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THE REFORMATION AND THE EMERGENCE OF RADICAL POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS GROUPS IN 17TH CENTURY BRITAIN

Costel COROBAN[*] and Mihaela-Mona COSTACHE-BOLOCAN[**]

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Abstract: This paper examines the emergence of radical political and religious groups in 17th century England, tracing their origins, beliefs, and impacts on both religious and political landscapes. The Reformation, initiated by Henry VIII and furthered by Elizabeth I, created a religious environment that fostered dissent and reform. This study explores how groups such as the Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers developed in response to the religious upheaval and in pursuit of political control over the church. Key doctrines and practices of these groups are analyzed, highlighting their diverse approaches to faith and governance. The interactions between these radical groups and the established Church of England are scrutinized, revealing the challenges and conflicts that shaped their development. The paper underscores the complex interplay between religious reform, the period's social dynamics, and political power. This nuanced perspective demonstrates how religious diversity and dissent significantly influenced English society during a transformative period in England's history.

Keywords: Reformation, radical religious groups, Puritans, Church of England, 17th century Britain

Rezumat: Acest studiu analizează apariția grupărilor politice şi religioase radicale în Anglia secolului al XVII-lea, urmărind originile, convingerile şi impactul acestora asupra peisajului religios şi politic. Reforma, inițiată de Henric al VIII-lea şi continuată de Elisabeta I, a creat un mediu religios care a favorizat disidența şi reforma. Studiul explorează modul în care grupuri precum puritanii, presbiterienii, independenții, baptiştii şi quakerii s-au dezvoltat ca reacție la frământările religioase şi a luptei pentru controlul politic asupra bisericii. Sunt analizate doctrinele şi practicile-cheie ale acestor grupuri, evidențiindu-se abordările lor diverse față de credință şi guvernare. Interacțiunile dintre aceste grupuri radicale şi Biserica Angliei sunt examinate, în încercarea de a se identifica provocările şi conflictele care le-au modelat evoluția. Studiul subliniază interacțiunea complexă dintre reforma religioasă, dinamica socială şi puterea

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politică. Această perspectivă nuanțată demonstrează cum diversitatea religioasă și disidența au influențat semnificativ societatea engleză în această perioadă de transformare care a marcat istoria Angliei.

Cuvinte cheie: Reforma, grupuri religioase radicale, puritani, Biserica Angliei, Britania secolului al XVII-lea

I. Introduction

The Reformation in England during the 16th and 17th centuries was a period of profound religious upheaval that significantly shaped English society. This study aims to explore the emergence of radical political and religious groups in 17th-century England, examining their origins, beliefs, and impact on both religious and political landscapes. The research questions guiding this paper are: How did the Reformation influence the formation of radical religious groups, such as the Presbyterians, Baptists, Mennonites, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchists and Quakers? What were the key religious doctrines and practices of these groups? How did these groups interact with and challenge the establishment, including the government and the Church of England?[1]

To address these questions, the research methodology combines primary and secondary sources, including contemporary writings and scholarly analyses. Primary sources such as religious texts and personal writings of key figures provide direct insights into the period. For example, *Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion* of the Anglican Church and Robert Browne's *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie* provide direct access to the reformed political and religious ideologies of the period. Additionally, works by influential figures like John Knox and Mary Cary Rand offer perspectives on the theological and political motivations behind various movements.

Secondary sources, including historical critiques and analyses, offer contextual understanding and interpretations of events and movements. For example, the works of John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim help contextualize the Puritan movement within broader historical trends. Angela Anderson's work on the English Civil Wars and Douglas Wilson's study of John Knox's contributions to the Reformed Church of Scotland provide detailed historical narratives and interpretations. Additionally, Max Weber's analysis of the Protestant ethic and its impact on capitalism offers a sociological perspective on the period's religious transformations. By situating the topic within the broader historiography[2], this analysis contributes to the understanding of how radical religious groups (Baptists, Mennonites, Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Fifth Monarchists and Quakers[3]) emerged as a response to the religious and political changes of the time. The study highlights the complex interplay between religious reform, social dynamics, and political power, offering a nuanced perspective on the transformative impact of the Reformation on English society.

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[1] Aspects concerning this topic were previously also considered in Mihaela Mona Bolocan, "Religious Sects in Seventeenth-Century England", *Romanian Journal of Literary Studies* 32 (2023): 911-919.

II. The English Reformation

English society at the beginning of the 17th century was significantly shaped by the upheavals of political life as well as the tensions arising from numerous religious minorities coalescing into distinct groups at this time. The profound transformations in the religious sphere can be traced back to the first half of the 16th century, during the reign of Henry VIII, who orchestrated the break between English Catholics and Rome, thus laying the foundations of Anglicanism. Since his wife, Catherine of Aragon, widow of his brother, had failed to provide a male heir, the king sought to have his marriage annulled by the Pope in order to marry Anne Boleyn, whom he hoped would bear him the long-awaited successor[4]. However, opposition came from Emperor Charles V, the Queen's nephew, who pressured the Pope into denying Henry's request. This impasse led the king to act independently of Rome.

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[2] For the Romanian historiography on early modern England see Adrian Nicolescu, *Istoria civilizatiei britanice*. Vol. 2, *Secolul al XVII-lea: 1603-1714* [Eng. trans.: *The History of British Civilization. The 17th Century*] (Iaşi: Institutul European, 2000); Corneliu Nicolescu, *Anglia şi spiritul englez* [Eng. trans.: *England and the English Spirit*] (Cluj-Napoca: CA Publishing, 2010); Camil Mureşan, *Revoluţia burgheză din Anglia* [Eng. trans.: *The Bourgeois Revolution in England*] (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1964); Costel Coroban, “Presbyterian And Jacobite ‘Spirits’ in Early Modern Scotland”, *Analele Universităţii Ovidius din Constanţa - Seria Istorie* XII, no. 12 (2015): 13-26; Costel Coroban, *Mişcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie 1688-1746* [Eng. trans.: *The Jacobite Movement in Great Britain 1688-1746*] (Târgovişte: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2011); D. Percec, Andreea Şerban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu, *Anglia elisabetană. Ghid de istorie culturală* [Eng. trans.: *Elizabethan England. Cultural History Guide*] (Timişoara: Editura Eurostampa, 2010) and D. Percec, Andreea Serban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu, *De la Anglia la Marea Britanie. Vol. 1, Anglia Elisabetană* [Eng. trans.: *From England to Great Britain. Elizabethan England*] (Timişoara: Editura Universităţii de Vest, 2020); D. Percec, Andreea Şerban, and Andreea Vertes-Olteanu. *Anglia elisabetană. Ghid de istorie culturală* [Eng. trans.: *Elizabethan England. Cultural History Guide*] (Timişoara: Editura Eurostampa, 2010).; A. Mărăşescu, *The History of England and Its Reflection in Literature* (Craiova: Editura Universitaria, 2018). For the Western historiography translated into Romanian see G. M. Trevelyan, *Istoria ilustrată a Angliei* [Eng. trans.: *The Illustrated History of England*], translated by Dan Hurmuzescu (Bucureşti: Editura Ştiinţifică, 1975); André Maurois, *Istoria Angliei* [Eng. trans.: *The History of England*] (Bucureşti: Editura Orizonturi, 2006); Angela Anderson, *Războaiele civile (1640-1649)* [Eng. trans.: *The Civil Wars (1640-1649)*] (Bucureşti: Editura All, 2002); Borislav Pekic. *O istorie sentimentală a Imperiului Britanic* [Eng. trans.: *A Sentimental History of the British Empire*], translated by Constantin Ghirdă (Bucureşti: Editura Historia, 2008); Antonia Fraser, *Cromwell (Vols. I-II),* trans. Mihai Livescu and edited by Camil Mureşan (Bucureşti: Editura Politică, 1982); J. Hawes, *O scurtă istorie a Angliei. De la Cezar la Brexit* [Eng. trans.: *A Short History of England. From Caesar to Brexit*], translated by Ondine-Cristina Dăscăliţa (Bucureşti: Editura Trei, 2022); and H. Clout, *Istoria Londrei* [Eng. trans.: *The History of London*], translated by Maria Micaela Neculai (Bucureşti: Editura Corint, 1999).

