the approaching 1992 general elections and the question of whether PNL should join the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR – Convenția Democrată Română), a coalition of anti-communist and center-right forces.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was both strategic and ideological. Cerveni strongly supported aligning PNL with the CDR to counterbalance the dominance of the ex-communist FSN. Câmpeanu, however, opposed such a move, preferring to preserve PNL's independence. This strategic disagreement reflected deeper ideological differences regarding the nature of liberalism and its role in post-communist Romanian politics. The dispute was internal but closely connected to broader external political dynamics.

(*Key events and dynamics*) The confrontation reached a climax in 1992 when Cerveni and his allies called for greater openness and democracy within the leadership of the National

Liberal Party (PNL) and pushed for integration into the Civic Forum of Romania (CDR). Câmpeanu resisted, which eventually led to Cerveni's faction being excluded from key party structures. In response, Cerveni and his supporters formed the National Liberal Party – Democratic Convention (PNL-CD – Partidul Naţional Liberal – Convenţia Democrată), which subsequently joined the CDR. This organisational split signalled a definitive rupture in the liberal camp.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict culminated in the formation of a new liberal party, the National Liberal Party (PNL), led by Nicolae Cerveni. There was no attempt at reconciliation. This institutional split further fragmented Romanian liberalism, resulting in competing liberal groups vying for legitimacy and voter support.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the split reduced the electoral strength and visibility of the Câmpeanu-led PNL. It also strengthened the CDR by incorporating Cerveni's group. In the long term, the conflict entrenched the pattern of liberal fragmentation and weakened the possibility of unified representation throughout the 1990s. The competition between PNL and PNL-CD, later named Liberal Party '93 (PL '93 – Partidul Liberal '93) continued throughout the 1990s until their eventual reunification efforts paid off.

Analytical observations: this episode reflects the difficulty of balancing ideological coherence and strategic elasticity in post-communist party building. The absence of internal democratic mechanisms made it difficult to manage dissent, while the refusal to compromise on alliances marginalized the PNL from key political developments in the decade of 1990s. This conflict demonstrates how unresolved strategic disagreements can lead to structural fragmentation in Romanian liberal politics.

Episode-4.
Once Again, All the Same: Old Leaders with Different Strategic Visions

(*Background of the conflict*) After the fragmentation caused by the 1992 departure of Cerveni's faction, the PNL entered a phase of introspection and reorganization. By 1993, the internal consensus around Radu Câmpeanu's leadership was crumbling. Discontent had grown due to the party's marginal position in Romanian politics and its continued self-exclusion from the Romanian Democratic Convention (CDR). Mircea Ionescu-Quintus, a senior liberal figure known for his conciliatory style, emerged as an alternative leader advocating for reintegration into the CDR and a more pragmatic strategy.

(*Nature of the conflict*) This episode was both strategic and personal. The strategic dimension revolved around whether PNL should rejoin the CDR and reposition itself at the heart of the anti-communist opposition. The personal aspect reflected mounting frustration with Câmpeanu's autocratic leadership and his refusal to embrace internal reform. While Câmpeanu represented continuity with an increasingly isolated vision, Quintus embodied a shift towards institutional consolidation and coalition politics.

(*Key events and dynamics*) In 1993, internal criticism culminated in a decisive confrontation at the PNL Congress. Mircea Ionescu-Quintus challenged Câmpeanu's leadership and ultimately succeeded in being elected party president. This marked a fundamental realignment of the party's strategic orientation. Under Quintus, the PNL rejoined the CDR and began re-establishing its relevance within Romania's politics. Câmpeanu, unable to accept the leadership change, left the party in 1995, and founded the National Liberal Party 'Câmpeanu' (PNL-C – Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu'), further fragmenting the liberal camp.

(*Resolutions*) The resolution was formal and institutional. Quintus's victory at the party congress represented a rare moment of procedural legitimacy and peaceful leadership transition within Romanian post-communist parties. However, the resolution also resulted in further fragmentation following Câmpeanu's departure.

(*Consequences*) The conflict had a paradoxical effect: it temporarily weakened the liberal movement through another split, but it also revitalized the PNL institutional organizations and by allowing reintegration into the CDR consolidated the party's relevance in national politics. This strategic repositioning paved the way for electoral success later in the decade. Câmpeanu's faction remained marginal and eventually reintegrated. The conflict also helped establish new norms of internal competition and democratic procedure within the PNL.

