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Balochistan: Historical Struggles and Contemporary Implications for Iran-Pakistan Relations

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Abstract:

Balochistan, a region with a rich cultural and historical heritage, spans across Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. Despite its significant landmass, Balochistan remains economically underdeveloped and politically marginalized. This article explores the historical context and current dynamics of Balochistan, focusing on the January 2024 cross-border strikes between Iran and Pakistan targeting Baloch militant groups. These events underscore the longstanding tensions and mutual accusations of harboring separatist terrorists. By examining the socio-political grievances of the Baloch people and the geopolitical strategies of Iran and Pakistan, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how Balochistan influences bilateral relations and regional stability.

Keywords: Balochistan, Iran-Pakistan relations, militant insurgency, cross-border strikes, socio-political grievances, regional stability, economic underdevelopment, ethnic minority

Introduction

Balochistan, a region with a unique cultural and historical identity, is divided among three countries: Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan. This division has created a complex geopolitical landscape characterized by economic underdevelopment, political marginalization, and recurrent insurgencies. Balochistan's largest portion lies in southwestern Pakistan, where it constitutes 44% of the country's total landmass. Despite its vast size, it remains Pakistan's least inhabited and economically developed region, plagued by issues of neglect and underrepresentation.

The Baloch people have a long history of resistance against central authorities, with insurgencies dating back to 1948, shortly after Pakistan's independence. These movements have been driven by grievances over economic deprivation, lack of political representation, and cultural marginalization. The Pakistani state's response has been a prolonged and often brutal counterinsurgency campaign.

The geopolitical significance of Balochistan extends beyond Pakistan's borders, impacting relations with neighboring Iran. Both countries have accused each other of harboring militant groups that operate across the porous border, leading to heightened tensions and cross-border military actions. In January 2024, this simmering conflict escalated dramatically, with Iran and Pakistan launching strikes across each other's borders, targeting Baloch militant bases.

This article aims to explore the historical context and sociopolitical dynamics of Balochistan, the nature of militant insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations within the region, and the broader implications for Iran-Pakistan relations and regional stability. By examining these interconnected issues, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of Balochistan's role in shaping the geopolitical landscape of South Asia.

Historical Context and Sociopolitical Dynamics of Balochistan

Balochistan, a region of immense historical and cultural significance, has been a focal point of geopolitical interest and conflict for centuries. The region's name is derived from the Baloch tribe, who began settling in the area several centuries ago. The Baloch people have maintained a distinct cultural identity, characterized by their language, traditions, and social structures, which have persisted despite the various empires and colonial powers that have ruled over the region.

Historically, Balochistan was part of several prominent ancient civilizations, including the Indus Valley Civilization. The region's strategic location made it a vital corridor for trade routes connecting the Middle East, Central Asia, and South Asia. Over the centuries, Balochistan came under the control of various empires, including the Achaemenid Empire, the Seleucid Empire, the Mauryan Empire, and later the Sassanian Empire. Each of these empires left an indelible mark on the region's cultural and social fabric.

In the medieval period, Balochistan saw the rise of local chieftains and tribal confederacies that often asserted their autonomy from larger empires. The region was also influenced by the spread of Islam, which brought new religious and cultural dynamics. Despite these influences, the Baloch people retained their distinct identity and continued to practice their traditional way of life.

The modern political landscape of Balochistan began to take shape during the colonial era. In the 19th century, the British Empire, expanding its control over the Indian subcontinent, incorporated Balochistan into its territory. The British established the province of British Balochistan, which included areas under direct British administration and princely states that retained some degree of autonomy.

The colonial administration implemented policies that had long-lasting impacts on the region. The construction of infrastructure, such as the railway network, aimed to integrate Balochistan

into the broader colonial economy. However, these developments were primarily driven by strategic and military considerations, rather than the socio-economic development of the local population. The Baloch people were often marginalized, and their traditional power structures were disrupted by the colonial administration.

The partition of British India in 1947 and the subsequent creation of Pakistan marked a significant turning point for Balochistan. The region became part of Pakistan in 1948, following negotiations and military interventions. This incorporation was met with resistance from some Baloch leaders and tribes, who feared the loss of their autonomy and marginalization within the new state.

Since joining Pakistan, Balochistan has been the site of several insurgencies driven by demands for greater autonomy, economic development, and political representation. The first major insurgency erupted in 1948, shortly after Balochistan's incorporation into Pakistan. Subsequent uprisings occurred in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, each fueled by grievances over centralization policies and perceived exploitation of the region's resources.

The most significant and prolonged insurgency began in the early 2000s. This phase of conflict has been marked by increased violence and a heavy-handed response from the Pakistani state. The military and intelligence agencies have conducted extensive counterinsurgency operations, leading to human rights abuses. These actions have further alienated the Baloch population and intensified their demands for independence or greater autonomy.

Balochistan's economic landscape is characterized by stark contrasts. Despite being rich in natural resources, including minerals, natural gas, and oil, the region remains one of the poorest and least developed in Pakistan. The exploitation of these resources has often benefited the central government and multinational corporations more than the local population. The lack of investment in infrastructure, education, and healthcare has perpetuated a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment.

Socially, Balochistan is a mosaic of ethnic and tribal groups, each with its own identity and grievances. The Baloch people, who are predominantly Sunni Muslims, coexist with other ethnic groups, including the Pashtuns, Hazaras, and Brahuis. This ethnic diversity has sometimes led to tensions and conflicts, further complicating the region's sociopolitical dynamics.

Balochistan's geopolitical significance extends beyond its borders. The region's location, bordering Iran and Afghanistan, makes it a strategic area for regional and global powers. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), a flagship project of China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), runs through Balochistan, highlighting its importance for international trade and economic integration. However, CPEC has also been a source of contention, with Baloch insurgents targeting infrastructure projects and Chinese nationals, viewing the initiative as another form of exploitation and marginalization.

The porous borders and rugged terrain of Balochistan have made it a haven for various militant groups, including Baloch separatists, Islamist extremists, and criminal syndicates. This has further complicated the security situation and contributed to the region's instability. The presence of these groups has also been a point of contention between Pakistan and Iran, with each accusing the other of harboring militants and failing to secure the border.

The historical context and sociopolitical dynamics of Balochistan provide a critical backdrop for understanding the region's contemporary challenges and its impact on Iran-Pakistan relations. The legacy of colonialism, the struggle for autonomy, economic exploitation, and geopolitical interests have all shaped Balochistan's trajectory. As the region continues to grapple with these issues, its role in regional stability and international relations remains a subject of significant importance. The subsequent chapters will delve deeper into the militant insurgencies and counterinsurgency operations in Balochistan and examine how these dynamics influence the relationship between Iran and Pakistan.

Militant Insurgencies and Counterinsurgency Operations in Balochistan

Historical Background of Insurgencies

Balochistan has a long and tumultuous history of insurgencies, driven by a complex interplay of socio-economic, political, and ethnic factors. The roots of Baloch insurgency can be traced back to the region's annexation by Pakistan in 1948. The Baloch people, who had enjoyed relative autonomy under British rule, were apprehensive about their future in the newly formed state. This initial resistance set the stage for subsequent uprisings.

The first insurgency erupted in 1948, led by Prince Abdul Karim of the Kalat state, who opposed the forced accession to Pakistan. Although this rebellion was swiftly crushed, it planted the seeds of dissent that would re-emerge in later years. The 1950s and 1960s saw sporadic but significant resistance, as the Baloch people continued to push back against policies of centralization and resource exploitation.

The 1970s marked a particularly intense period of conflict. The insurgency during this decade was characterized by a well-organized armed resistance led by the Baloch People's Liberation Front (BPLF). The Pakistani government responded with a massive military crackdown, deploying tens of thousands of troops to the region. The conflict resulted in thousands of casualties and widespread devastation, but it also highlighted the deep-seated grievances of the Baloch people.

The Post-2000 Insurgency

The turn of the 21st century brought a new wave of insurgency in Balochistan. The early 2000s saw the emergence of militant groups such as the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), the Baloch Republican Army (BRA), and the Baloch Liberation Front (BLF). These groups intensified their armed struggle, targeting government installations, security forces, and infrastructure projects.

The insurgency was fueled by a combination of historical grievances and contemporary issues. The Baloch people felt increasingly marginalized as their region remained underdeveloped

despite its rich natural resources. The construction of the Gwadar port and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) exacerbated these sentiments. Many Baloch viewed these projects as further exploitation of their resources without adequate benefits to the local population.

Nature and Tactics of Insurgency

Baloch insurgent groups have employed a variety of tactics to further their cause. These include guerrilla warfare, sabotage, targeted killings, and bombings. The rugged terrain of Balochistan, with its mountains and deserts, has provided a natural advantage for insurgent operations. The insurgents have also targeted critical infrastructure, such as gas pipelines, railway lines, and communication networks, aiming to disrupt economic activities and draw attention to their cause.

One of the most significant aspects of the insurgency has been its targeting of CPEC-related projects. The Gwadar port, a key component of CPEC, has been a focal point of insurgent attacks. These attacks are intended to signal the Baloch opposition to foreign investments that do not benefit the local population. The insurgents argue that CPEC projects are designed to serve the interests of the central government and foreign powers, rather than addressing the needs of the Baloch people.

Counterinsurgency Operations

In response to the insurgency, the Pakistani state has launched extensive counterinsurgency operations. These operations have been characterized by a heavy military presence, intelligence-based operations, and efforts to undermine the insurgent groups' support base. The Pakistani military, paramilitary forces, and intelligence agencies have been at the forefront of these efforts.

The counterinsurgency strategy has included a mix of kinetic and non-kinetic measures. Kinetic measures involve direct military action, such as search-and-destroy missions, aerial

bombings, and ground assaults. Non-kinetic measures aim to win the "hearts and minds" of the local population through development projects, political reforms, and social initiatives.