[3] Mainstream political groups such as the Whigs and Tories are not treated here. For these see Costel Coroban, “Whigs, Tories and Jacobites during the Reign of King George I (1714-1727)”, *Analele Universităţii „Ovidius” Seria Istorie* 5 (2008): 9-26.

On January 25, 1533, Henry VIII secretly married Anne Boleyn, in a ceremony officiated by Thomas Cranmer, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury[5]. This act triggered Henry's excommunication and formalized the English Church's break from Rome. In the period that followed, Parliament approved all the king's measures against the Catholic Church. The most significant was the *Act of Supremacy*, passed in 1534, which declared the king the sole and supreme head of the Church of England, demoting the Pope to the status of "Bishop of Rome"[6]. This religious reform ushered in sweeping changes: the number of lay clergy increased, Latin was replaced by English in religious services, ecclesiastical courts were abolished, and the groundwork was laid for the printing of prayer books in English. Catholic priests and monks who resisted these measures were accused of treason. Between 1536 and 1539, Catholic monastic institutions were dissolved[7], their properties sold, and their lands were redistributed to loyal nobles. The clergy associated with these institutions left England[8]. One concrete consequence of this redistribution of church wealth and land was the strengthening of the gentry – a class that would come to be prominently represented in the House of Commons[9].

Despite the sweeping transformations, the new religion did not undergo profound structural changes. The Anglican rite closely resembled the services conducted in Catholic churches, and the organization of the Anglican Church remained rooted in an episcopal hierarchy. However, within this framework, the episcopate was entirely subordinate to the crown and served the interests of the monarchy, effectively functioning as a key institution of the state. This religious evolution facilitated the spread of Protestantism in England, though it developed with its own distinct characteristics and was marked by numerous internal divisions. These divisions arose primarily from the diverse interpretations and readings of the Bible by various groups[10]. Although Catholic persecution defined much of the period, Protestant groups also faced harsh measures as in the case of one early English reformer, William Tyndale, who was burned at the stake for translating and printing the Bible in English[11].

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[4] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 294.

[5] John Miller, *Early Modern Britain, 1450-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 120.

[6] Ibid., 121.

[7] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 2.

[8] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 300.

[9] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 3.

[10] Ibid.

Religious reform continued under the reign of Elizabeth I. Shortly after ascending the throne in 1559, Parliament once again passed the *Act of Supremacy*, which abolished papal authority, along with the *Act of Uniformity*. The latter redefined the monarch's title from "Supreme Head of the Church" to "Governor of the Church"[12]. These acts also legitimized the use of the vernacular in religious services and prayer books[13]. Queen Elizabeth aimed to establish a middle path between Catholic and Protestant doctrines, appealing to English subjects who valued Catholic rituals but rejected papal authority and the Latin language. These individuals were more loyal to their sovereign than to any religious institution. Nonetheless, the queen also imposed penalties on those who continued to recognize papal supremacy, chief among them being the confiscation of property[14].

In 1563, the *Forty-Two Articles*, originally drafted in 1553 by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer under King Edward VI, were revised and reissued as the *Thirty-Nine Articles*. This document formally defined the core liturgical and doctrinal principles of the Anglican Church[15]. However, the text only partially fulfilled the expectations of the Puritans, who demanded the complete abolition of episcopal hierarchy and its accompanying cathedrals[16]. Puritanism represented the English expression of Calvinism and advocated for a purification of Anglicanism by removing all remnants of Catholic doctrine, liturgy, and church structure. Central to Puritan theology was the concept of predestination, the belief that salvation or damnation in the afterlife is determined by a divine decree from birth and cannot be altered by human actions. According to this doctrine, the success or failure of one's earthly endeavors served as evidence of divine favor or disfavor.

During Elizabeth I's reign, the Puritans succeeded in introducing legislative proposals in Parliament aimed at thoroughly reforming the Anglican Church. Their objective was to shift church authority to parish ministers elected by their congregations, following the model established by John Calvin in Geneva and already implemented by John Knox in Scotland[17]. In response to this pressure to purge the Church of England of all Catholic elements, the queen resisted firmly. Determined to preserve the monarchy's control over the church, Elizabeth rejected such initiatives and maintained the episcopal system, as bishops were appointed by the crown. This policy was later continued by James I, despite his Calvinist education that raised Puritan hopes in the early stages of his reign[18].

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[11] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 301.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid., 321.
[14] Ibid., 325.
[15] Geta Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane, noi începuturi pe pământ nord-american* (Oradea: Editura Ratio et Revelatio, 2020), 57.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Anderson, *Războaiele civile,* 31.

The adoption of the *Thirty-Nine Articles* prompted the return of some Protestant exiles who had fled England during the reign of Mary I (1553–1558), also known as "Bloody Mary". Among them was the Protestant cleric John Foxe, author of *Actes and Monuments*, a work that documented the martyrdoms of English Protestants and helped shape national identity around the idea of England as God's chosen nation[19]. This belief would later be carried across the Atlantic by Puritans who left England for the American continent half a century later, bringing with them the notion of divine election to the New World[20]. An analysis of these developments reveals that at the beginning of her reign, Queen Elizabeth did not pursue a forceful policy against the Catholics; she neither aggressively suppressed them nor made significant concessions to the Calvinists[21]. However, her stance toward the Catholics hardened considerably after her excommunication by the Pope in 1570. In the aftermath, she became equally uncompromising with radical Protestants, imposing severe penalties to silence their dissent[22].

Subsequently, when James I Stuart ascended the throne, several petitions were submitted calling for reform within the Anglican Church. The king initially responded with tolerance to the more moderate requests. However, James took a firm stand against radical demands, especially as he increasingly viewed extreme Puritans as a threat to political stability and actively sought to diminish their influence[23]. Against the backdrop of the religious tensions marking the 17th century, numerous religious sects emerged across England, both in rural and urban areas. Many of these sects operated outside the established parish system, some defined themselves by strict doctrines, while others were named after their charismatic leaders[24]. Frequently, these groups sought to assert their beliefs not only spiritually but also politically.

Amid these disputes, several distinct religious minorities began to establish themselves in England. One such group was the Presbyterians, the Scottish variant of Protestantism. This denomination, often characterized by a somewhat utopian vision, emphasized the need for a uniform ecclesiastical structure and for magistrates to wield greater authority[25]. A defining feature of Presbyterianism was its vigorous opposition to bishops and cathedrals, though it did not completely reject ecclesiastical hierarchy. Instead, it proposed a system in which local pastors represented territorial units within a collective governing body, thus preserving an organizational structure, albeit one exercised through shared leadership[26]. Presbyterians were known for their austerity and simplicity. They dressed modestly, typically in black garments with white collars and wore wide-brimmed, pointed hats, which they famously refused to remove as a sign of politeness or deference.

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[18] Ibid.

[19] Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 58.

[20] Ibid., 59.

[21] Ibid., 60.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Tom Webster, "Early Stuart Puritanism", in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 50.

[24] John Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution", in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and P.C.H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 77.

Notably, John Knox had begun preaching the Reformed faith in Scotland as early as 1547. However, his mission was interrupted when he was captured and imprisoned in France[27]. Following his release, secured through English intervention, he continued his ministry in England, though this attempt was once again disrupted by the accession of the notorious Mary I Tudor[28]. Facing renewed persecution, Knox fled to Geneva, where he published a polemical work titled *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*. In it, he fiercely criticized the tyrannical rule of Mary Stuart, but his views also provoked discontent among other female monarchs of the time, including Elizabeth I and Catherine de' Medici[29].

Knox's efforts were instrumental in the establishment of the Reformed Church of Scotland, known as the *Kirk*, which around 1560 had become the dominant faith in the country[30]. Its position was officially cemented in 1567, when the Scottish Parliament passed legislation recognizing it as the national church, complete with a well-defined organizational structure[31].