Analytical observations: This episode is significant for demonstrating the transition from personalized to institutionalized leadership within Romanian liberalism. It highlights the internal struggle between isolationism and coalition-building, and shows that procedural legitimacy can serve as a stabilizing force even in turbulent party systems. The conflict also illustrates the recurring cost of leadership disputes: even when resolved democratically, they can result in short-term fragmentation that must later be repaired through reintegration.

Episode-5.
Different Vision of the Party's Identity and Leadership Style

(*Background of the conflict*) Following the disappointing electoral results of the 2000 general elections, the National Liberal Party (PNL) entered another phase of internal crisis. With Theodor Stolojan taking over the party's presidency, supported by Valeriu Stoica, a new faction advocating modernization and stronger leadership emerged. At the same time, a faction led by two liberal leaders, Horia Rusu and Nicolae Lăzărescu, expressed dissatisfaction with the direction the party was taking, particularly in terms of ideology, leadership centralization, and organizational strategy.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was both ideological and strategic, centered on the vision of the party's identity and leadership style. While Stolojan and Stoica aimed to streamline the party's internal structure and consolidate leadership authority, Rusu and Lăzărescu criticized what they saw as the erosion of liberal principles and internal

democracy. Their faction emphasised a return to authentic liberalism, encouraging greater debate and transparent decision-making processes.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2000 and early 2001, tensions rose as the party leadership, under Stolojan and Stoica, sought to impose a more disciplined and centralized structure. The dissenting group led by Rusu and Lăzărescu became increasingly vocal, culminating in open criticism at party congresses and within public statements. Ultimately, this led to the exclusion of key dissenters, and by mid-2001, the marginalisation of the Rusu–Lăzărescu faction.

(*Resolutions*) Rather than reconciliation, the conflict was resolved through exclusion and marginalisation. The leadership under Stolojan and Stoica prevailed, and dissenters either left the party or remained politically irrelevant. There was no formal mediation process, and internal opposition was suppressed through organizational measures.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the conflict solidified the control over the party of the new leadership coalesced around Theodor Stolojan and paved the way for a rebranding of PNL as a more disciplined and electorally focused political force. However, the suppression of internal debate weakened the party's liberal-democratic credentials and alienated segments of its traditional base. In the long run, this contributed to the growing perception of PNL as a pragmatic rather than ideologically consistent actor.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates the growing tension between internal party democracy and the perceived need for organizational efficiency in post-transition Romanian politics. It also highlights the internal costs of political centralization: although it may bring short-term gains in coherence and public messaging, it can erode the ideological diversity and participatory ethos foundational to liberal parties. The Stolojan–Stoica leadership marked a turning point towards a managerial style of politics in the PNL.

Episode-6.
Liberal Networks in Conflict

(*Background of the conflict*) In the run-up to the 2004 general elections, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was part of the Justice and Truth Alliance (DA – Alianța Dreptate și Adevăr), formed together with the Democratic Party (PD – Partidul Democrat). The alliance presented Theodor Stolojan as its candidate for prime minister who had the pretense of representing continuity and the goal of European integration combined with an aura of professionalism. However, in a surprising move shortly before the election, Stolojan withdrew from the race, citing personal reasons. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu was quickly nominated to replace him. This sudden leadership transition triggered a latent conflict within the party that would shape internal dynamics in the years to come.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was strategic and personal. While the official narrative emphasized health-related motives for Stolojan's withdrawal, many within the party and in

the public suspected a power struggle behind the scenes. Tăriceanu's rapid rise to leadership was perceived by some as opportunistic, while others saw it as necessary for the party's electoral survival. This episode raised questions about transparency, succession planning and the influence of personal networks on party leadership decisions.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Following Stolojan's withdrawal, Tăriceanu became Prime Minister after the DA Alliance's electoral success. However, tensions between the two resurfaced, particularly regarding economic policy and relations with President Traian Băsescu. Stolojan, although no longer formally leading the party, remained influential and critical of Tăriceanu's governance. The rivalry became visible in internal party debates, strategic decisions, and the media.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict did not result in a definitive rupture as of that time. Stolojan's departure later and the formation of a competing liberal faction marked the end of any reconciliation attempts by 2006. The split institutionalized the rivalry and created a lasting cleavage in the Romanian center-right political landscape for the next decade.