It is particularly intriguing to observe that Iran and Pakistan, both neighboring countries with significant stakes in the region, engage in a complex blame game regarding the instability and unrest in Balochistan. Each side points fingers at the other, attributing the ongoing chaos to external interference rather than addressing the internal issues that contribute to the region's volatile situation. This mutual blame not only complicates efforts to bring about peace and stability but also reflects the deep-seated mistrust and geopolitical tensions that exist between the two nations. The situation in Balochistan, therefore, becomes not just a local or regional issue but a significant point of contention between Iran and Pakistan, with each country accusing the other of fueling the fires of unrest for their strategic interests.

Regional and International Dimensions

The insurgency in Balochistan has not only domestic but also regional and international dimensions. The porous border between Pakistan and Iran has allowed for cross-border militant activities. Iran has accused Pakistan of harboring Sunni militant groups, such as Jaish al-Adl, which have carried out attacks in Iran's Sistan and Balochistan province. Conversely, Pakistan has accused Iran of supporting Baloch separatists operating on its soil.

These mutual accusations have strained Iran-Pakistan relations and led to occasional cross-border military actions. In January 2024, the situation escalated dramatically with both countries launching strikes across the border, targeting militant bases. This unprecedented escalation highlighted the fragility of the regional security environment and the potential for broader conflict.

Internationally, the Baloch insurgency has attracted attention from various global actors. Western governments and human rights organizations have expressed concern over human rights abuses in Balochistan. There have also been allegations of foreign support for Baloch

insurgent groups, although concrete evidence remains sparse. The geopolitical significance of the region, particularly in the context of CPEC and broader regional security, ensures that Balochistan remains on the radar of global powers.

Socio-Political Impact

The prolonged insurgency and counterinsurgency operations have had profound socio-political impacts on Balochistan. The region's socio-economic development has been severely hampered by the ongoing conflict. Education, healthcare, and infrastructure have suffered, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and underdevelopment. The constant state of insecurity has also led to significant internal displacement, with many Baloch families fleeing conflict zones.

Politically, the insurgency has led to the militarization of the region. Civilian governance structures have been weakened, and the military has taken on a prominent role in the administration of Balochistan. This has further marginalized local political actors and reduced the scope for peaceful political dialogue. The lack of political representation and meaningful engagement with the central government remains a core issue driving the insurgency.

Impact of Balochistan on Iran-Pakistan Relations and Regional Stability

The relationship between Iran and Pakistan has been marked by both cooperation and contention since Pakistan's independence in 1947. The two countries share a nearly 1,000-kilometer border along their respective Balochistan regions, creating a shared space of cultural and ethnic overlap but also a zone of potential conflict. Historically, both nations have engaged in diplomatic and economic collaboration, yet the insurgency and militant activities in Balochistan have been a persistent source of strain.

In the early years of their relationship, Iran and Pakistan maintained cordial ties, largely driven by mutual geopolitical interests and a shared concern over the Soviet Union's influence in the region. However, the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which brought about a shift towards a more

ideologically driven Islamic governance, introduced new complexities into their bilateral relations. This ideological shift was particularly significant given Pakistan's own strategic alignment with Western powers and its role in supporting Afghan mujahideen during the Soviet-Afghan War.

The insurgency in Balochistan has exacerbated tensions between Iran and Pakistan, primarily due to the cross-border activities of militant groups. Both countries have accused each other of harboring insurgents and providing safe havens for militant operations. Pakistan has frequently pointed to the presence of groups like Jaish al-Adl, a Sunni militant organization, which it claims operates from Iranian territory to launch attacks on Pakistani soil. Conversely, Iran has accused Pakistan of allowing Baloch separatist groups to use its territory as a base for launching attacks within Iran.

These mutual accusations have led to several cross-border skirmishes and retaliatory strikes, further straining bilateral relations. In January 2024, this animosity reached a peak when both countries conducted unprecedented airstrikes across their borders. Iran targeted alleged militant bases in Pakistani Balochistan, while Pakistan responded with drone and rocket strikes on Iranian territory. These events marked a significant escalation, highlighting the fragile security situation in the region and the potential for broader conflict.

The conflict in Balochistan has significant geopolitical implications, influencing not only Iran-Pakistan relations but also the broader regional stability. Balochistan's strategic location, rich in natural resources and crucial for major infrastructure projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), makes it a focal point of international interest. CPEC, a flagship initiative under China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), aims to connect Gwadar Port in Balochistan to China's Xinjiang region, facilitating trade and economic integration. However, this project has also been a target for Baloch insurgents who view it as a symbol of external exploitation.

The instability in Balochistan poses challenges for the successful implementation of CPEC, thereby affecting Pakistan's economic aspirations and China's strategic interests in the region. Additionally, the conflict has drawn attention from other global powers, including the United States and India, each with their own strategic interests in South Asia. The involvement of these external actors complicates the regional security landscape, as they may provide covert support to various factions to further their geopolitical agendas.

The prolonged conflict in Balochistan has severe socio-economic and humanitarian consequences for both Pakistan and Iran. The region's underdevelopment, characterized by high levels of poverty, unemployment, and lack of basic infrastructure, is exacerbated by the ongoing violence. The local population, already marginalized, faces further disenfranchisement as resources are diverted towards military operations rather than development initiatives.

In both Pakistan and Iran, Balochistan is one of the most impoverished regions, with rampant unemployment and frequent droughts. The socio-economic marginalization fuels the insurgency, creating a cycle of violence and repression. These abuses undermining any efforts towards stability.

The humanitarian impact is profound, with thousands of families displaced by the conflict. The lack of access to education, healthcare, and other basic services exacerbates the suffering of the local population. The international community, while occasionally raising concerns about human rights violations, has not effectively addressed the humanitarian crisis in Balochistan. This neglect further alienates the Baloch people and fuels anti-state sentiments.

Efforts to address the insurgency and its impact on Iran-Pakistan relations have included diplomatic initiatives and calls for regional cooperation. Both countries have engaged in dialogue to address cross-border militancy, but these efforts have often been undermined by mutual distrust and the complexity of the insurgency. Confidence-building measures, such as

joint border patrols and intelligence sharing, have been proposed but have seen limited implementation.

Regional cooperation, involving other neighboring countries like Afghanistan and broader international stakeholders, is crucial for addressing the root causes of the conflict. Initiatives aimed at fostering economic development, political inclusion, and social cohesion in Balochistan are essential for long-term stability. The involvement of multilateral organizations, such as the United Nations, could provide a platform for dialogue and conflict resolution, ensuring that the voices of the Baloch people are heard and their grievances addressed.

Future Prospects

The future of Balochistan and its impact on Iran-Pakistan relations hinges on several factors. Firstly, a shift in the approach of both governments from a predominantly military response to one that prioritizes political dialogue and socio-economic development is essential. Addressing the root causes of the insurgency, including political marginalization, economic deprivation, and cultural discrimination, is crucial for achieving lasting peace.

Secondly, fostering regional cooperation and reducing external interference can help stabilize the region. Iran and Pakistan, along with other regional players, need to commit to a cooperative framework that prioritizes security, development, and human rights. International support, in the form of diplomatic mediation, economic assistance, and humanitarian aid, can play a significant role in facilitating this process.

Lastly, empowering local communities and ensuring their active participation in governance and development initiatives can help build trust and promote sustainable peace. The Baloch people must be seen as partners in the development process, with their rights and aspirations respected and addressed.

Conclusion

Balochistan, with its rich cultural heritage and complex historical background, remains a critical region in South Asia, influencing both domestic and international dynamics. The region's persistent underdevelopment, socio-political grievances, and insurgent activities have shaped its trajectory since its incorporation into Pakistan in 1948. These factors have not only fueled internal conflict but have also significantly impacted the relations between Pakistan and its neighboring countries, particularly Iran.

The historical context of Balochistan reveals a legacy of resistance against external domination and central authority, driven by a desire for autonomy and equitable development. The militant insurgencies that have erupted periodically over the past seven decades underscore the deep-rooted grievances of the Baloch people. These insurgencies have been met with extensive counterinsurgency operations by the Pakistani state, leading to widespread human rights abuses and further alienation of the local population.

The cross-border dimensions of the Baloch insurgency have strained Iran-Pakistan relations, with both countries accusing each other of harboring militants. The January 2024 cross-border strikes marked a significant escalation, highlighting the fragile security environment and the potential for broader regional conflict. The geopolitical significance of Balochistan, particularly in the context of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), adds another layer of complexity to the situation, drawing international attention and involvement.

Addressing the challenges in Balochistan requires a multifaceted approach that goes beyond military solutions. A comprehensive strategy should include political dialogue, socio-economic development, and respect for human rights. The grievances of the Baloch people must be addressed through meaningful political inclusion, equitable distribution of resources, and development initiatives that benefit the local population.

Regional cooperation is crucial for achieving stability in Balochistan. Iran and Pakistan, along with other neighboring countries and international stakeholders, need to engage in constructive dialogue and joint efforts to combat cross-border militancy and promote economic development. Confidence-building measures, such as joint border patrols and intelligence sharing, can help reduce tensions and foster trust.

The prospect of a meaningful and lasting resolution to the Balochistan conflict remains dim, primarily because both Pakistan and Iran demonstrate only superficial interest in achieving a final and peaceful settlement. Their engagement appears more symbolic than substantive, with neither country showing a genuine commitment to addressing the root causes of the conflict. This lack of sincere effort complicates the role of international actors, particularly the United Nations, making it difficult to envision any significant progress being made under such circumstances. For both Iran and Pakistan, Balochistan serves as a strategic tool, a means of exerting influence and control over each other. Rather than seeking peace for the sake of regional stability or humanitarian concerns, both nations seem more focused on using the conflict as leverage in their broader geopolitical maneuvering. This dynamic perpetuates the instability in Balochistan, leaving little room for optimism about any constructive intervention by the UN or other international bodies.