While Presbyterianism found legitimacy and wide acceptance in Scotland, its spread into England was met with resistance as the Anglican Church regarded its followers with deep suspicion and hostility[32]. Nevertheless, certain social groups, particularly the rising gentry and the urban bourgeoisie, welcomed Presbyterianism. They viewed its structure as a challenge to the monarchy's authority and appreciated its simplified rites, which translated into lower church-related expenses.

Another significant religious minority that emerged between 1580 and 1590 was the *Congregationalists*, also known as *Independents*. This movement was founded by preacher Robert Browne (c. 1550-1633) and Robert Harrison (d.

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[25] Ibid., 69.
[26] Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 69.
[27] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie,* 58.
[28] Ibid., 58.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Douglas Wilson, *For Kirk and Covenant. The Stalwart Courage of John Knox* (Moscow-Idaho: Blog & Mablog Press, 2020), 79.
[31] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită din Marea Britanie,* 59.
[32] Ibid.

1585), who established the first separatist church in Norwich in 1581 and held services in private homes[33]. Facing persecution in early 17th century England, many Independents fled to the Netherlands. Some later returned and, in search of religious freedom, boarded the *Mayflower*, eventually settling in New England[34]. Far more radical than the Presbyterians, the Independents rejected both the Anglican and Presbyterian churches[35]. They denied all hierarchical systems, asserting that each congregation should remain autonomous and not be subordinate to any larger religious institution[36]. In their view, a true church could not be modeled on existing institutions but had to emerge through a voluntary act of separation, a deliberate break by believers united solely by the fellowship of the Gospel[37]. Despite rejecting hierarchy, the Independents were not devoid of authority given that their clergy exerted substantial influence over congregations, derived from their deep dedication to daily preaching and rigorous study of the Bible[38]. Consequently, the governance system of Independent churches, led by representatives elected solely by the congregation, was in fact highly authoritative and its decisions were considered binding.

III. Emerging Political and Religious Movements

Doctrinal rivalries between the Independents and the Presbyterians also spilled over into the political arena, particularly during the mid-17th century, in the time of the English Civil War. Despite being fewer in number and less popular overall, the Independents managed to distinguish themselves by leveraging personal prestige and demonstrating effective administrative strategies, which enabled them to gain control over the most influential parliamentary counties[39]. This political and religious ascendancy of the Independent Church laid the groundwork for the rise of Oliver Cromwell[40].

During the same period, a variety of new religious sects began to emerge across England, both in rural and urban areas, operating outside the traditional parish system. Some, like the Baptists, were doctrinal in nature, while others took their names from their charismatic leaders[41]. Many of these groups also sought to assert their beliefs in the political sphere.

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[33] Robert Browne, *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarying for Anie* (Middleburgh: 1582, republished in London: Congregational Historical Society, 1903), 6.

[34] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei*, 367.

[35] Ibid., 366.

[36] Dumitriu, *Puritani și puritane*, 70.

[37] Ibid.

[38] Ibid., 74.

[39] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită*, 82.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution"*,* 77.

The *Baptists* formed a distinct religious minority, likely founded by John Smyth (c. 1554 - c. August 28, 1612), who famously baptized himself in 1609. This group practiced adult baptism and regarded the church solely as a fellowship of reborn believers[42]. Around 1640, there were approximately forty Baptist congregations in England, ten of which were located in London alone. Their numbers grew rapidly, and by 1660, around 250 congregations were recorded, comprising roughly of 25,000 members, or about 0.47% of the total English population[43].

The *Mennonites* in England were a branch of the Anabaptist movement, a radical Protestant sect that rejected infant baptism and championed the separation of church and state. They took their name from Menno Simons (c. 1496 - January 31, 1561), a former Dutch Catholic priest who became a key figure in the Anabaptist tradition. While the Mennonites themselves never gained widespread traction in England, their theological principles significantly influenced the formation and evolution of the Baptist denomination.

Another influential group that emerged during this tumultuous period was the *Levellers*, who formed a political movement in 1647. The Levellers advocated for political equality, asserting that all men are born free and should be governed only through their own consent[44]. The group's most notable leaders, John Lilburne (c. 1614 - August 29, 1657), Richard Overton, William Walwyn, and John Wildman, were also prolific political pamphleteers, widely known for their writings and activism[45].

The *Diggers,* also known as the "True Levellers", were organized into a community led by Gerrard Winstanley (baptized October 19, 1609 - September 10, 1676). They emerged from the Baptist church, though their beliefs aligned more closely with those of the Anabaptist movements than with Mennonite teachings[46]. The Diggers championed absolute equality among all people, arguing that no material distinctions should exist. Accordingly, they believed that property should be held in common and used collectively by the entire community[47]. The Diggers have often been regarded as forerunners of the communist ideology, after all, Winstanley himself is the eighth figure listed on Moscow's "Revolutionary Column", a monument commemorating ideological precursors to socialism. However, the philosophical roots of the Digger movement are more accurately traced to the harsh aftermath of the English Civil War, marked by widespread poverty, economic collapse, disease, and general deprivation[48]. Furthermore, the Diggers' message emphasized that only those spiritually transformed – "enlightened", in their terms – were capable of renouncing worldly possessions and embracing communal life[49].

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[42] Max Weber, *Etica protestantă și spiritul capitalismului* (București: Editura Antet Revolution, 2012; orig. *Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus*, 1905), 79.

[43] Arriel Hessayon, "Early modern Communism: The Diggers and the Community of Goods", *Journal for the Study of Radicalism* 3, no. 2 (2009): 15.

[44] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 83.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Hessayon, "Early modern Communism," 32.

[47] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 83.

The *Ranters* were another radical and controversial millenarian group whose very existence has been subject to debate, due to the scarcity of verifiable historical records. Nonetheless, they appear to have emerged as a rebellious reaction to the prevailing Puritan order of English society, whose strict values they openly rejected. Composed largely of the lower social classes, the Ranters had no cohesive doctrine and were often poorly educated. Their worldview was shaped more by instinct than by structured theology or logic[50]. The Ranters claimed to be liberated from all societal constraints and were notorious for behaviors that scandalized contemporary England as drinking, smoking, blasphemy, adultery, and offensive speech were among the charges laid against them. Some even declared that one could not be freed from sin until one had committed every sin[51]. Their provocative conduct suggested that they either embraced or were indifferent to their social marginalization, considering themselves above conventional norms[52].

Between 1645 and 1660, the Ranters were active in London, where they reportedly held gatherings in taverns, and in various regions including Lancashire, Yorkshire, Warwick, Leicester, Norfolk, Suffolk, Sussex, Hampshire, Wiltshire, Bristol and Dorset[53]. While their exact numbers remain unknown, estimates suggest they never exceeded a few thousand. The group's most notable figures included Joseph Salmon, Jacob Bauthumley, Lodowicke Muggleton, Laurence Clarkson, and Abiezer Coppe, the latter perhaps the most infamous, known for his provocative sermons delivered in the nude.

In response to the Ranters perceived threat, the authorities took harsh measures. In 1648, for example, Parliament ordered the public burning of two Ranter publications: *A Fiery Flying Roll* by Abiezer Coppe and *A Rout, A Rout* by Joseph Salmon[54]. Politically, both texts rejected established authority, including church and state, advocating instead for a spiritual and social upheaval grounded in divine inspiration. Coppe's *Fiery Flying Roll* fiercely denounced wealth inequality, property ownership, and the oppression of the poor, promoting radical egalitarianism and spiritual liberty. He used blasphemous and prophetic language to shock readers into questioning religious and moral conventions. Salmon's *A Rout, A Rout* similarly attacked religious hypocrisy and legalism, presenting a vision of spiritual warfare where traditional institutions were overthrown in favor of direct, personal communion with the divine. He emphasized liberty of conscience and millenarian hopes, suggesting the imminent arrival of a new spiritual age. Both authors saw inner enlightenment as the true source of authority, rather than law, clergy, or scripture. Their works reflect a broader frustration with the failure of the English Revolution to bring about genuine change, expressing a deep desire for not just political reform but a total transformation of society, grounded in divine justice, equality, and freedom from external control.