(*Consequences*) No immediate consequence was not visible at the time but in the future it weakened the political formation through the loss of a high-profile figure and a large portion of its electorate. The long-term impact was the reconfiguration of the liberal space with the polarization of the center-right and commenced a period of greater volatility into party alliances and voter loyalty.

Anal*ytical observations*: This episode highlights how informal leadership transitions and opaque decision-making can destabilize party unity. It also underscores the personalistic nature of Romanian political leadership, where individual rivalries often override institutional structures and goals.

Episode-7.
Liberal Values in Balance Under a President's Long Shadow

(*Background of the conflict*) Following the 2004 elections, Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu became prime minister, representing the National Liberal Party (PNL) within the governing Justice and Truth Alliance (DA) alongside the Democratic Party (PD). Initially, Theodor Stolojan supported this arrangement, but tensions soon emerged between Tăriceanu and President Traian Băsescu, the former leader of the PD, whose influence extended to Stolojan. By 2006, the alliance between the two parties was crumbling, and divisions within the National Liberal Party (PNL) began to deepen, particularly regarding the party's direction and its relationship with Băsescu.

(*Nature of the conflict*) This conflict was primarily ideological, with a significant external dimension, as it was fueled by pressures from President Băsescu and the PD faction. Stolojan accused Tăriceanu of abandoning reformist and center-right principles by distancing PNL from its DA partner and resisting presidential influence. Tăriceanu, on the other hand,

positioned himself as defending party autonomy and institutional balance, opposing what he saw as presidential overreach.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2006, tensions escalated as Tăriceanu refused to dissolve Parliament and call early elections, a move strongly supported by Băsescu and Stolojan. In response to growing dissatisfaction, Stolojan and several PNL members defected and, by the end of 2006, formed the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD – Partidul Liberal Democrat). This split was publicly justified as a return to authentic liberalism, but it was widely perceived as having been orchestrated with the President's support.

(*Resolutions*) The resolution came in the form of a formal party split. The PLD was established as a separate entity and later merged with the Democratic Party in 2007 to form the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal). There was no reconciliation between the factions at the time, and the schism remained a defining feature of Romanian center-right politics for several years.

(*Consequences*) The immediate impact was the weakening of PNL, which lost several high-profile members. Strategically, the emergence of PLD (and subsequently PDL) restructured the center-right field, establishing a new dominant force aligned with President Băsescu. The conflict also eroded public trust in liberal unity and contributed to political instability within the governing coalition.

Analytical observations: This episode reflects the profound influence of external actors, particularly the presidency, on intra-party dynamics in Romania. It also reveals the fragility of alliances built on expediency rather than ideological coherence. The conflict between Tăriceanu and Stolojan illustrates how ideological disputes, when compounded by external pressures and personal rivalries, can lead to long-term institutional fragmentation and party system realignment.

Episode-8.
Another President, Another Shadow

(*Background of the conflict*) In 2014, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was undergoing a transformation following its withdrawal from the Social Liberal Union (USL – Uniunea Social Liberală) coalition, which had governed alongside the Social Democratic Party (PSD). In the wake of this shift, Klaus Iohannis, the then-mayor of Sibiu and a recent political figure on the national stage, was endorsed by the PNL leadership as the party's candidate for the presidential election. Călin Popescu-Tăriceanu, a former PNL prime minister and a proponent of continued cooperation with the PSD, opposed this decision. The resulting clash highlighted both ideological and strategic divisions within the liberal camp.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was both ideological and strategic, with a strong external dimension. Tăriceanu supported the continuation of the USL project and closer ties with PSD, advocating for a centrist-to-left orientation. Iohannis, backed by the newly

merged PNL–PDL alliance, stood for a center-right realignment and open opposition to PSD. The two visions were fundamentally incompatible, and the conflict escalated rapidly.

(*Key events and dynamics*) As the 2014 presidential campaign approached, Tăriceanu vocally criticized the direction PNL was taking under Iohannis and the merger with PDL. In March 2014, he resigned from the PNL and announced the formation of a new party, the Liberal Reformist Party (PLR – Partidul Liberal Reformator). He then ran for president himself, further deepening the split. Although he received a low percentage of votes, his candidacy weakened the liberal camp's coherence and diverted attention during a critical electoral period.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict was resolved through a formal split. Tăriceanu did not return to PNL and later merged PLR with other political entities to form the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (ALDE – Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților). There was no reconciliation, and the split resulted in a lasting division within Romania's liberal spectrum.