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The Forgotten War: Uncovering the Atrocities and Global Neglect of the Tigray Conflict

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Abstract

In 2022, while global attention fixated on the war in Ukraine, a devastating conflict in Ethiopia's Tigray region resulted in more fatalities than several other high-profile conflicts combined. This article delves into the harrowing details of the war between the Ethiopian government, allied with Eritrea, and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). It examines the widespread atrocities committed, the severe humanitarian crisis that ensued, and the muted international response. By highlighting the geopolitical and media dynamics that contributed to the global neglect of the Tigray War, this piece underscores the urgent need for justice and sustained attention to prevent future atrocities.

Keywords

Tigray War, Ethiopia, TPLF, Eritrea, Human Rights, War Crimes, Humanitarian Crisis, International Response, Media Coverage, Atrocities, Geopolitical Neglect, Transitional Justice

The Unseen Conflict - A Grim Reality in Tigray

In 2022, as the world's attention fixated on the Russian invasion of Ukraine, a less publicized yet equally catastrophic conflict raged on in Tigray, the northernmost region of Ethiopia. The war, which began in November 2020, pitted the Ethiopian government and its Eritrean allies against the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF). This brutal conflict, characterized by widespread atrocities, resulted in an estimated 600,000 deaths, a staggering number surpassing the fatalities in Ukraine, Yemen, Myanmar, Nigeria, Somalia, Mali, and Burkina Faso combined.

The war in Tigray unfolded amidst a backdrop of long-standing ethnic tensions and historical conflicts. Ethiopia's three major ethnic groups—the Oromos, Amharas, and Tigrayans—have a complex and often contentious history. Additionally, the border conflict with Eritrea, which shares a northern boundary with Tigray, further complicated the situation. The immediate cause of the war was a clash between the federal government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed and the TPLF, which controlled the Tigrayan regional government. Both sides accused each other of unconstitutional actions, culminating in the TPLF's alleged attack on the Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) headquarters in Mekelle, the capital of Tigray.

The federal government's response was swift and severe. In collaboration with Eritrean forces and regional Amhara militias, they launched a full-scale military offensive against Tigray. The conflict quickly escalated, leading to massive mobilizations on both sides. The Tigrayan Defence Forces managed to recapture Mekelle in June 2021 and even advanced towards Addis Ababa before being pushed back in November 2021. The final phase of the conflict saw a relentless assault by Eritrean, Ethiopian, and Amhara forces, culminating in the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022.

The human toll of this conflict was devastating. A total blockade of Tigray was enforced, cutting off electricity, banking services, telecommunications, and internet access. Humanitarian agencies were barred from entering, and the region was plunged into darkness,

both literally and figuratively. Reports of atrocities began to surface, painting a harrowing picture of the war's impact on civilians. According to the UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), all parties to the conflict committed war crimes and crimes against humanity on a staggering scale.

One of the most horrific aspects of the Tigray war was the widespread use of sexual violence. Tigrayan women and girls were subjected to brutal and systematic rape by Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, as well as regional militias. ICHREE's findings revealed that sexual violence was perpetrated on an unprecedented scale throughout the conflict. In addition to physical violence, the blockade led to severe shortages of food and medicine, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of people due to famine and lack of medical care.

Amnesty International's report on the situation in Western Tigray documented a campaign of ethnic cleansing against Tigrayan civilians. Newly-appointed officials and security forces from the Amhara region, with the possible participation of Ethiopian federal forces, expelled hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans from their homes. These expulsions were accompanied by unlawful killings, mass arbitrary detentions, sexual violence, and the denial of humanitarian assistance. The systematic deprivation of essential services, including healthcare, shelter, water, sanitation, education, and food, contributed to the humanitarian catastrophe.

Despite the cessation of hostilities, the situation in Tigray remains dire. Eritrean troops continue to control certain areas, blocking aid agencies and perpetuating reports of atrocities, particularly sexual violence. Within the Western Tigray Zone, ethnic cleansing campaigns by Amhara regional forces and militias persist, and nearly 40% of the Tigrayan population suffers from extreme food shortages. In May 2023, the World Food Program suspended aid deliveries to Tigray due to an internal investigation into food theft, exacerbating the already dire situation.

The Tigray conflict serves as a grim reminder of the world's selective attention to human suffering. While the war in Ukraine dominated headlines and elicited a strong international

response, the atrocities in Tigray were largely overlooked. The lack of media coverage, combined with geopolitical interests, contributed to the muted response to one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st century. This neglect not only deepened the suffering of those affected but also allowed perpetrators of heinous crimes to evade accountability, underscoring the need for a more equitable and just approach to global conflicts.

Media Silence and Global Neglect

Despite the scale and intensity of the Tigray conflict, it remained largely in the shadows of global media coverage. The year 2022 saw more battle-related deaths in Tigray than in any other conflict, surpassing even the widely reported war in Ukraine. Yet, the international response was muted, with the Tigray war often sidelined in news reports and international discourse.

Several factors contributed to this media silence. The war in Ukraine, with its geopolitical implications and extensive media coverage, dominated headlines, overshadowing other conflicts. The European setting and the direct involvement of Russia, a major global power, ensured continuous global attention. In contrast, Tigray, a region with limited strategic interest to major powers, failed to capture sustained international focus.

Moreover, the Ethiopian government imposed a total blockade on Tigray, cutting off the region from external scrutiny. Humanitarian agencies were barred from entering, and communications, including internet and telecommunications, were shut down. This blackout made it exceedingly difficult for journalists and human rights organizations to report on the atrocities being committed. The lack of images and firsthand accounts contributed to the international community's relative indifference.

This neglect had profound implications. The war in Tigray resulted in an estimated 600,000 deaths, a figure that includes a significant number of civilians who perished due to famine and

lack of medical care. The blockade led to severe shortages of food and essential supplies, causing widespread suffering. Between 228,000 and 356,100 people are believed to have died from famine-related causes, while between 124,000 and 155,000 succumbed to the lack of medical attention.

The atrocities committed during the Tigray conflict were staggering. The UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) found evidence of war crimes and crimes against humanity perpetrated by all parties involved. Ethiopian and Eritrean forces, along with regional militias, were implicated in systematic ethnic cleansing, mass killings, and widespread sexual violence. Amnesty International documented the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of Tigrayan civilians from their homes through threats, unlawful killings, sexual violence, mass arbitrary detention, pillage, and denial of humanitarian assistance.

Despite the severity of these crimes, the international response remained tepid. The Ethiopian government's lobbying efforts successfully influenced key international actors, leading to a lack of sustained pressure or meaningful action. The mandate of ICHREE, established to investigate these crimes, was not renewed in October 2023, largely due to the lobbying by the Ethiopian government and the prioritization of diplomatic normalization over accountability by major international actors.

This lack of attention and accountability is not just a historical oversight but a present danger. With the eyes of the world turned elsewhere, the risk of further atrocities remains high. Eritrean troops continue to occupy parts of Tigray, blocking aid and perpetuating abuses. In Western Tigray, ethnic cleansing by Amhara forces continues, and nearly 40% of the Tigrayan population faces severe food shortages. The suspension of aid deliveries by the World Food Program in May 2023, due to internal theft investigations, further exacerbated the humanitarian crisis.

The muted global response also reflects broader systemic issues in international media and geopolitical priorities. Conflicts in Africa often receive less attention and are more readily

dismissed as perennial and unresolvable. This perception undermines efforts to address root causes and hold perpetrators accountable. It also fuels a sense of abandonment among affected populations, who see their suffering ignored by the global community.

For individuals like Gebrekirstos G. Gebremeskel, who founded the media organization Tghat to document the war, the lack of international solidarity is a bitter revelation. The war has fundamentally altered his view of global justice and humanity. The blockade, which cut off communication with his family for two years, was a harrowing experience shared by many in the diaspora. The international community's failure to respond adequately has left a deep scar, fostering a belief that geopolitical interests, rather than humanitarian concerns, drive global attention and intervention.

The Tigray conflict exposes the flaws and biases in global media coverage and international response. The war's atrocities, largely hidden from the world, underscore the need for greater vigilance and accountability in addressing human rights abuses, regardless of where they occur. The neglect of Tigray serves as a stark reminder of the disparities in global concern and the urgent need to rectify these imbalances to prevent future tragedies.

The Struggle for Justice and Accountability

As the guns fell silent in Tigray with the signing of the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement (CoHA) in November 2022, the immense task of seeking justice and accountability for the war's atrocities began. However, the path to justice has been fraught with challenges, and the international community's response has been inconsistent and, at times, inadequate.

The CoHA brought an official end to the full-scale fighting and lifted the devastating blockade on Tigray, allowing humanitarian aid to enter the region. However, it did not address the deeply rooted issues of accountability for the war crimes and human rights violations committed during the conflict. The Ethiopian and Eritrean governments, along with regional

militias, were implicated in some of the most severe abuses, including ethnic cleansing, systematic rape, and extrajudicial killings. Despite this, the mechanisms for holding perpetrators accountable have been weak and insufficient.

The UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE), established in 2021, played a crucial role in documenting these atrocities. In its reports, ICHREE found credible evidence of widespread war crimes and crimes against humanity. The commission highlighted the systematic nature of the violence, particularly against Tigrayans, and called for comprehensive investigations and accountability measures. However, the Ethiopian government consistently obstructed the commission's work, refusing it free and unfettered access to conflict zones and limiting its ability to conduct thorough investigations.