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[48] Hessayon, "Early modern Communism," 32.
[49] Ibid.
[50] G. F. S. Ellens, "The Ranters Ranting: Reflections on a Ranting Counter Culture", *Church History* 40, no. 1 (1971): 94.
[51] Ibid., 91.
[52] Ibid., 98.
[53] Ibid., 92.
[54] Ibid., 94.

Another sect that emerged during this period was the *Fifth Monarchists*, a millenarian movement that appeared during the Republic and continued to exist throughout the Protectorate, until 1660. The beliefs of these millenarians were deeply rooted in biblical prophecy, particularly in Chapter 7 of the Book of Daniel and Chapter 12 of the Book of Revelation. They interpreted these texts to identify the four beasts of Daniel's vision with four ancient empires: Babylon, the Persian Empire, the Macedonian Empire, and the Roman Empire[55]. Moreover, their prophetic calculations suggested that the beast would reign for 1,260 years, starting from 396 AD, a year they regarded as marking the end of paganism. This led them to predict that the Fifth Monarchy – the thousand-year reign of Christ and the kingdom of the saints – would begin in 1656, following the fall of the Babylonian beast[56].

Among all Puritan sects, the Fifth Monarchists stood out for the profound political implications of their beliefs. They aspired to transform the Stuart-ruled kingdom into a holy kingdom governed directly by Christ. As a first step towards this goal, they supported the summoning of the Nominated Assembly – also known as the Barebones Parliament, after one of its members – which was established in June 1653. This assembly consisted of 140 members appointed by independent church congregations. However, the assembly will be dissolved after only two months due to the radicalism of its members[57].

For the Fifth Monarchists, the dissolution of this parliament represented a betrayal, both on the part of Oliver Cromwell and of the New Model Army. They later denounced Cromwell's assumption of the title of Lord Protector, and their pamphlets and sermons, aimed at discrediting the Protectorate, ultimately worked against them and, soon, their activities attracted increased surveillance[58]. Repeatedly, due to their radical political views, members of this sect were arrested and regarded as a threat to state security. Charismatic leaders such as John Rogers, Christopher Feake, and Thomas Harrison spent long periods in prison. They were even accused by John Thurloe, Secretary of the Council of State, of plotting to seize political power[59].

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[55] Leo F. Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men: Politics and the Milennium", *Church History* 30, no. 3 (1961): 315.

[56] Ibid., 318.

[57] Coroban, *Politică și alegeri în Anglia,* 24.

[58] Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men," 318.

One notable figure within the ranks of the Fifth Monarchists was a woman, Mary Cary Rand (c. 1621-1653), a writer and pamphleteer who argued that prophetic gifts were not reserved solely for men. Her works reflect many of the key ideas of the movement, among them the belief that the Church of Rome, along with its successor, the Anglican Church, had reached their end, and that political power should be exercised by an elite group predestined to rule[60]. In her *Epistle to the Reader*, which prefaces her 1648 work, *The Resurrection…*, Cary asserts that God's promise of deliverance had been fulfilled during the Civil War. She claims that a true understanding of these events – grasping their biblical significance – would lead to genuine faith. However, Rand acknowledges that this deeper meaning is difficult to access unless one is among the saints; nevertheless, through dedicated study and great effort, one could reach such understanding and, in doing so, achieve sanctity[61]. Even John Bunyan, the renowned Baptist preacher, appears to have shared some of the views of this sect at one point, as evidenced by certain passages in his work *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ*[62].

The *Quakers*, also known as the Society of Friends[63] – sometimes referred to as "tremblers" because their whole bodies would shake in moments of religious ecstasy as they awaited the descent of the Holy Spirit[64] – represented another significant nonconformist group. For them, faith was an intensely personal, inner experience, and they rejected many practices of the established church, including the ordination of priests[65]. Quakers advocated asceticism, discipline, hard work, sobriety, and pacifism, refusing to live in submission to earthly authorities and instead forming free, self-governing communities[66].

During the Protectorate, the Quakers became the most widespread sect, but their beliefs and behavior led them to be perceived as rebellious and, as a result, they faced persecution. They refused to participate in warfare, denied all ecclesiastical authority, would not swear oaths[67], and rejected outward signs of deference by refusing to remove their hats, kneel, bow, or address anyone in the formal second-person plural[68]. Even wealthier Quakers instructed their children to pursue education and learn a trade, though not for material gain, but in the service of ethical ideals. They permitted only a few forms of recreation, such as visiting friends, reading history books, conducting scientific experiments, gardening, or engaging in business-related conversations[69].

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[59] Ibid., 319.
[60] Alfred Cohen, "The Fifth Monarchy. Mind, Mary Cary and the Origin of Totalitariansm", *Social Research* 31, no. 2 (1964): 200.
[61] Ibid., 201.
[62] Richard L. Graves, "John Bunyan and The Fifth Monarchists", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 13, no. 2 (1981): 83–84.
[63] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită,* 84.
[64] Weber, *Etica protestantă,* 122.
[65] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 429.
[66] Coroban, *Mișcarea iacobită*, 122.
[67] Maurois, *Istoria Angliei,* 367.
[68] Weber, *Etica protestantă,* 243.

Many of those who joined the Quakers had previously been Levellers, Diggers, Baptists, or adherents of the Fifth Monarchy movement[70]. They published their ideas openly, signing their pamphlets with their real names, despite the risk of persecution or even arrest for their beliefs[71]. Faced with increasing repression, many of them sought refuge in North America, settling primarily in New England, where they continued to preach their anti-clerical ideology, a practice they refused to abandon, even after four of their missionaries were executed in 1659[72].

The founder of this millenarian sect was George Fox (July 1624 - January 13, 1691), a preacher of humble origins, who – at a time when religion had become highly theoretical and abstract – brought forth a new vision of faith, grounded in a practical ideology that spoke directly to a society searching for an alternative path. In this context, Fox proclaimed that the Day of the Lord was near, and that Christ would return to instruct his disciples personally. Therefore, believers no longer needed external teachings, for divine wisdom was being directly instilled within them by God; they could rely on their inner spiritual experiences to guide them in perfect harmony with the divine will[73].

This idea granted each Quaker a vital, individual role in the spiritual and moral evolution of humanity (their "day-to-day cross"[74]) and explained Fox's contempt for earthly authorities, his constant criticism of them, and the promotion of the belief that the world would be far better governed if power were held by his followers[75]. Guided by spiritual experience, Fox used the religious convictions that animated the Quakers as a means to accuse and judge his political opponents, whom he admonished in his pamphlets, warning them that failure to abide would lead only to ruin, ignorance, and ultimately to destruction in a lake of fire. In his view, only God's laws could govern effectively in such times, while the laws of the state were of no real value[76]. His criticism spared no one, not the soldiers engaged in military service, neither the inhabitants of other Western European countries, nor the wealthy, whom he condemned for adorning themselves with gold and wasting their lives on what he considered frivolous and useless activities. Fox proclaimed that such practices would cease once the Quakers came to power and would govern the world[77].

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[69] Ibid., 244.
[70] Morrill, "The Puritan Revolution", 79.
[71] Ibid., 83.
[72] Solt, "The Fifth Monarchy Men", 302.
[73] Larry H. Ingle, "George Fox, Milenarian", *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 24, no. 2 (1992): 263-268.
[74] Coroban, "The Quakers", 290.
[75] Ingle, "George Fox, Milenarian", 264.
[76] Ibid., 267.

A notable case is that of one of George Fox's most prominent disciples – William Penn (October 24, 1644 - August 10, 1718). At the age of 22, Penn embraced the Quaker movement, and for the next twelve years he dedicated himself to publishing numerous pamphlets in which he criticized the political system, the laws of the land, and the hierarchical structure of the Church, while fervently promoting the ideals of the sect. His outspoken views led to repeated arrests and imprisonment, including time spent in Newgate Prison and the Tower of London. During these incarcerations, Penn challenged the legality of his trials and denounced the abuses and violations of his rights, rights which, he argued, had been guaranteed since the drafting of the Magna Carta[78]. In 1676, as King Charles II owed William Penn's father, a distinguished admiral, the sum of £16,000, the monarch granted Penn a vast tract of land west of the Delaware River, in the territory that lies today between New York and Maryland. Penn had originally wished to name this land New Wales or Sylvania; however, the king insisted on calling it Pennsylvania, in honor of Admiral Penn, his loyal servant[79]. A year later, a group of six Quakers, including William Penn himself, signed a letter declaring that in this new land they had finally found peace and religious freedom. In 1681, William Penn would formally establish an English colony there, a community rooted in the principles of tolerance, equality, and liberty of conscience[80].