(*Consequences*) This conflict led to the permanent departure of Tăriceanu from the PNL and the creation of a new party competing for a similar electorate. It also altered the structure of the Romanian liberal space, with ALDE occupying a centrist-liberal niche, while PNL moved firmly to the center-right. The rivalry contributed to some polarization and reduced the ideological cohesion of the liberal tradition.

Analytical observations: This episode illustrates how leadership disputes, compounded by diverging strategic visions, can lead to lasting fragmentation. The emergence of ALDE reflects a broader trend in Romanian politics where political realignment often results in organizational splits rather than internal compromise. It also highlights the challenges of integrating new leadership figures like President Iohannis into legacy party structures, especially when older elites remain influential and committed to ideologically different paths.

Episode-9.
The Search for Economic Liberalism

(*Background of the conflict*) By 2019, a new leader, Ludovic Orban, had solidified his position within the National Liberal Party (PNL), positioning the party as the principal center-right force in Romania and in opposition to the ruling Social Democratic Party (PSD). As the party prepared for upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections, internal tensions began to resurface, especially concerning ideological coherence and leadership style. Viorel Cataramă, a long-standing liberal and economic hardliner, criticized the direction Orban was taking the party, accusing him of abandoning classical liberal principles.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was ideological, rooted in fundamental disagreements over the party's economic vision and its commitment to liberal doctrine. Cataramă advocated for a return to free-market fundamentalism and criticized Orban for what

he perceived as populist compromises and an overreliance on state intervention. While personal elements were also present, the dispute primarily revolved around doctrinal purity versus electoral pragmatism.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2018 and into early 2019, Cataramă became an increasingly vocal presence in the media and at party forums, demanding a platform for internal ideological debate. However, his proposals were met with resistance and ultimately rejected by the Orban-led leadership. In May 2019, after being excluded from the party's internal decision-making processes, Cataramă left the PNL and founded the Liberal Right (DL – Dreapta Liberală), a political formation claiming to represent unfiltered liberal values.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict was resolved by a formal split, with no attempt at mediation or internal compromise. Cataramă's exit was portrayed by party leadership as marginal and non-representative, while the Liberal Right remained a minor player in Romanian politics with limited electoral appeal.

(*Consequences*) In the short term, the split had little electoral or structural impact on the PNL. However, it reinforced the perception that the party had drifted away from doctrinal liberalism in favor of electoral success and coalition politics. Cataramă's departure highlighted the narrowing space for ideological dissent within PNL and the increasing dominance of centralized leadership.

Analytical observations: This episode underscores the tension between ideological identity and strategic flexibility in a maturing party system. While the conflict did not shake the PNL's electoral prospects, it revealed a deep undercurrent of dissatisfaction among classical liberals. It also signals the decline of internal pluralism in favor of top-down control, a pattern seen in other Romanian parties undergoing institutional consolidation.

Episode-10.
Could There Be a Technocracy Guided by Liberal Values?

(*Background of the conflict*) In 2021, the National Liberal Party (PNL) was the most relevant party in the governing coalition following the 2020 elections, with Florin Cîțu serving as Prime Minister and Ludovic Orban as the party's president. Despite initial cooperation, tensions quickly emerged between the two leaders, fueled by differing governance styles, internal party ambitions, and external pressures, particularly from President Klaus Iohannis. The conflict escalated in the context of the party's internal leadership race.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was both ideological and personal, with a strong external dimension linked to President Iohannis's involvement. While both Orban and Cîțu identified with center-right liberalism, their leadership approaches diverged significantly. Orban emphasized party unity and continuity in liberal more market based approaches to economy, while Cîțu, with the backing of Iohannis, positioned himself as a reformer with

a strong technocratic vision. Behind the scenes, institutional power struggles and control over key government appointments intensified the conflict.

(*Key events and dynamics*) The leadership race formally began in mid-2021, and quickly turned into a public and polarizing battle. Cîțu received open support from President Iohannis and a significant segment of the party establishment, while Orban mobilized traditional party structures and grassroots members. The September 2021 PNL Congress culminated in Orban's defeat and Cîțu's election as party president. Shortly after, Orban publicly criticized the influence of the president and accused PNL of abandoning liberal values.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict concluded with Orban's removal from party leadership and, shortly thereafter, his resignation from PNL. In December 2021, he announced the formation of a new political party, The Right's Force (FD – Forța Dreptei). There was no reconciliation, and the split reflected a deep internal rift.