In October 2023, the mandate of ICHREE came up for renewal. Despite the commission's vital work and the ongoing need for accountability, the UN Human Rights Council failed to renew its mandate. This decision, influenced by the Ethiopian government's lobbying efforts, dealt a significant blow to justice for the victims of the Tigray conflict. Human Rights Watch and other organizations condemned the move, emphasizing that it left the peace process and transitional justice in the hands of the Ethiopian government—a situation deemed unsatisfactory by most observers.

The Ethiopian government has taken steps to create domestic mechanisms for accountability. However, these efforts are widely seen as inadequate and more focused on deflecting international scrutiny than delivering genuine justice. The government's strategy of "quasi-compliance" involves establishing processes that appear to ensure accountability but, in reality, serve to protect perpetrators and avoid meaningful scrutiny. This approach has deepened skepticism about the prospects for justice within Ethiopia.

The situation remains dire in Tigray and neighboring regions. Eritrean troops, who were supposed to withdraw under the CoHA, continue to control parts of the region, obstructing aid and perpetrating abuses. In Western Tigray, Amhara forces continue an ethnic cleansing

campaign, forcibly expelling Tigrayans from their homes. The humanitarian crisis persists, with nearly 40% of the Tigrayan population suffering from severe food shortages. The World Food Program's suspension of aid deliveries in May 2023, due to internal theft investigations, has exacerbated the crisis, leaving millions in dire need.

The international community's response has been criticized for prioritizing diplomatic normalization with Ethiopia over accountability. Major powers, including the EU and the USA, have sought to restore relations with Ethiopia, sidelining the need for justice for the Tigray conflict's victims. This shift has been demoralizing for those who suffered during the war and for advocates of human rights and justice.

For the victims and survivors of the Tigray conflict, the struggle for justice is deeply personal. Many, like Gebrekirstos G. Gebremeskel, who lost family members and saw their communities ravaged, feel abandoned by the international community. The lack of accountability and the muted global response have fostered a sense of disillusionment with international institutions and their commitment to human rights.

Steven Ratner, a professor of law at the University of Michigan and one of the ICHREE commissioners, underscored the importance of international oversight in preventing future atrocities. He highlighted that wars without witnesses are particularly devastating for victims, and the absence of external scrutiny allows perpetrators to act with impunity. The decision to end ICHREE's mandate, Ratner argued, was a setback not only for addressing past crimes but also for safeguarding against future abuses.

The Ethiopian government's continued resistance to meaningful accountability measures raises serious concerns about the future. Without robust international pressure and oversight, the risk of further atrocities remains high. The peace process, while crucial, cannot be decoupled from justice. True reconciliation and stability in Tigray and Ethiopia as a whole depend on addressing the root causes of the conflict and holding those responsible for the atrocities accountable.

In the absence of strong international mechanisms, the burden falls on local and regional actors to push for justice. Civil society organizations, human rights groups, and the diaspora community play a crucial role in keeping the spotlight on the Tigray conflict and advocating for accountability. Their efforts are essential in documenting ongoing abuses, providing support to survivors, and pressing for international action.

The struggle for justice and accountability in Tigray is a long and arduous journey. It requires persistent advocacy, international solidarity, and a commitment to human rights that transcends geopolitical interests. The lessons from Tigray highlight the need for a more equitable and responsive international system that values all lives equally and holds perpetrators of atrocities accountable, regardless of where they occur. Only through such a commitment can we hope to prevent future tragedies and build a world where justice and human dignity are upheld for all.

Conclusion

The conflict in Tigray stands as a stark reminder of the profound suffering that can arise from political and ethnic strife, and of the devastating impact of global indifference. While the war between the Ethiopian government and the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) has officially ended, the repercussions of the violence, human rights abuses, and humanitarian crisis continue to haunt the region. The staggering death toll and the widespread atrocities committed during the conflict underscore the urgent need for justice and accountability.

The muted international response to the Tigray conflict, in stark contrast to other contemporary conflicts, reveals troubling disparities in how global attention and empathy are distributed. The reasons for this neglect are complex, involving geopolitical interests, media coverage challenges, and deep-seated biases. However, the consequences are clear: a failure to

adequately address and respond to the Tigray conflict not only perpetuates injustice for the victims but also sets a dangerous precedent for future crises.

Efforts to bring justice to Tigray have been hampered by political resistance and insufficient international support. The UN International Commission of Human Rights Experts on Ethiopia (ICHREE) provided crucial documentation of the atrocities, yet its mandate was not renewed, leaving a significant gap in accountability mechanisms. The Ethiopian government's strategy of "quasi-compliance" further complicates the pursuit of justice, as domestic processes fall short of genuine accountability.

For the victims and survivors, the struggle for justice is deeply personal and fraught with challenges. The international community's prioritization of diplomatic normalization over accountability has been disheartening, fostering a sense of abandonment among those who have suffered the most. Nevertheless, the resilience of local and regional actors, human rights organizations, and the diaspora community offers a glimmer of hope. Their continued advocacy and documentation efforts are vital in keeping the issue alive and pressing for meaningful action.

Ultimately, the path to justice and reconciliation in Tigray requires a concerted effort from the international community. It demands a re-evaluation of global priorities to ensure that all conflicts, regardless of their location or perceived strategic importance, receive the attention and response they deserve. Upholding human rights and delivering justice must be paramount, transcending geopolitical interests and biases.

The Tigray conflict serves as a poignant reminder of the need for a more equitable and responsive international system. One that values all human lives equally, holds perpetrators of atrocities accountable, and prioritizes the protection of vulnerable populations. Only through such a commitment can we hope to prevent future tragedies, address ongoing injustices, and build a world where justice and human dignity are upheld for all.

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The role of charisma in the 2016 US election campaign: an unexpected turnover

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Abstract

The 2016 US election campaign tends to be memorable with its polarizing nature. Surprisingly, the successful businessman Donald Trump defeated a renowned political figure Hillary Clinton, breaking many existing stereotypes around the US presidential marathon. Appearing in front of his supporters at the election night, Republican Trump informed the American as well as the world communities of the need for unification against the US challenges.

Trump, an inexperienced political figure with brilliant entrepreneurial skills, managed to win a major electoral chess party against the politically skillful Democratic contender. It appears that Trump's political messages and program were more acceptable to the majority of US states than his opponent's. In this sense, it is interesting to study the aspects of political charisma of two main participants of the 2016 US elections.

Keywords

US elections; charisma; leadership; electorate

Introduction

The words, by which Donald Trump started his speech as a winner of 2016 presidential elections, describe him as a candidate associating himself primarily with the electorate's interests:

“I’ve just received a call from Secretary Clinton. She congratulated us... it’s about us... on our victory, and I congratulated her and her family on a very, very hard-fought campaign... Hillary has worked very long and very hard over a long period of time, and we owe her a major debt of gratitude for her service to our country” (CNN staff, 2016).

Bearing in mind the fact that the final results were unexpectedly astonishing for major analytical and journalistic groups (Aswad, 2019, pp. 56-57), it can be argued that these elections had a serious impact on the change of political and social life in the United States. Thereafter, the research question arises: which factor(s) contributed to Donald Trump’s unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016?

Various reasons can be pointed out to explain this electoral paradox. One of such reasons is the contrast between both candidates’ personal characteristics of political leadership (Aswad; 2019, p. 57). Therefore, it can be interesting to compare Clinton and Trump’s individual charisma. Arguably, dozens of media sources found Hillary Clinton to be lacking charismatic political approaches whereas Trump’s speeches as well as attitudes towards the major opponent, media and society were mostly assessed as memorable and penetrant (Aswad, 2019, p. 57). Such facts draw one’s attention to a significant circumstance: Trump’s representable manners and persuasive speeches could be impressive for an average voter. This increases the interest in studying the 2016 presidential elections in the frames of political psychology. More specifically, the emphasis of the article is on evaluating the charismatic traits in both Republican and Democratic nominees of the aforementioned elections. Thereafter, the following hypothesis can be formulated according to the research question given above: charismatic personality traits contributed to Donald Trump’s unexpected victory over Hillary Clinton in 2016.

Interestingly, the article is oriented on the charismatic traits of major contestants of the 2016 presidential marathon. The attention is mainly drawn to the advertising style, main messages and contents of the political promises of each candidate during the debates as well as relations with media professionals and society/electorate. The review of existing scientific literature on the 2016 US elections is given a separate part in the article. The conclusions are drawn according to the study of indicators which are described in the research design in detail.

Literature Review

Review of scientific sources is important to indicate the research gaps which are aimed to be studied in the article. One of the important authors on the 2016 presidential elections is Noor Ghazal Aswad. The researcher pays attention to the fact that the academic sphere lacks sufficient research with Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's campaign, especially in the context of charismatic leadership (Aswad, 2019, p. 57). This shows an important scientific gap in the topic which has to be filled by a separate study. Therefore, this circumstance can be an important motivator to use this gap as the essence of the given article. Ghazal Aswad puts an important emphasis on the fact that there is a diversity of opinion on Trump and Clinton's charismatic aspects between journalists, analysts and researchers (Aswad, 2019, p. 57). Thereafter, the 2016 presidential campaign topic is worth studying in the frames of charismatic characteristics. Ghazal Aswad discusses the essence of charisma and points out the criteria for its evaluation (Aswad, 2019, p. 60) which are important for the construction of the theoretical framework discussed more in detail in the research design part. It has to be remarked that Ghazal Aswad's research is valuable to understand the importance of certain elements of political psychology in the 2016 election campaign, especially charisma. However, none of the candidate's political stance is sufficiently evaluated by their speeches, messages and advertising style. It is only superficially mentioned that Clinton's eighty nine and Trump's sixty six political speeches of the electoral campaign are studied in Ghazal Aswad's article, providing

only the general overview of both candidate's campaigning (Aswad, 2019, p. 62). This factor once again strengthens the importance of the given article's research.