IV. Conclusion

The Reformation in England during the 16th and 17th centuries was a catalyst for the emergence of radical religious groups, profoundly influencing the religious and political landscape of the time. This analysis explored the origins, beliefs, and impact of these groups, seeking to address the research questions posed in the introduction. The Reformation's influence on the formation of radical religious groups was multifaceted. The break from Rome initiated by Henry VIII and the subsequent establishment of the Church of England created a religious environment ripe for dissent and reform. The introduction of the *Act of Supremacy* and the *Act of Uniformity* under Elizabeth I further solidified the Anglican Church's dominance but also alienated those who sought more radical reforms. This environment of religious upheaval and state control over the church provided fertile ground for the emergence of groups such as the Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, Baptists, and Quakers, each seeking to purify or radically alter the existing religious structures.

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[77] Ibid., 268.

[78] William Wistar Comfort, "William Penn's Religious Background." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 68, no. 4 (1944), 344.

[79] Ibid., 346.

[80] Ibid., 347.

The key religious and political doctrines and practices of these groups varied significantly. Puritans, for instance, emphasized predestination and sought to eliminate remnants of Catholicism from Anglican practices. Presbyterians advocated for a church governed by elected elders rather than bishops, reflecting their desire for a more democratic ecclesiastical structure. Independents, or Congregationalists, rejected all hierarchical systems, insisting on the autonomy of each congregation. Baptists introduced the practice of adult baptism, emphasizing personal faith and rebirth. The Quakers, or the Society of Friends, focused on inner spiritual experience and rejected formal sacraments and clergy, advocating for pacifism and equality.

These groups interacted with and challenged the established Church of England in various ways. The Puritans, through their legislative efforts in Parliament, sought to reform the church from within but faced resistance from the monarchy. Presbyterians and Independents often found themselves in direct conflict with the Anglican establishment, leading to periods of persecution and exile. The Baptists and Quakers, with their radical beliefs and practices, faced significant government opposition and were often marginalized or persecuted. Despite these challenges, these groups persisted, contributing to the rich tapestry of political and religious diversity in England.

By situating the topic within the broader historiography of 17th century Britain, this study has highlighted the complex interplay between religious reform, social dynamics, and political power. The emergence of radical religious groups was not merely a reaction to religious changes of the period but was deeply intertwined with the social and political transformations of the time. This study offered a nuanced perspective on the transformative impact of the Reformation on English society and politics, demonstrating how religious dissent and diversity shaped the course of English history.

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EXPLAINING THE ALGERIAN–FRENCH CRISIS (2019-2025): FROM COLONIAL MEMORY TO STRATEGIC DIVERGENCE

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Abstract: This article examines the persistent deterioration of Algerian-French relations between 2019 and 2025, arguing that the crisis stems from the interplay between unresolved colonial legacies and structurally divergent strategic imperatives. Rather than a sequence of isolated diplomatic disputes, the rupture is interpreted as a structural phenomenon embedded in long-standing historical grievances, asymmetrical power perceptions, and shifting regional dynamics. France's oscillating posture toward its colonial past – marked by selective symbolic overtures without comprehensive reconciliation – has perpetuated mistrust and hindered the normalization of bilateral ties. In parallel, Algeria's post-Hirak political trajectory has reinforced a doctrine of sovereignty preservation, accompanied by a deliberate diversification of external partnerships to reduce reliance on traditional interlocutors. Strategic incompatibilities have been further magnified in the Maghreb-Sahel security sphere, where France's preference for force projection contrasts sharply with Algeria's advocacy for political dialogue and regionally owned security mechanisms. Analytically, the study applies a dual theoretical lens: it uses postcolonial theory to elucidate the symbolic and identity-based undercurrents of the crisis and provides a neoclassical realism reading of the events to account for how domestic political constraints, leadership perceptions, and systemic shifts converge in shaping foreign policy choices. The findings indicate a gradual transformation of the bilateral relationship from symbolic estrangement to strategic disengagement, reflecting a broader regional reconfiguration toward multipolarity, with Algeria emerging as an increasingly autonomous regional actor and France confronting its diminishing leverage in the region.

Keywords: Algeria, post-Hirak government, colonial memory, political crisis, far-right, France, Security of the Maghreb-Sahel region

Rezumat: Acest articol examinează deteriorarea continuă a relațiilor algeriano-franceze între 2019 și 2025, argumentând că această criză provine din interacțiunea dintre

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moştenirile coloniale nerezolvate şi imperativele strategice structural divergente ale celor două state. Ruptura nu este doar o secvență de dispute diplomatice izolate, ci aceasta trebuie interpretată ca un fenomen structural înrădăcinat în nemulțumiri istorice de lungă durată, percepțiile asimetrice ale puterii precum şi dinamicii regionale în schimbare. Postura oscilantă a Franței față de trecutul său colonial – marcată de deschideri simbolice selective, fără o reconciliere cuprinzătoare – a perpetuat neîncrederea şi a împiedicat normalizarea legăturilor bilaterale. În paralel, traiectoria politică post-Hirak a Algeriei a consolidat o doctrină a conservării suveranității, însoțită de o diversificare deliberată a parteneriatelor externe pentru a reduce dependența de interlocutorii tradiționali. Incompatibilitățile strategice au fost amplificate şi mai mult în sfera de securitate Maghreb-Sahel, unde preferința Franței pentru proiectarea forței contrastează cu pledoaria Algeriei pentru dialog politic şi mecanisme de securitate la nivel regional. Din punct de vedere analitic, studiul aplică o dublă perspectivă teoretică: utilizează teoria postcolonială pentru a înțelege dinamica subiacentă simbolică şi identitară a crizei şi oferă o analiză realistă neoclasică a evenimentelor pentru a explica modul în care constrângerile politice interne, percepțiile asupra conducerii şi schimbările sistemice converg în modelarea deciziilor de politică externă. Rezultatele cercetării indică o transformare treptată a relației bilaterale de la înstrăinare simbolică la dezangajare strategică, reflectând o reconfigurare regională mai amplă către multipolaritate, Algeria devenind un actor regional din ce în ce mai autonom, în timp ce Franța se confruntă cu o influență diminuată în regiune.

Cuvinte cheie: Algeria, guvernarea post-Hirak memorie colonială, criză politică, extrema dreaptă, Franța, securitatea regiunii Maghreb-Sahel

I. Introduction

Algerian-French relations have long been shaped by a complex nexus of memory, identity, and power, with postcolonial legacies sustaining structural asymmetries and symbolic tensions at the core of the bilateral relationship. In the aftermath of decolonization, unresolved colonial memories, contested sovereignty claims, and divergent national narratives entrenched a cycle of recurrent diplomatic ruptures, periodically interrupted by pragmatic cooperation in areas such as security, energy, and trade. This oscillation between engagement and confrontation persisted as a latent fault line, reactivated through episodic crises, mutual recriminations, and alternating phases of rapprochement and estrangement.

However, since 2019 the relationship has entered a qualitatively distinct phase, marked not merely by intensified disputes but by a structural reconfiguration of the bilateral landscape. What had previously been intermittent tensions has transformed into a sustained and multidimensional crisis, driven by the convergence of three novel dynamics: 1) the domestic political transitions triggered by the 2019 Hirak movement (Revolution of

Smiles), which redefined Algeria's foreign policy posture and discursive identity; 2) the erosion of diplomatic trust and sharper rhetorical confrontations between the two states; 3) the widening geopolitical divergence over strategic priorities in the Maghreb and the Sahel[1].