(*Consequences*) This conflict significantly damaged PNL's public image and strongly affected its internal cohesion. It highlighted the growing influence of external actors, especially the presidency on party decisions. The formation of FD further fragmented the liberal center-right electorate. The conflict also weakened PNL's ability to govern cohesively during the critical Covid-19 pandemic period.

Analytical observations: This episode reflects the increasing personalization of leadership contests in Romanian politics and the role of presidential influence in intra-party dynamics. It also demonstrates the fragility of elite consensus in governing coalitions and the erosion of intra-party mechanisms for conflict resolution. The emergence of The Right's Force marks yet another chapter in the recurring cycle of splintering and reconfiguration within Romanian liberalism.

Episode-11.

Could the Whole Liberal Party Be Transformed into a Technocratic Disciplined Bureaucracy?

(*Background of the conflict*) By 2022, Nicolae Ciucă had become the dominant figure in the National Liberal Party (PNL), following the resignation of Florin Cîțu and the party's entry into a grand coalition government with the Social Democratic Party (PSD). Ciucă's appointment as party president, despite his background as a non-political military leader, marked a shift toward a more centralized and technocratic leadership style. Within this context, Robert Sighiartău – an established figure in the party's more ideologically active and traditionally liberal faction – began voicing criticism about the direction PNL was taking.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was of a mixed and organizational nature, involving disagreements over party governance, communication strategies, and political identity.

Sighiartău criticized the increasing bureaucratization and top-down control within the party, as well as the diminishing influence of internal democratic debate. He also opposed certain compromises made with the PSD that he considered to be inconsistent with the liberal tradition.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2022, Sighiartău expressed his dissent both in internal forums and public appearances. He criticized the leadership's lack of engagement with party members and decision-making transparency. The conflict reached its peak during key debates on party reforms and internal restructuring, in which Ciucă's leadership marginalized dissenting voices. Although Sighiartău was not formally expelled, he was gradually sidelined from the decision-making core of the party.

(*Resolutions*) There was no formal resolution to the conflict, but its outcome was effectively decided through institutional marginalization. Ciucă's leadership remained uncontested due to broad support from both the presidential faction and party elites. Sighiartău's influence within the party waned, and he became increasingly absent from central political processes.

(*Consequences*) This episode further consolidated Ciucă's disciplined bureaucratic control over PNL but at the cost of reduced ideological pluralism and internal dialogue. It reinforced a managerial style of leadership focused on administrative control rather than political debate. The sidelining of Sighiartău signaled to other dissenters the limits of acceptable opposition within the party and deepened internal passivity.

Analytical observations: The conflict between Ciucă and Sighiartău illustrates the transformation of PNL into a more hierarchical and executive-led party. While effective in ensuring organizational discipline, this model risks eroding democratic mechanisms and alienating ideological voices.

Episode-12.
Are Issues of Family and Religious Faith Liberal?

(*Background of the conflict*) In 2023, the National Liberal Party (PNL) continued to be led by Nicolae Ciucă, whose leadership style had further centralized control within the party. Meanwhile, internal tensions were rising due to the party's close collaboration with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and a perceived ideological drift away from traditional liberalism. Ben-Oni Ardelean, a long-time PNL MP known for his conservative and Christian-democratic leanings, emerged as a prominent critic of the party's direction.

(*Nature of the conflict*) The conflict was primarily ideological, with a secondary strategic dimension. Ardelean opposed what he considered the abandonment of the party's identity and principles, especially concerning issues of family, faith, and conservative values. He also criticized the lack of internal transparency and debate, as well as the leadership's focus on administrative alliances over ideological coherence. The conflict was internal but reflected broader concerns about the erosion of ideological diversity within Romanian parties.

(*Key events and dynamics*) Throughout 2023, Ardelean voiced dissent in public speeches, interviews, and party forums. His critiques targeted both the leadership's ideological compromises and its increasing reliance on presidential and technocratic influence. In response, the party leadership distanced itself from Ardelean's positions, eventually leading to his departure. By the end of 2023, he founded a new political initiative called Movement of Hope (MS – Mişcarea Speranţei), focused on Christian-democratic and family-centered policies.

(*Resolutions*) The conflict ended with a definitive split. Ardelean left PNL and launched his own political project, marking a clean break from the party's dominant trajectory. There was no attempt at reconciliation or internal mediation, and the party treated his exit as marginal.