The important researchers with regard to the 2016 presidential elections Jayeon Lee and Young-shin Lim. They focus on the social media campaigning of Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton and make main emphasis on the gender factor. To the authors' observation, Clinton was more oriented on her personal patriarchal qualities while discussing women's problems and challenges. Nevertheless, Trump would only focus on men's problems without taking notice of his own characteristics (Lee & Lim, 2016, pp. 849). This is an important factor from the point of view of the given article's thesis: it appears that both Democratic and Republican candidates had their own approaches towards disseminating their messages across social media. Lee and Lim remark that more than 79 percent of Trump's tweets consisted of simple, easily understandable words and sentences whereas Hillary Clinton would actively use various visual and original forms of storytelling in social media (more than 58 percent) This is also an important factor to distinguish each nominee's unique style in this sense. Despite the fact that the value of Lee and Lim's research is exceptional due to the researchers' focus on stereotypes and other psychological aspects of the 2016 electoral campaign (Lee & Lim, 2016, pp. 849-851), it does not perfectly cover the issues connected to Trump and Clinton's charismatic characteristics. Thereafter, this research is also an important catalyst of carrying out the additional study on charisma of both candidates.

The interesting points are also given by Alessandro Nai and Jürgen Maierb. The researchers pay attention to the personality traits of candidates in 2016 presidential elections. To their observation, "Trump was usually portrayed as thin-skinned, narcissistic, bellicose, and disagreeable, whereas Clinton was seen as dependable, organized, and experienced, albeit cold and arrogant. However, little systematic evidence supports this assessment." (Nai & Maierb, 2017, pp. 80). This statement is a good proof why the results of the 2016 elections were different from the pre-existing expectations: the scientific and analytical approach towards the case shows that Hillary Clinton was not able to create an image of herself so that most voters

would become sympathetic to her during the election night. The authors use three components to analyze the 2016 campaign of both nominees: their populist approaches, negative messages against each other and psycho-emotional attitudes. According to the research, Trump was not concentrated on elitist approaches and was using a very simple and less standardized style of communication with the voters, while being emotionally unstable. Unlike him, Clinton had a balance of characteristics like transparency, negotiability, breeding of fear and hope, etc. (Nai & Maierb, 2017, pp. 81-82). This analysis does not compare the specific messages, aspects of debates and advertising and other elements of the 2016 election campaign. Thereafter, it depicts the importance of a separate research about Clinton and Trump's charismatic traits. The important research is also carried out by Joshua D. Wright and Monica F. Tomlinson. They focus on the personality characteristics of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 elections. According to their research, "...Trump voters perceived him as higher in all personality traits compared to Clinton, while Clinton voters perceived her as higher in agreeableness, conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness to experience, but perceived Trump as higher in extraversion" (Wright & Tomlinson, 2018, p. 23). The research is interesting, as the authors cover the characteristics of each nominee. However, it lacks the comparison of those characteristics in the context of charismatic approaches. This circumstance strengthens the significance of the research of the given article. No less important are the findings made by Sudeep Bhatia, Geoffrey P. Goodwin and Lukasz Walasek. They find the link between Hillary and Trump's personalities and general characteristics, based on the study of each candidate's electorate's activities in the media. Ability, agency, character, communion, goodness, grit, morality, strength, warmth - these are the nine traits on which the authors pay main attention (Bhatia, Goodwin & Walasek, 2018, p. 126). Despite the fact that these characteristics are indicated in the research, the study lacks the focus on the charisma of each candidate. This circumstance once again points to the importance of a new study in this field.

The literature review indicates that there is a lack of academic sources that have the emphasis on Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's charismatic personality characteristics in the 2016 election campaign. Thereafter, as indicated above, there is a necessity to study the topic.

Research Design

Research design is a pivotal part of the article. It should be noted that the research design consists of conceptualization, operationalization and research methods. Conceptualization is an important part of the research design. First and foremost, the independent and dependent variables have to be pointed out. The independent variable, according to the hypothesis of the article, is charismatic personality traits and the dependent variable - Trump's victory over Clinton. The major concept that needs to be defined is charisma which, according to a signaling theory, can be defined as a politicians' capability, encompassing values and emphatic aspects, to attract and convince the electorate in accepting their political views. This is a capability which is strongly connected to leadership and management skills, portraying the political figure as an influential who will never digress in fighting for ordinary people's needs (Aswad, 2019, p. 59). Thereafter, the article focuses on the charismatic traits of 2016 major Republican and Democratic presidential nominees, studying the principal differences between two candidates' charismatic personalities.

Operationalization is also an important part of the research design. Charisma is assessed in the article with the following criteria, based upon Ghazal Aswad's study: 1. Collective focus – the subject of evaluation is the candidate's capability to associate himself/herself to a person strongly integrated into the society; 2. Followers' worth – candidate's skills towards becoming favorable and trustworthy for their electorate are assessed; 3. Similarity to followers – it has to be studied whether the general lifestyle and moral norms of the candidate (spouse, children, income, etc.) are close to societal understandings; 4. Cooperation – it has to be evaluated whether the candidate has the capability for showing himself/herself as a member of the hard-working team; 5. Action oriented – the subject of study is the candidate's readiness to actively

fulfill national tasks in a timely manner; 6. Adversity – candidate’s willingness to overcome the comfort zone and initiate significant dramatic changes has been studied; 7. Tangibility – the focus is on the candidate’s capability to remain agile towards specific challenges by implementing specific political initiatives (Aswad, 2019, pp. 60, 61, 62). So, this is the theoretical framework within which the study is carried out in the article.

Research methods, as also a significant section of the research design, should contain the major methods to study the topic. It should be remarked that both qualitative and quantitative methods will be used to study the 2016 elections. The comparative case study method is used in the article (Babbie, 2016, p. 304), as it is important to carry out the research connected to the 2016 election case in the context of comparing and contrasting Trump and Clinton’s charisma. Furthermore, descriptive statistics is also an important method (Babbie, 2016, p. 451) in order to use quantitative data such as election results, poll results and other kinds of statistical information, valuable to carry out the research. Moreover, content analysis (Babbie, 2016, p. 223) and textual analysis (Frey, Botan, & Kreps, 2000, p. 225) are also important methods to understand and evaluate the context of 2016 election messages, speeches and general advertising texts of both Republican and Democratic candidates.

Analysis

Trump’s paradox

Communication is an important aspect for the electorate to decide on the specific candidate during the elections. This is a merging component of the chain of candidate’s qualities such as managerial skills, political background and activity, general psychological condition and attitudes, etc. (Aswad, 2019, p. 58). The US elections are not an exception. Keeping in mind the general practice which shows that the electorate decides candidates’ maturity for the presidential position in accordance with those candidates’ verbal and non-verbal communication style (Aswad, 2019, p. 58), it can be argued that political psychology aspects play a crucial role in the US election nominees’ fortune. This statement shows the importance

for the creation of a strong link between a candidate, on the one hand and the media and society, on the other.

The essence of political figures' relations with media and society lies in the fact that most electors lack the opportunity to have close contact with the presidential candidates. The evidence of charismatic personality in public meetings with the electorate appears to be one of the decisive factors, according to surveys and research (Aswad, 2019, p. 58). The same can be said about the campaign advertising and debates which are also the candidates' forms of communication with the electorate. All these aspects increase the significance of analyzing Trump and Clinton's personal charisma during the 2016 elections. Thereafter, it has to be pointed out that during his meetings with the voters, Trump always tried to show himself as a member of a huge team called the US citizens. For instance, in his speech during the Republican National Convention in front of the huge electorate, Trump had the following remarks:

“USA, USA, USA. Who would've believed that when we started this journey on June 16th last year, we, and I say we, because we are a team, would have received almost 14 million votes, the most in the history of the Republican Party and that the Republican Party would get 60 percent more votes than it received eight years ago...” (ABC News; 2016).

Needless to say that there is a strong emphasis on the candidate as a social rather than an individual phenomenon. This strengthens Trump's personality in the context of a collective focus, as he pays much attention to the word “we” emphasizing its essence in harmony with the evidently increasing number of supporters of his party. Trump's aforementioned appearance in front of the voters after becoming the projected winner of 2016 elections shows the same circumstance, as he mentioned Hillary Clinton's wishing of success not only to himself personally but also to the whole Republicans. At the same time, he called for the whole electorate's unification afterwards, regardless of political preferences (CNN staff, 2016). All these statements make it clear that from the perspective of political psychology, Trump's

political identity was crucially linked to collective focus. This could be an important antecedent for the electorate's worth in case of the Republican nominee. The aforementioned 2016 election night is a good indicator of this fact: the voters became sympathetic towards Donald Trump which enabled him to gain 306 Electoral College scores, enough to become a winner (The New York Times, 2017).

Keeping in mind Hillary Clinton's advantage in the post-October 19 debate polls (Morning Consult, 2016), one might argue that Clinton was more favorable and most voters were more sympathetic to her than to her opponent. The percentages were more in favor of Clinton but there was one question in which most voters (51 percent) expressed their sympathy towards Trump's political activities: to their mind, the Republican candidate was more adequate than reckoned before while giving the answers to Clinton as well as moderator's questions and critical points (The New York Times, 2017). This, at a glance, small detail proves that the electorate was not antagonistic towards Trump during the 2016 electoral campaign, even though undoubtedly Hillary Clinton was a front-runner in the aforementioned polling. So, presumably, Trump managed to acquire the electorate's trust and attain positive feedback in this part of charismatic personality as well. This proves the paradoxical reality that Trump was creating. He did not succeed in the debate whereas during the election night he managed to gain the victory.