This combination distinguishes the 2019–2025 period from earlier phases. Symbolic disputes over colonial memory are now increasingly entwined with shifting regional alignments, leading to deeper and more persistent forms of contention. Although the literature addresses postcolonial memory politics in Algerian-French relations[2], scholarly engagement with this recent, highly fluid period remains limited, especially regarding how the symbolic and strategic dimensions intersect during moments of acute bilateral strain. Existing studies[3] treat these domains separately, thereby overlooking the ways in which they have become mutually reinforcing since 2019.

The novelty of the current period is further characterized by broader geostrategic transformations in the Mediterranean region and Africa. Intensified competition over energy corridors, recalibrated security partnerships, and the restructuring of Euro-African relations in the wake of the Ukraine war have reshaped the strategic calculus of both Algeria and France. These shifts have amplified disputes over sovereignty, regional influence, and security cooperation, while simultaneously reactivating longstanding postcolonial grievances. As a result, the 2019-2025 crisis is embedded in a fundamentally altered strategic environment, one in which memory politics, identity narratives, and geopolitical rivalries are deeply intertwined.

Against this backdrop, the central research question guiding this study is: *How can the Algerian-French crisis (2019–2025) be explained considering the historical depth of the relationship and the intensifying divergence in their strategic trajectories, while accounting for the symbolic legacies of colonialism and evolving regional geostrategic contexts?* From this overarching inquiry emerge the following sub-questions: How do unresolved colonial memories and competing identity narratives influence the perceptions and diplomatic conduct of both states during the current crisis?; In what ways have domestic political dynamics within Algeria and France shaped their foreign policy choices between 2019 and 2025?; How have regional and international developments – including post-Ukraine shifts in Euro-African relations and evolving geopolitics in the Maghreb and Sahel – interacted with symbolic disputes to exacerbate bilateral tensions?; and finally: To what extent does the interplay between symbolic dimensions (memory, identity) and strategic considerations (security, influence, energy) account for the persistence and structural nature of the crisis?

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[1] Brahim Oumansour, "Relations franco-algériennes: derrière la désescalade des tensions, quels enjeux?", *Institut de relations internationales et stratégiques*, April 14, 2025, https://www.iris-france.org/relations-franco-algeriennes-derriere-la-desescalade-des-tensions-quels-enjeux/

[2] Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006); Phillip C. Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonization and Transformation* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2024); Jill Jarvis, *Decolonizing Memory: Algeria and the Politics of Testimony* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021); Belkacem Belmekki and Ahlem Fidouh, "Algeria, France: Complex Relations and a Lasting Trauma of Colonialism", *The Historian* 86, no. 4 (2024/25): 356.

[3] Frédéric Charillon, "La relation franco-algérienne au regard de l'analyse de politique étrangère", *Questions internationales* 81 (September-October 2016): 97-108; Laurence Thieux and Rachid Farrah, "Algeria and Western Sahara: Reactivating the Principle of Just Cause in the Post Hirak Era", *The Journal of North African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2025): 228; Michael J. Willis, "Algeria and the Outside World: Foreign Policy and Relations in a Transformed Regional Environment," in *Algeria: Politics and Society from the Dark Decade to the Hirak*, ed. Michael J. Willis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 335-402.

The study advances the hypothesis that the current crisis is dual in nature: rooted simultaneously in the enduring symbolic weight of unresolved colonial memory and identity disputes, and in an increasing incompatibility of geopolitical orientations, particularly in North Africa and the Sahel. This divergence has been sharpened by Europe's evolving energy and security imperatives in the aftermath of the Ukraine crisis, fostering renewed competition for influence in Africa, with Algeria pursuing strategic diversification and France seeking to preserve its traditional spheres of influence.

To adequately address this multidimensional entanglement of symbolic and strategic factors, the study adopts an interpretive and multilayered analytical framework that integrates postcolonial theory insights into memory and identity with neoclassical realism's emphasis on the interaction between systemic pressures and domestic political mediation. Such an approach moves beyond the limitations of conventional foreign policy analysis, which often privileges material power while overlooking symbolic politics, and avoids the reductionism of memory-centered frameworks that underplay the strategic recalibrations shaping the Maghreb, the Sahel, and the broader Mediterranean region since 2019.

Methodologically, the study draws primarily on multiple sources, including official governmental statements, policy documents, media reports, and research center publications, ensuring that the data accurately captures each state's positions, narratives, and strategic considerations.

II. Conceptual and Theoretical framework

Understanding the Algerian-French crisis in its contemporary form requires a conceptual approach capable of capturing both its symbolic depth and strategic complexity. To this end, the article adopts a dual theoretical framework, drawing on postcolonial theory and neoclassical realism. This combination allows for a layered analysis of the crisis – one that integrates the politics of memory and identity with the strategic behaviors shaped by domestic and systemic variables.

II.1. Postcolonial Theory: Colonial Legacies and Power in International Relations

Postcolonial theory serves as a crucial epistemological framework for interrogating how the legacies of colonialism permeate and structure contemporary international relations beyond the formal cessation of imperial systems. It challenges dominant paradigms that focus predominantly on materialist and institutional variables by foregrounding the enduring cultural, symbolic, and discursive power asymmetries that persist between former colonial metropoles and postcolonial states[4]. The postcolonial approach problematizes the notion of decolonization as a discrete historical event and instead frames it as an ongoing process through which colonial epistemologies, identity constructs, and power hierarchies continue to inform global political interactions[5].

At the heart of postcolonial analysis is Edward Said's seminal concept of *imaginative geographies*, elaborated in *Orientalism*[3]. Said demonstrates how the West's construction of the "Orient" as an exotic, inferior Other was not merely a literary or academic exercise but a mechanism of imperial domination that established enduring epistemic asymmetries[6]. This binary oppositional logic-defining the West as rational, progressive, and superior vis-à-vis a backward, irrational East continues to underpin contemporary international relations through what postcolonial scholars' term "coloniality of power"[7]. These representational frameworks are deeply embedded in Western diplomatic discourse, media, and policy narratives, influencing how former colonies are surveilled, governed, and engaged on the global stage[8]. Such entrenched hierarchies manifest as civilizational essentialism and neocolonial practices, reproducing exclusion and marginalization despite the affirmation of formal sovereignty.

Colonial memory, in this context, refers to the collective and institutionalized remembrance of colonial rule, encompassing narratives, symbols, commemorations, educational curricula, and public discourses that shape national identity, historical consciousness, and foreign policy orientations[9]. Such memories are not neutral repositories of the past but active components in political negotiation, affecting how states and societies interpret historical grievances, assert sovereignty, and engage with former colonizers.

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[4] Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts. Third Edition* (London: Routledge, 2013), 204-205.

[5] G. Sreevarsha, "Post-Colonial Theory," *International Journal of Advanced Research in Science and Technology* 11, no. 1 (2021): 302, https://www.ijarst.in/public/uploads/paper/980671726043702.pdf.

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 54.

[7] Walter Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 47.

[8] Leela Gandhi, *Postcolonial Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 45-47.

Frantz Fanon's psychoanalytic and phenomenological insights enrich this discourse by illuminating the intimate violence of colonial domination on subjectivity. Fanon contends that colonialism imposes a dehumanizing "racial epidermal schema" that fractures the colonized's sense of self, inducing a pathological inferiority complex and internalized subjugation[10]. Decolonization, therefore, transcends political sovereignty and requires an ontological rupture – an existential reconstitution of identity that dismantles colonial subjectivities and asserts agency. This theoretical lens underlines the deep symbolic struggles embedded in postcolonial statecraft and international diplomacy, where claims to dignity and recognition contest residual imperial legacies.

Achille Mbembe extends these insights by diagnosing the postcolony as a site where colonial power's symbolic architecture persists through mechanisms of "commandment" that obscure, exclude, and silence alternative histories[11]. This framework problematizes simplistic narratives of postcolonial emancipation by revealing how postcolonial governance often replicates exclusionary and opaque power structures inherited from colonial administration. Such dynamics complicate international relations by embedding historical grievances and contested memories within diplomatic encounters.