(*Consequences*) While the immediate electoral impact was minor, the departure of Ardelean signaled a growing dissatisfaction among more conservative segments of the liberal electorate. The foundation of the Movement of Hope (MS) created an alternative space for voters disillusioned with the technocratic direction of PNL. It also further emphasized the trend of fragmentation and ideological polarization within Romania's center-right.

Analytical observations: This episode exemplifies the ideological thinning of mainstream parties under the pressure of pragmatism and institutional consolidation. Ardelean's departure reflects the narrowing tolerance for internal ideological diversity and the marginalization of religiously conservative voices. The emergence of MS adds to the ongoing pattern in Romanian liberalism: unresolved internal dissent frequently results not in negotiation or reform, but in organizational splintering and party proliferation.

Comparing the Strings

Comparing the internal power dynamics of the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and the National Liberal Party (PNL) in Romania reveals significant contrasts in their approaches to conflict management, leadership struggles, and organizational resilience. Both parties have experienced intense internal disputes that have shaped their political trajectories, but the nature, resolution, and long-term impact of these conflicts differ considerably, reflecting their distinct organizational cultures and historical contexts.

First, the typology of conflicts within PSD and PNL highlights notable differences in the underlying causes and intensities of internal strife. PNL's conflicts more often center on ideological and strategic disagreements, reflecting the party's liberal and individualistic ethos. In contrast, PSD's internal struggles frequently slide into power contests with a strong personal dimension, shaped by the party's hierarchical structure and centralized leadership.

The mechanisms for resolving internal conflicts also differ significantly between the two parties. PNL has historically managed its disputes through factional splits and the creation

of splinter parties, reflecting a more fluid and decentralized approach to party organization. For example, the 1992 departure of Niculae Cerveni and the formation of PL '93, as well as the 2006 creation of the Liberal Democratic Party (PLD – Partidul Liberal Democrat) by Theodor Stolojan, illustrate a pattern of breaking away rather than negotiating internal settlements. In contrast, PSD has typically responded to internal dissent with expulsions, marginalizations, or coercive loyalty enforcement, as seen, for example, in the 2011 expulsion of Mircea Geoană and the 2018 suppression of the Firea-Stănescu faction. This reflects a preference for maintaining centralized control over the party's direction, even at the cost of long-term factional stability.

The impact of these conflicts on party structure and leadership has also varied. PNL's frequent ideological splits have often resulted in significant organizational fragmentation, but also periodic cycles of consolidation and renewal. For instance, the formation of PLD in 2006 and its subsequent merger with the Democratic Party (PD) to form the Democratic Liberal Party (PDL – Partidul Democrat Liberal) marked a major reconfiguration of the center-right landscape in Romania. PSD, by contrast, has tended to maintain its organizational coherence despite repeated leadership crises, such as the 2017 dismissal of Sorin Grindeanu and the 2018 expulsion of Mihai Tudose. This reflects the party's greater institutional resilience but also a higher tolerance for centralized, personality-driven leadership.

Generational dynamics play a crucial role in shaping the conflict landscape within both parties. PNL has often experienced leadership turnover driven by ideological renewal, as seen in the 2004 conflict between Theodor Stolojan and Călin Popescu Tăriceanu, which marked a generational shift towards a more modern, pro-European liberalism. PSD's generational transitions, by contrast, have often been marked by sharp internal divides, such as the 2005 contest between Geoană and Iliescu and the 2019 leadership change from Dăncilă to Ciolacu. These transitions have typically involved more intense power struggles, reflecting the party's hierarchical structure and strong leader-centric culture.

External pressures have also shaped the nature and outcomes of these internal conflicts. PNL's history of alliances and mergers reflects a higher degree of responsiveness to shifting political landscapes, such as the integration into the European People's Party (EPP) and the subsequent ideological realignments. PSD, meanwhile, has often resisted such external influences, maintaining a more insulated organizational identity despite periodic challenges, such as the 2007 departure of Teodor Meleșcanu and the 2022 exit of Viorica Dăncilă.

The internal dynamics of PNL and PSD reveal two distinct models of political conflict. PNL's liberal ethos has fostered a more fragmented but adaptive organizational culture, while PSD's centralized leadership structure has created a more stable but often rigid power hierarchy. Understanding these patterns is essential for interpreting the broader trajectory of Romanian party politics and the ongoing challenges of democratic consolidation.