Trump can be said to be successful in similarity with voters. Even Hillary Clinton associated him with an exemplary father and husband during the second debate. To the Democratic nominee's opinion, her major opponent's kids' positive attitudes and behavior meant Trump was a remarkable family-lover (The New York Times, 2016). These facts show that Trump was close to the general electorate's lifestyle because his major opponent pointed out his family as his major positive side. Despite the fact that the scandals arouse around his personality in this aspect as well (e. g. scandal related to Stormy Daniels' affair (Rothfeld and Palazzolo, 2018)), her major opponent's praise towards Trump's children preserved this aspect of his charismatic personality as well. Therefore, it can be argued that this type of resemblance to the voters

increased his chances to become the winner. Having in mind cooperation as an important quality for charisma, it should once again be remarked that the focus on the term “we” in most speeches would make the Republican nominee’s charisma exceptional. As discussed above, it appears that this quality bred in most voters the feeling of belonging which is the third stair in Maslow’s hierarchical pyramid together with the sense of love (Copley, 2024). Thereafter, it can be said that the synthesis of similarity with voters and willingness for collaboration increases the sympathetic attitudes in the electorate. This is evident from the fact that 55 percent of the married electors voted for Trump while 39 percent of the aforementioned voters supported Clinton in 2016 (Pew Research Center, 2018). It can be argued that in the thinking of an average voter, Trump was associated with the charismatic political figure resembling the ordinary citizens’ lifestyle and being ready to work in the team of the US society.

Trump’s activities tend to describe him as a person full of courage and enthusiasm. He used to show himself always ready to undertake steps which some people could even think to be out of the clear blue. This can be best understood by one of his extraordinary initiatives related to the construction of a wall on the Mexican boundary. Trump announced the following during his 2016 campaign speech in Arizona: “We will build a wall along the Southern Border... We will use the best technology... to supplement the wall, find and dislocate tunnels, and keep out the criminal cartels” (Politico Staff, 2016). It seems that Trump was an action oriented person willing to execute every important initiative just as he thought. The initiative related to the wall seems to encompass one more quality of the charismatic personality: adversity. This can be explained by the fact that the initiative related to the wall could somehow be a traumatic change for American society. While some people thought that it was populism, President Trump started building the wall after becoming the president (Prendergast, 2020). One more argument in favor of Trump’s remarkable adversity would be his decision to leave the convenient life of a businessman and transfer to politics. It seems that he assured the electorate of being coherently and fearlessly resistant towards challenges. Thereafter, his tangibility characteristics can best be read in the campaign against the Obamacare program.

After becoming the president, Trump made serious surgical interventions into the program by leaving only 10% of the existing Obamacare budget and decreased financial benefits for becoming a beneficiary (Luhby, 2024).

The above analysis of Trump's personality shows that he more or less satisfies each criteria of the charismatic political figure. Therefore, it can be argued that the Republican nominee managed to gain victory in the 2016 elections with the help of political psychology.

Clinton's rise and fall

It becomes evident from Hillary Clinton's campaign that she had more emphasis on her individualism rather than on being the representative of the society. This can be assumed from her speech in Florida in March, 2016:

„I am so delighted to be here with you in Florida. I congratulate Sen. Sanders on his strong showing and campaigning. I'm grateful to all of you who voted for me, to the volunteers and organizers. I know you worked your hearts out. To all my friends, many of a lifetime who traveled to all the states to tell people about the candidate they knew, and the hundreds of thousands of people who went to HillaryClinton.com to give what they could – most less than \$100 – now this campaign moves forward to the Crescent City, Motor City and beyond“ (Golshan, 2016).

The psychological contents inside the speech can be understood in the following way: despite the fact that Clinton remarks the positive side of her Democratic opponent, Senator Sanders, she mentions her buddies supporting her personality all over the US. Furthermore, Clinton emphasizes the number of over 100 000 electors who donated money to her victory and increased her fame from California to Michigan (Golshan, 2016). These aspects prove that Hillary Clinton was not much in favor of collective focus and would rather highlight her personality both in case of in-group (inside the Democratic party) and out-group (she as a part of the American electorate) activities. Thereafter, she was willing to play the 2016 chess party not by a principal-agent model but by a rather didactic approach.

In the same speech, Clinton addresses the voters with the following message: “Like many of you, I find strength and purpose from my family and my faith” (Golshan, 2016). At a first glimpse of an eye, there is nothing problematic in this phrase. However, the careful analysis of the message shows Clinton’s strong dependence on her own family’s interests as well as internal feelings and motivations. It may be argued that this message again neglects the need for collective focus, relating Democratic candidate’s political identity mainly to her individual political agenda. Despite all this, these facts to a certain extent strengthen Clinton’s similarity towards voters, as she tries to show herself as a family-loving housewife. She tried to portray her image in the media and society’s mind as a good mother, wife and grandmother which would breed in most voters the sense of similarity. Nevertheless, as analyzed above, Hillary Clinton received a smaller amount of votes (39 percent) from the married electorate than Trump (55 percent)(Pew Research Center, 2018). Therefore, it can be argued that maybe in the eyes of several voters she was an exemplary family-lover but it is a fact that she did not have a strong support from the married couples. This may to a certain extent be connected to Trump’s accusation of her Democratic contestant of being indifferent, tolerant and even supportive towards her husband, US President Bill Clinton’s abuses towards women. Interestingly, Trump had a message to the electorate on this topic, containing the contents that during his first debate he did not unlock the secrets of Bill and Hillary Clintons scandalous life and was promising to do this in future (Boburg, 2016). So the aspects of political psychology, mainly with regard to the candidates’ message box towards each other played an important role in this affair too: it becomes evident that Trump, who was also blamed for scandals (Rothfeld and Palazzolo, 2016), assisted to lift the same burden to Hillary Clinton and irritated her aspect of similarity to voters. This circumstance had a negative impact on Clinton’s charisma.

It can be argued that Clinton was not much good at assuring the American electorate of being trustworthy towards her. The Democratic nominee of 2016 elections once even regretted that unlike her husband and President Barack Obama, she was unable to gain a direct trust from

the average voter. “They are so natural ... they can just go into a room and really capture it – They’ve got charisma. It was a lot harder for me”, - she spoke to iHeart radio (Aswad, 2019, p. 57). So Clinton was unable to provoke the emotions in the voters which are necessary in order to gain long-term trust. Bearing in mind the strong sarcastic criticism of Clinton’s charisma by Washington Post in 2016 (there was an emphasis on the need for rapid surgical intervention into Clinton’s charisma)(Aswad, 2019, p. 57), this kind of a drawback could be an important factor in the turnover of the October 19-20 pollings’ painting on the election day results. Despite the fact that the mentioned polls were in favor of Clinton (Morning Consult, 2016), it can be argued that the problem with regard to her follower’s worth delivered the contrasted outcomes of elections.

It is also interesting how Clinton was doing in cooperation and action orientation aspects. As per the above analysis, Clinton had a strong focus on her own personality and despite one of her major slogans “Stronger Together”, she did not shape many messages to voters about the willingness for teamwork and devotion to collective welfare. According to the Democratic party members and activists, Clinton together with only her campaign managers were “...insular and self-assured. ...Presumptuous, know-it-all attitude caused ...to ignore early warning signs of electoral trouble inside the states, and demoralized DNC staff who felt largely marginalized or altogether neglected for most of the campaign” (Catanese, 2016). Believe it or not, Clinton’s individual problems with the teamwork capability were evident inside the Democratic party and were revealed to the society only after the announcement of the election results. Clinton can thus be judged for the lack of skills of cooperation and this could have made a significant negative impact on her charisma among the voters. This could have also portrayed her political personality as being less action-oriented.

Adversary and tangibility aspects also have to be stressed. It has to be emphasized from the above analysis that Clinton did not have any such types of revolutionary initiatives as building a metal wall against immigrants, quitting social and/or healthcare programs, etc. She had a

rather refined, usual style of relations with the electorate. The Democratic nominee was locking herself into a strictly standardized, structured and career-oriented politician's psychology, expressing less enthusiasm towards transcending the existing boundaries to implement traumatic reforms. Her public speeches and main messages towards the huge audience of voters were more hackneyed than pragmatic and spontaneous. She was not sitting in the boat swimming under the idiomatic expression: "drastic times call for drastic measures". Her promises would rather contain the messages like "...if you cheat your employees, exploit consumers, pollute our environment or rip off the taxpayers, we're going to hold you accountable"; "Add more good jobs... Jobs that provide dignity and a bright future"; "Don't let anybody tell you we can't make things [in] this America anymore..." (Golshan, 2016).. These messages, lacking precise contents, containing negative context (especially the last example), breeding arrogance in Clinton's image and taking her at a distance from the usual electorate, could have played a negative role in Clinton's 2016 political campaign. All this also indicated the lack of charisma in Hillary Clinton's political activities which, actually, resulted in the candidate's defeat. So, although Donald Trump himself emphasized that Hillary Clinton's major positive quality is that she never concedes and tries to fight using every strength (The New York times, 2016), it can be discussed that the banal elements and arrogant approaches in her 2016 campaign led to her unsuccessful outcomes.

In sum, it can be argued that an experienced political figure Hillary Clinton lacked the political charisma which caused her to lose elections against an unskillful politician. It appears that the Democratic nominee's inappropriate style of communication, elitist approaches and less prepared message box led to her fall during the elections, despite her rise in the campaign polls.

Conclusion

The analysis of Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump's political charisma shows that each candidate's image had its pros and cons. It is also evident from the research results that Trump's

personal characteristics were related to more extraordinary, unique and long-term goals and activities whereas Clinton concentrated more on self-actualization and rational style of political campaign in 2016.