Furthermore, Vijay Prashad highlights the strategic role of collective memory in postcolonial sovereignty construction. Memory, far from being a passive repository of trauma, is actively mobilized to produce counter-narratives that challenge colonial epistemologies and assert political agency[12]. Through this lens, the reframing of colonial histories becomes an emancipatory practice that legitimizes claims to self-determination and resistance against neocolonial encroachments.

Lastly, in this brief postcolonial overview, Homi Bhabha's theorization of ambivalence and hybridity provides critical conceptual tools for understanding the paradoxical nature of postcolonial identity formation[13]. Bhabha argues that colonial and postcolonial subjects inhabit a liminal space characterized by ambivalence, wherein mimicry of colonial cultural forms coexists with subversive resistance[14]. This hybridity destabilizes rigid colonial binaries, producing complex interstitial cultural and political formations that challenge essentialist notions of identity and power. The postcolonial subject, therefore, is neither wholly colonized nor fully sovereign but negotiates a dynamic, contested identity that permeates both domestic politics and international relations.

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[9] Itay Lotem, *The Memory of Colonialism in Britain and France: The Sins of Silence* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 19-20.

[10] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, trans. Charles Lam Markmann (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 112-115.

[11] Achille Mbembe, *On the Postcolony* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 25-27.

[12] Vijay Prashad, *The Darker Nations: A People's History of the Third World* (New York: The New Press, 2007), 104.

[13] Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 92.

[14] Ibid.

In sum, postcolonial theory offers a comprehensive analytic apparatus that reveals how colonial histories, epistemologies, and power asymmetries continue to shape international political structures, state identities, and diplomatic practices. It underscores the persistence of symbolic violence and cultural hegemony alongside formal political independence, rendering postcolonial international relations an arena of ongoing negotiation, contestation, and transformation.

II.2. Neoclassical Realism Theory: Bridging Systemic Structure and Domestic Agency

Neoclassical realism constitutes a significant evolution within the realist theory in international relations by addressing the explanatory shortcomings of classical realism and structural realism through a more nuanced understanding of how systemic pressures interact with domestic-level variables to shape foreign policy outcomes[15]. While classical realism focuses primarily on the anarchic international system and the distribution of material power as the key drivers of state behavior, neoclassical realism insists that this systemic influence is neither direct nor mechanical. Instead, it is filtered through domestic political structures, decision-making processes, elite perceptions, and strategic cultures, which ultimately mediate how states perceive, prioritize, and respond to external threats and opportunities[16].

This theoretical approach acknowledges the "black box" of the state, emphasizing that foreign policy cannot be understood solely by examining external factors but must consider how internal political dynamics affect a state's ability and willingness to act on international imperatives[17]. Institutions, regime stability, bureaucratic politics, and societal cohesion determine whether and how a state balances against threats or pursues strategic objectives. This domestic mediation explains divergences in foreign policy responses among states facing similar external environments, as domestic constraints may lead to under-balancing or selective engagement.

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[15] Gideon Rose, "Review Article; Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy", *World Politics* 51, no. 1 (October 1998): 144.

[16] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy", in *Noclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy*, ed. Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 18.

[17] Randall L. Schweller, "Unanswered Threats: A Neoclassical Realist Theory of Underbalancing", *International Security* 29, no. 2 (2004): 161.

Central to neoclassical realism is the role of elite perceptions and cognitive biases. Unlike purely structural accounts, this theory foregrounds how decision-makers' interpretations shaped by historical memory, identity narratives, and political culture influence threat assessment and policy choices[18]. This interpretive lens allows for an understanding of phenomena such as threat inflation or misperception, which can exacerbate tensions or generate policy inconsistencies despite objective material conditions. Elite beliefs about national interests and external actors may diverge significantly, affecting how systemic pressures translate into specific foreign policies[19].

The theory further foregrounds regime type and legitimacy as crucial variables shaping strategic behavior. Regimes facing internal legitimacy crises or factional disputes often prioritize regime survival and domestic consolidation over consistent external balancing, leading to erratic or constrained foreign policies[20]. Stable, cohesive regimes are better positioned to translate systemic pressures into coherent strategic action and to mobilize resources effectively. Thus, internal political dynamics are key determinants of a state's external posture, impacting its capacity for balancing or bandwagoning in the international system[21].

Moreover, neoclassical realism elaborates on the dynamic process of strategic adjustment, where states actively interpret and respond to systemic changes through deliberate foreign policy innovations such as alliance formation, hedging, or diversification of partnerships[22]. This agency-driven perspective contrasts with more deterministic structural accounts, highlighting the capacity of states to shape their strategic environment through calculated domestic and international actions. For example, states may seek to offset relative declines in power by cultivating new partnerships or recalibrating diplomatic alignments based on domestic preferences and political calculations.

Finally, neoclassical realism's integrative framework – combining structural constraints with domestic and ideational factors – provides a comprehensive understanding of state behavior as contingent, context-dependent, and mediated by multiple levels of analysis[23]. This framework is particularly useful for explaining protracted crises or complex bilateral relations where historical grievances, identity politics, and internal legitimacy concerns intersect with shifting international power dynamics.

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[18] Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, *Balancing Risks: Great Power Intervention in the Periphery* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 50.

[19] Peter J. Katzenstein, *Cultural Norms and National Security: Police and Military in Postwar Japan* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 22.

[20] Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In", *International Security* 19, no. 1 (1994): 71-75.

[21] Fareed Zakaria, "Realism and Domestic Politics: A Review Essay", *International Security* 17, no. 1 (1992): 185.

[22] Thomas J. Christensen, *Useful Adversaries: Grand Strategy, Domestic Mobilization, and Sino-American Conflict, 1947–1958* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 92.

[23] Elias Götz, "Neoclassical Realist Theories, Intervening Variables, and Paradigmatic Boundaries", *Foreign Policy Analysis* 17, no. 2 (2021): 6.

In applying neoclassical realism to the Algerian-French case, the study emphasizes the centrality of elite perceptions in mediating systemic pressures. In France, the growing influence of the far-right shapes narratives regarding immigration, national identity, and postcolonial responsibilities, which in turn frame Algeria alternately as a partner and a competitor, particularly with regards to the security and migration policies. In Algeria, elite perceptions are expressed through the post-Hirak regime's sovereignty discourse, emphasizing historical grievances, national autonomy, and strategic diversification. By linking these elite perceptions to observable policy choices and diplomatic rhetoric, the study demonstrates how domestic interpretations of systemic pressures contribute to the specific patterns of the Algerian-French crisis between 2019 and 2025.

III. Algerian-France Relations (1962-2018): Between Rupture and Normalization

Since 1962, the bilateral relationship between Algeria and France has evolved within a complex postcolonial framework where historical memory, structural asymmetries, and shifting regional dynamics intersect to shape patterns of rupture and attempts at normalization. Far from being linear, the trajectory of Algeria-France relations has unfolded through cycles of confrontation, cautious rapprochement, and recurring crises, revealing the deep entanglement between decolonization struggles and the persistence of symbolic and material dependencies. Understanding these phases is essential to grasp how unresolved colonial legacies and divergent strategic visions continue to structure contemporary tensions between the two countries.

Following independence, Algeria under Ahmed Ben Bella and Houari Boumédiène prioritized radical decolonization through non-alignment, anti-imperialist solidarity, and state-led development as a means of consolidating sovereignty[24]. The 1971 nationalization of French hydrocarbon assets and Algeria's support for African and Palestinian liberation movements positioned it as a leader within the Global South while intensifying tensions with France, which struggled to redefine its role as a postcolonial power[25]. France oscillated between paternalistic post-imperial ties and strategic withdrawal, maintaining cultural and economic connections while failing to establish a stable partnership, leading to distrust and diplomatic crises. The colonial past remained a latent fracture in bilateral interactions, resurfacing whenever symbolic or strategic interests collided.

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[24] Robert A. Mortimer, "Algerian Foreign Policy: From Revolution to National Interest," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 3 (2015): 468, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2014.990961.