Conclusions

This study examined the internal power struggles within Romania's two dominant political parties, the National Liberal Party (PNL) and the Social Democratic Party (PSD), from 1990 to 2025. A structured analytical framework was used to map the origins, nature, dynamics, resolutions and consequences of intra-party conflicts. The findings provide valuable insights into the internal fragility and external adaptability of political parties in a post-communist, semi-presidential democracy.

This study also underscores the importance of leadership personalisation in Romanian political life. In both parties, conflicts have been less about programmatic debates and more about controlling resources, particularly at a local level, controlling candidacies at a central level and, at times, personal prestige and symbolic leadership. This pattern reveals a persistent reliance on informal networks and charismatic authority rather than democratic internal deliberation. While generational shifts have often triggered elite-level competition, these transitions have rarely been consensual or strategic; more commonly, they have been marked by abrupt ruptures or expulsions.

From a systemic perspective, the analysed cases demonstrate that Romania's party system was vulnerable to the volatility of its leadership. While external pressures, such as presidential interference, European integration or mass protest movements, have occasionally acted as catalysts for internal change, they have rarely presented opportunities for meaningful reform. Intra-party conflicts, however, have tended to produce fragmentation, reduced legitimacy and weaker programme clarity. This corroborates the view of the broader literature that, if left unresolved, internal party conflict tends to degrade organisational coherence and electoral performance in emerging democracies.

Nevertheless, the endurance of both PSD and PNL over a 35-years period is notable. Despite fragmentation, expulsion of leaders, and intense factional battles, both parties have survived and even thrived electorally. This resilience is paradoxical and speaks to the adaptability of elite structures even when the ideological or institutional foundations are weak. In this sense, Romanian political parties illustrate a form of 'unstable stability' or a form of organizational continuity built not on consensus or democratic routines, but on elite control and short-term adaptability to pressures to democratize.

Limited intra-party elite-level conflicts are not anomalies in the Romanian context but core features of political life. Understanding them offers a lens through which to interpret electoral strategies, institutional design, and party identity in a still-consolidating democracy. Future research could benefit from extending this framework to other Romanian parties, as well as from testing the findings in comparative perspectives across Central and Eastern Europe.

Abbreviations list

ALDE – Alliance of Liberals and Democrats (Alianța Liberalilor și Democraților)
ApR – Alliance for Romania (Alianța pentru România)
CDR – Romanian Democratic Convention (Convenția Democrată Română)
DA – Justice and Truth Alliance (Alianța Dreptate și Adevăr)
DL – Liberal Right (Dreapta Liberală)
FD – The Right's Force (Forța Dreptei)
FDSN – Democratic National Salvation Front (Frontul Democrat al Salvării Naționale)
FSN – National Salvation Front (Frontul Salvării Naționale)
MS – Movement of Hope (Mișcarea Speranței)
PD – Democratic Party (Partidul Democrat)
PDAR – Democratic Agrarian Party of Romania (Partidul Democrat Agrar din România)
PDL – Democratic Liberal Party (Partidul Democrat Liberal)
PDSR – Party of Social Democracy in Romania (Partidul Democrației Sociale în România)
PL '93 – Liberal Party '93 (Partidul Liberal '93)
PLD – Liberal Democratic Party (Partidul Liberal Democrat)
PLR – Liberal Reformist Party (Partidul Liberal Reformator)
PNL – National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal)
PNL-AT – National Liberal Party – Young Wing (Partidul Național Liberal – Aripa Tânără)
PNL-C – National Liberal Party 'Câmpeanu' (Partidul Național Liberal 'Câmpeanu')
PNL-CD – National Liberal Party – Democratic Convention (Partidul Național Liberal – Convenția Democrată)
PNȚCD – National Peasant's Christian Democrat Party (Partidul Național Țărănesc Creștin Democrat)
PSD – Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat)
PSD-CTP – Social Democratic Party 'Constantin Titel Petrescu' (Partidul Social Democrat 'Constantin Titel Petrescu')
PSDR – Romanian Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat Român)
PSRO – Romanian Social Party (Partidul Social Românesc)
UDMR – Hungarian Democratic Union of Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România)
UL-B – 'Brătianu' Liberal Union (Uniunea Liberală 'Brătianu')
UNPR – National Union for the Progress of Romania (Uniunea Națională pentru Progresul României)
USL – Social Liberal Union (Uniunea Social Liberală)

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