It becomes clear from the article that charismatic traits played an important role in the victory of the Republican nominee in 2016. However, certain positive sides of the Democratic candidate's image, discussed in the article (family-lover person; woman who never gives up, etc.), contributed to the fact that Clinton won the popular vote with 48 percent. In contrast, Trump's exceptional and original campaigning style, filled with messages about dramatic changes as well as strict approaches towards the national tasks and willingness for teamwork, led to the Republican candidate's victory in the Electoral College, even though Trump was not able to take more than 45.9 percent in the popular vote.

To summarize the article, it should be mentioned that when both Trump and Clinton were asked to distinguish major pros in each other's personalities, Trump remarked on the Democratic nominee's non-conceding personal characteristic while Clinton stressed Trump's kids (The New York Times, 2016). This also shows Trump's charismatic strength over Clinton: The Republican candidate was able to emphasize Hillary Clinton's personal positive trait whereas Clinton failed the task by focusing on Trump's children, i. e. other persons and not precisely on Trump. This contrast could have also contributed to the results that were finally delivered by the candidates in the elections.

Bearing in mind all the above analyzed facts, it is clear that Trump's exceptional charisma strengthened his advantage during the 2016 US election. Despite his loss in the 2020 elections (CNBC News, 2020), Trump was able to regenerate his strength and is still the major Republican nominee for the presidential position in the 2024 elections (Ramirez, 2024). This indicates that Trump is still an actual, phenomenal personality in US political life.

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Title: ECOWAS and the Crisis of Pro-Russian Coups: Challenges and Strategic Responses

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Abstract

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a regional political and economic union, faces unprecedented challenges following a series of military coups in West Africa. These coups, notably in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, have led to a complex geopolitical crisis involving increased Russian influence and the destabilization of the region's political landscape. This paper examines the historical context of ECOWAS, the impact of the recent pro-Russian coups on regional stability, and ECOWAS's responses, including sanctions and diplomatic efforts. It also analyzes the broader implications for democracy, economic development, and international relations in West Africa. Through this exploration, the paper seeks to understand the effectiveness of ECOWAS's strategies and the potential pathways for restoring stability and democratic governance in the region.

Keywords

ECOWAS, West Africa, military coups, pro-Russian influence, regional stability, democracy, economic development, international relations, sanctions, geopolitical crisis.

Understanding ECOWAS: An Overview of Its Formation, Objectives, and Structure

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organization established to foster economic integration and political cooperation among West African countries. Since its founding in 1975, ECOWAS has played a pivotal role in promoting regional stability, economic growth, and political solidarity. This chapter provides an overview of the history, objectives, and organizational structure of ECOWAS, highlighting its evolution and significance as a regional bloc in Africa.

ECOWAS was founded on May 28, 1975, with the signing of the Treaty of Lagos by fifteen West African countries. The founding members included Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo, and The Gambia. The treaty aimed to promote economic integration and cooperation among the member states, recognizing that a unified economic strategy was crucial for the region's development and stability.

The creation of ECOWAS was driven by the recognition that collective self-sufficiency could be achieved through regional cooperation. The founders envisioned a single, large trade bloc that would enable member states to pool resources, improve trade relations, and enhance their collective bargaining power on the international stage. In 1993, the Treaty of Lagos was revised and signed in Cotonou, Benin, to address emerging challenges and further strengthen the union's framework.

ECOWAS's primary objectives are to promote economic integration, raise living standards, and enhance political cooperation among its member states. The organization aims to create a full economic and trading union by facilitating the free movement of goods, capital, and people within the region. Key objectives include:

Economic Integration: Establishing a customs union, a common market, and an eventual economic and monetary union to ensure economic stability and growth.

Political Stability: Promoting democratic governance, peace, and security in the region through conflict resolution and preventive diplomacy.

Social Development: Improving living standards by promoting social and cultural cooperation, education, and public health initiatives.

Human Rights and Justice: Upholding the principles of human rights, equity, interdependence, and social justice among member states.

ECOWAS operates on fundamental principles such as non-aggression, solidarity, and cooperation. The organization's commitment to these principles is reflected in its various protocols and action plans, such as the ECOWAS Free Movement of Persons Protocol and the Ecotour Action Plan 2019–2029, which focus on regional integration and development.

ECOWAS is structured to facilitate decision-making, implementation, and coordination of its various activities. The principal institutions within ECOWAS include:

The Authority of Heads of State and Government: The highest decision-making body, responsible for setting the strategic direction and policies of the organization.

The Council of Ministers: Comprising ministers from each member state, this body implements policies and oversees the organization's budget and programs.

The Community Parliament: A consultative body that represents the people of West Africa, providing advice on issues related to regional integration and cooperation.

The ECOWAS Commission: The executive arm responsible for implementing decisions, managing day-to-day operations, and coordinating activities across member states.

The Community Court of Justice: This judicial body ensures the interpretation and application of the ECOWAS Treaty and resolves disputes among member states.

ECOWAS also has specialized agencies and committees that focus on specific areas such as agriculture, infrastructure, and trade, facilitating collaboration and development across various sectors.

ECOWAS as a Peacekeeping Force

Beyond its economic and political objectives, ECOWAS has played a critical role as a peacekeeping force in West Africa. The organization established the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in 1990, a military intervention force designed to address political instability and unrest in member countries. ECOMOG has been deployed in several conflicts, including the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, showcasing ECOWAS's commitment to regional peace and security.

The organization's ability to respond to conflicts and promote stability has been pivotal in its efforts to maintain peace and prevent the spread of violence across borders. This peacekeeping mandate underscores ECOWAS's broader role in ensuring political stability and fostering an environment conducive to economic growth and development.

Russia's Involvement in ECOWAS Countries and Its Influence on Recent Coups

In recent years, Russia has increased its presence and influence in West Africa, particularly in ECOWAS member states. This chapter explores the nature and extent of Russia's involvement in the region, focusing on its geopolitical interests, the mechanisms through which it exercises influence, and the impact of this involvement on recent military coups in West African countries. By examining the factors contributing to Russia's growing presence and the subsequent destabilization in some ECOWAS countries, we aim to understand the broader implications for regional security and governance.

Russia's engagement in West Africa is driven by several strategic interests, including:

Expanding Influence: Russia seeks to expand its geopolitical influence in Africa as part of its broader strategy to counter Western dominance and increase its presence in global affairs. By forging alliances with African nations, Russia aims to strengthen its position on the international stage.

Access to Resources: West Africa is rich in natural resources, including minerals, oil, and gas. Russia's interest in these resources aligns with its broader economic strategy to secure access to critical raw materials and energy supplies.

Military and Security Partnerships: Russia has been actively building military and security partnerships with several African countries, offering military equipment, training, and advisory services. These partnerships serve both economic and strategic purposes, as they provide Russia with access to African markets and strengthen its military ties in the region.

Russia employs various mechanisms to exert influence in West Africa, including:

Russia has signed military cooperation agreements with several West African countries, providing arms, military training, and support. This cooperation is often framed as a means of enhancing the security capabilities of these countries, but it also serves to increase Russia's influence over their military and political institutions.

Russia has been investing in key sectors such as mining, energy, and infrastructure in West Africa. These investments not only provide economic benefits to the host countries but also create dependencies that can be leveraged for political influence.

Russia has offered diplomatic backing to certain governments and military juntas, often positioning itself as an alternative to Western powers. This support can manifest in various forms, including political endorsements, aid, and media narratives that align with the interests of its allies in the region.

Use of Private Military Companies (PMCs): The Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, has been particularly active in West Africa. It provides security services and military support to regimes facing internal challenges, often in exchange for concessions in resource-rich areas. The presence of such PMCs further extends Russia's reach and influence in the region.

Russia's growing involvement in West Africa has coincided with a series of military coups in ECOWAS member states, including Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Several factors link Russian influence to these coups:

In countries like Mali and Burkina Faso, Russian involvement has included support for military juntas that have seized power. These governments have sought Russian backing as a counterbalance to pressure from ECOWAS and Western nations for a return to democratic governance.

Russian influence often capitalizes on and amplifies existing anti-Western sentiments in the region. By portraying Western intervention as neocolonial or self-serving, Russia positions itself as a more sympathetic and supportive ally to governments facing internal and external criticism.

Insecurity and instability in West Africa, fueled by jihadist insurgencies and internal conflicts, have provided an opening for Russia to offer military assistance. This assistance, often perceived as less conditional than that provided by Western powers, has made Russian partnerships attractive to some regimes.

The increasing Russian involvement in West Africa has significant implications for ECOWAS and the region's stability:

Challenges to ECOWAS's Authority: Russian support for military juntas undermines ECOWAS's efforts to promote democratic governance and stability. The organization's

sanctions and diplomatic interventions are often countered by Russian backing, complicating ECOWAS's ability to enforce its protocols and maintain regional cohesion.

The presence of Russian PMCs (The Wagner Group) and military support can exacerbate existing conflicts and contribute to the militarization of political disputes. This dynamic risks prolonging conflicts and creating cycles of instability that hinder economic development and governance reform.

The growing influence of Russia in West Africa contributes to a broader geopolitical contest between Russia and Western powers, particularly the United States and France. This contest can lead to increased tension and division within the region, complicating efforts to address shared challenges such as security, development, and climate change.

The Future of ECOWAS: Challenges and Opportunities

As the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) navigates a rapidly changing political and economic landscape, it faces a range of challenges and opportunities that will shape its future trajectory. This chapter explores the potential future of ECOWAS by examining the internal and external factors influencing its evolution, the challenges it must overcome, and the opportunities it can leverage to strengthen regional integration and stability.

Political instability, exacerbated by military coups and governance issues, remains one of the most significant challenges for ECOWAS. Frequent changes in government disrupt the implementation of regional policies and undermine the democratic processes the organization seeks to promote. Challenges include:

Military Coups and Authoritarian Regimes: The recent spate of military coups in member states like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger underscores the fragility of democratic institutions in

the region. These events challenge ECOWAS's ability to enforce democratic norms and maintain political stability.

Weak Governance Structures: Many member states struggle with weak governance structures, corruption, and a lack of effective institutions. These issues hinder economic development and exacerbate political instability, making it difficult for ECOWAS to achieve its objectives.

While ECOWAS aims to foster economic integration, significant economic disparities and structural challenges persist across the region. Member states exhibit varying levels of economic development, with some economies heavily reliant on agriculture and others on natural resources. These disparities complicate efforts to create a unified economic and trading bloc. Despite progress, intra-regional trade remains limited due to non-tariff barriers, inadequate infrastructure, and logistical challenges. Improving connectivity and reducing trade barriers are crucial for enhancing economic integration.

High levels of youth unemployment and poverty pose significant social and economic challenges. Addressing these issues is essential for sustainable development and social stability in the region.

The proliferation of terrorism and violent extremism in West Africa poses a significant threat to regional stability and development. Groups such as Boko Haram, Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS) continue to operate in the region, undermining security and destabilizing affected areas. West Africa faces challenges from transnational criminal activities, including human trafficking, drug smuggling, and arms trade. These activities exacerbate insecurity and hinder development efforts.

External influences, such as Russia's growing presence and Western interventions, contribute to geopolitical tensions in West Africa.

The competition between global powers for influence in West Africa can lead to divisions within ECOWAS and complicate regional cooperation efforts. Reliance on external actors for

security and economic support can undermine the sovereignty and independence of member states, affecting ECOWAS's ability to pursue its regional agenda.

Conclusion

By reducing trade barriers and improving infrastructure, ECOWAS can facilitate greater economic integration and create a more robust regional market. Initiatives such as the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) offer opportunities for expanding trade and investment.

ECOWAS can leverage its collective resources to promote sustainable development initiatives, focusing on areas such as renewable energy, agriculture, and education. This approach can help address economic disparities and improve living standards. ECOWAS can play a pivotal role in supporting democratic governance by promoting electoral integrity, strengthening institutions, and encouraging transparency and accountability.

By investing in early warning systems and conflict resolution mechanisms, ECOWAS can improve its ability to prevent and respond to political crises and conflicts. ECOWAS can enhance regional security by fostering collaboration among member states to combat terrorism and transnational crime. This includes strengthening intelligence-sharing mechanisms and improving military cooperation. ECOWAS can engage strategically with global partners to ensure that external support aligns with regional priorities and respects the sovereignty of member states.

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Diversification of energy resources – review of EU energy policy and opportunities for south Caucasus countries

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Abstract: Diversification of energy resources is one of the most important challenges of the current century. Given that the world community has almost completely drained exhaustible energy resources, the search for and distribution of renewable and cheap energies plays a vital role in the countries' policies. The article reviews the policy of diversification of the energy market, the need for which was especially evident in the ongoing war in Ukraine. In this paper, we also discuss the major focus of the current energy policy of the European Union and the role of the Caucasus countries in a diversified energy market.

Keywords: renewable energy, pipeline, cooperation, diplomacy, energy hub, diversification

Globalization has strengthened competition and put the issue of ensuring energy security on the agenda, which largely depends on the diversification of markets and the creation of an energy hub. The success of this process depends on the flexibility of energy diplomacy, which is a new tool of modern economic policy (EC, 2020).

The European Union is the largest importer of energy in the world. In 2016, the level of dependence in the European Union was 54%, which means that more than half of the

energy needs of the member states were provided at the expense of imports. This figure ranges from 90% in Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus to 20% in Estonia and Denmark. The level of dependence on imports of energy carriers has increased significantly since 2000, when it was only 47% (Abdelilah and Lerouge 2023) (EC, 2022). The European Union, before the Russia-Ukraine conflict, was mainly dependent on Russian crude oil and natural gas, followed by Norway and its energy capabilities (Carlson and Coq, 2022). The current crises put on the agenda the issue of European energy security, the search for new alternative ways, the need to develop a unified approach to solving energy problems and energy security, as well as the creation of such a mechanism in which the global aspect of the energy dimension would be taken into account. The latter is a long-term objective of the EU, which takes EU energy policy to a supranational level and contributes to increasing the importance of energy cooperation for future security.

To date, the European Union has focused on the creation of energy security and national hubs in many directions, including Georgia as a gathering hub for the South Caucasus and Caspian regions, where oil/gas pipelines and electricity networks from these regions can converge.

In response to the difficulties caused by the current crises and the disruption of the global energy market, the European Commission presented the REPowerEU plan (EC, 2022), fully supported by financial and legal leverage, and aims to build the new energy infrastructure and system needed by Europe, which will increase the transfer of green energy through regional energy hubs across In Europe, massive investments in the production of renewable energies, such as hydrogen and bio-methane, encourage industry to save energy and diversify energy sources around the world (Fonte and Landini. 2023).

REPowerEU's grant budget is massive and exceeds €500 billion for 2022-2027. The action plan is two-phased and divided into short-term and long-term goals. The first phase aims

to reduce Europe's dependence on Russian energy by 2/3 in the first year of implementation, and to reduce this dependence to zero by 2027 (Eurostat, 2023). This means common purchases of natural and liquefied gas, hydrogen through the EU energy platform for all member states, as well as for Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans; New energy partnerships with trusted suppliers, renewable and low-carbon gas, acceleration of solar and wind energy projects with renewable hydrogen reservoirs, approval of the first hydrogen projects across the EU, biomethane production and more (Nouicer and Rossetto, 2020).

Within this context the region of South Caucasus goes in the focus of EU energy security and diversification policy. The South Caucasus region, particularly Azerbaijan, Georgia, and potentially Armenia, possesses diverse energy resources including natural gas, oil, and renewable energy sources like hydropower and solar energy. Leveraging these resources can provide a stable and diversified energy supply for the EU. Situated between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, the South Caucasus serves as a natural bridge for energy transit. Its geographical proximity to major energy producers in the Caspian Sea region, including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, allows for cost-effective transportation of oil and gas to European markets (Жанбулатова, 2018).

The EU has a comprehensive strategy to diversify its energy sources and supply routes, aiming to reduce reliance on imports from a single country or region (IAEA, 2021). The South Caucasus region, with its abundant energy resources and proximity to European markets, plays a key role in this diversification strategy. In this context Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) has is a crucial component of EU energy diversification efforts. The SGC involves the construction of pipelines, including the Trans Anatolian Pipeline (TANAP) and the Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), to transport natural gas from Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz field to European consumers. By tapping into Caspian Sea gas reserves, the EU aims to reduce its dependence on Russian gas imports. Expanding and modernizing the existing Infrastructure - including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the

Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) gas pipeline, this region can enhance its capacity to serve as an energy corridor to the EU.

Realizing this potential of becoming energy hub will be beneficial both for the Caucasus region and EU. Building energy infrastructure and fostering energy cooperation can stimulate economic development in the South Caucasus region, creating jobs and attracting investment. Enhanced energy cooperation can also contribute to broader regional stability and cooperation. On the other hand diversifying energy sources and supply routes as mentioned is a key priority for the EU to enhance its energy security.

In addition to traditional fossil fuels, the South Caucasus region has significant potential for renewable energy development (Keogh, Bayramov, & German, 2021-03), particularly in hydropower and solar energy, as well as emerging opportunities in wind energy. The EU supports initiatives to harness these renewable energy sources and integrate them into the European energy market (Opitz, Kharazyan, Pasoyan, Gurbanov, & Margvelashvili, 2015). Armenia and Georgia have considerable hydropower potential. Georgia is endowed with abundant water resources, making hydropower the most significant renewable energy source in the country. Rivers such as the Mtkvari, Rioni, and Alazani offer excellent hydropower potential. On the other hand, Azerbaijan and Armenia (and at less extent Georgia) receive abundant sunlight throughout the year, making solar energy an attractive renewable energy source. Azerbaijan has already implemented solar energy projects, including utility-scale solar PV installations and rooftop solar systems. Armenia has favourable conditions for solar photovoltaic (PV) installations, particularly in the Ararat Valley and other low-lying areas. Investing in renewable energy projects and the chance becoming part of REpowerUE project can promote sustainability and reduce carbon emissions in both the region and the EU.

With this regard It is necessary to create a long-term safe and reliable political balance in the South Caucasus region, the prerequisites for which already exist. Despite

geopolitical tensions in the region (Erkomaishvili and Khurtsia, 2023), Azerbaijan and Georgia have maintained relative political stability compared to other parts of the former Soviet Union. This stability provides a conducive environment for energy investment and cooperation, reducing political risks for international energy companies. Georgia is striving for EU membership, which opens the way for Azerbaijan and Armenia to receive all the benefits that will follow as a result of cooperation with the EU. In this regard, the role of Azerbaijan as the largest supplier of energy resources will be decisive. Effective cooperation among South Caucasus countries and with the EU is essential for realizing the vision of the region as an energy hub. Diplomatic efforts to resolve conflicts and build trust, along with supportive policies and agreements, can facilitate energy cooperation and infrastructure development.

In summary, the EU views the South Caucasus region as a valuable source of alternative energy supply, offering opportunities for diversification, infrastructure investment, and political cooperation. By strengthening energy ties with South Caucasus countries and tapping into their energy resources, the EU aims to enhance its energy security and promote sustainable energy development in the region.

Overall, the combination of strategic location, abundant energy resources, favourable investment climate, and growing infrastructure make the South Caucasus well-positioned to emerge as a competitive energy hub, offering significant benefits for both the region and its European partners.

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