[25] Khadija Mohsen-Finan, "Entre la France et l'Algérie, une relation ponctuée de crises", *Le Centre arabe de recherches et d'études politiques de Paris (CAREP Paris)*, March 31, 2025, https://carep-paris.org/recherche/europe-monde-arabe/entre-la-france-et-lalgerie-une-relation-ponctuee-de-crises/.

The arrival of Chadli Bendjedid and François Mitterrand in the early 1980s introduced cautious normalization, with France and Algeria expanding economic cooperation, engaging in debt restructuring, and deepening energy ties[26]. However, this rapprochement occurred within asymmetrical frameworks: France retained dominance in economic and linguistic spheres, while Algeria preserved political distance, wary of neo-colonial dependency. Symbolically, Mitterrand's ambiguous stance on the Algerian War and the absence of official recognition of colonial violence obstructed genuine reconciliation. The 1990s, marked by Algeria's civil conflict, deepened this ambiguity, as France adopted a dual-track approach – publicly condemning violence while secretly collaborating on counterterrorism – reflecting a securitization of Algerian affairs within French domestic politics and reinforcing mutual suspicion[27].

The election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika in 1999 opened a period of partial normalization characterized by efforts to formalize cooperation through the 2003 Declaration of Algiers and the proposed Friendship Treaty. However, the 2005 French parliamentary law praising the "positive role" of colonialism rekindled historical grievances, leading to the treaty's collapse and exposing the fragility of symbolic reconciliation[28]. Despite increasing economic interdependence in energy and infrastructure, unresolved disputes over colonial memory, migration policies, and visa restrictions continued to strain relations. Symbolic gestures, such as François Hollande's 2012 acknowledgment of colonial brutality without issuing a formal apology, highlighted the discursive limitations of France's approach to historical reconciliation. Meanwhile, divergent regional strategies in the Sahel, Libya, and Western Sahara further illustrated strategic misalignments, with Algeria asserting non-aligned autonomy and France defending its traditional zones of influence[29].

From radical rupture and anti-colonial assertion to ambiguous rapprochement and fragile normalization, Algeria-France relations from 1962 to 2018 demonstrate that the colonial past remains an unresolved structural and symbolic fault line in the bilateral relationship. The comparative table synthesizes the key phases of Algeria-France relations, highlighting Algeria's and

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[26] Frédéric Charillon, "La relation franco-algérienne au regard de l'analyse de politique étrangère", *Questions internationales* 81 (September-October 2016): 100.

[27] Pierre Vermeren, "Petite histoire de l'Algérie depuis l'indépendance", *Questions internationales* 81 (September–October 2016): 15.

[28] Aomar Baghzouz, "Algeria–France: Permanent Normalisation", in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir (London: Routledge, 2020), 183.

[29] Ibid., 188.

France's respective positions, the central characteristics of each phase, and the enduring structural fault lines that continued to shape the bilateral relationship across decades (see Table no. 1). As the table illustrates, Algeria-France relations have followed a cyclical trajectory characterized by moments of cautious rapprochement, repeatedly undermined by symbolic, structural, and geopolitical asymmetries. While economic cooperation and partial normalization emerged during periods of stability, unresolved issues related to colonial memory, migration, and regional competition have continued to generate friction, preventing the relationship from achieving a sustainable partnership.

Phase	**Period**	**Key Features**	**Algeria's Position**	**France's Position**	**Structural Fault Lines**
1	1962–1978	Radical decolonization, non-alignment, nationalization of hydrocarbons, support for liberation movements	Assertive anti-imperialist sovereignty, Global South leadership, rejection of neocolonial ties	Paternalistic post-imperial ambiguity, strategic disengagement, cultural ties maintained	Colonial memory tensions, economic disputes, political mistrust
2	1979–1999	Economic cooperation (debt restructuring, energy), cautious diplomatic rapprochement during Bendjedid/Mitterrand, Algerian civil conflict	Maintained political distance, utilized memory for legitimacy, security challenges during the civil war	Economic and cultural influence retained, dual-track approach (public condemnation, covert cooperation)	Historical reconciliation absent, securitization of Algerian issues, diaspora tensions
3	2000–2018	Declaration of Algiers, proposed Friendship Treaty, economic interdependence, symbolic gestures without formal apology	Partial engagement, sovereignty-sensitive, defensive nationalism, assertive regional autonomy	Pursuit of pragmatic cooperation, limited symbolic reconciliation, traditional regional interests	Colonial memory gap, migration and visa disputes, economic asymmetry, regional competition

Table 1: Comparative Phases of Algeria–France Relations (1962–2018)
Source: Author's elaboration based on the studies by Aomar Baghzouz, "Algeria–France: Permanent Normalisation", in *The Politics of Algeria: Domestic Issues and International Relations*, ed. Yahia H. Zoubir (London: Routledge, 2020) and Khadija Mohsen-Finan, "Entre la France et l'Algérie, une relation ponctuée de crises", *Le Centre arabe de recherches et d'études politiques de Paris (CAREP Paris)*, March 31, 2025, https://carep-paris.org/recherche/europe-monde-arabe/entre-la-france-et-lalgerie-une-relation-ponctuee-de-crises/.

This historical background sets the stage for understanding how domestic variables in both Algeria and France, analyzed in the following section, interact with the enduring fault lines to produce recurring crises in the bilateral relationship.

IV. Domestic Politics and the Enduring Diplomatic Stalemate in Algeria-France Relations since 2019

The ongoing crisis in Algeria-France relations since 2019 is deeply rooted in domestic political dynamics on both sides. In France, postcolonial memory politics, rising populism, and the securitization of migration have constrained diplomatic flexibility and fueled tensions with Algeria. Simultaneously, Algeria's post-Hirak domestic landscape has reinforced sovereignty narratives and anti-colonial identity discourses, framing France as both a historical adversary and a contemporary challenge to national dignity. These intertwined domestic drivers have entrenched the current diplomatic impasse, shaping a bilateral relationship marked by mutual distrust, symbolic confrontations, and strategic ambiguities.

IV.1. France: Populism, Colonial Memory, and Strategic Ambiguities

France's domestic drivers shaping its foreign policy toward Algeria are deeply intertwined with postcolonial memory politics, rising populism, the securitization of migration, and shifting elite calculations about national identity and global positioning. These factors collectively constrain France's diplomatic flexibility and contribute to the structural entrenchment of crises in its relations with Algeria.

At the core of these dynamics lies the legacy of colonialism, particularly concerning Algeria, which remains a contentious element within French national identity debates. Despite partial gestures toward recognition – such as President Macron's acknowledgment of France's responsibility for the death of Algerian nationalist Ali Boumendjel[30], France has refrained from issuing a formal apology or reparations for colonial crimes due to domestic political sensitivities. As Todd Shepard argues, the end of the Algerian war did not signify the end of France's colonial entanglement but rather transformed it into a "domestic problem" tied to immigration and identity[31]. This refusal to address colonial injustices is deeply rooted in the French republican model of universalism, which resists identity-based recognition and reparative policies, perceiving them as threats to the secular fabric of the state. Consequently, this ideological stance contributes to the denial or minimization of colonial violence within political discourse.

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[30] Frédéric Bobin and Olivier Faye, "Emmanuel Macron 'reconnaît' la responsabilité de la France dans l'assassinat d'Ali Boumendjel en Algérie", *Le Monde*, March 3, 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/03/03/france-algerie-emmanuel-macron-reconnait-la-responsabilite-de-la-france-dans-l-assassinat-d-ali-boumendjel_6071806_3212.html

[31] Todd Shepard, *The Invention of Decolonization: The Algerian War and the Remaking of France* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), 3.

Further illustrating France's selective approach to colonial memory, Macron acknowledged the "debt of the French State" toward the Harkis[32], requesting forgiveness for them and their descendants. An independent committee, chaired by Jean-Marie Bockel, was established to handle "recognition and compensation" for the Harkis, including opening archives and restoring certain graves. Following legislation adopted in February 2022, millions of euros were paid as compensation to Harki families. According to official figures, approximately 90,000 Harkis and their families fled Algeria after independence, and about 50,000 individuals are eligible for this indemnification, with a total allocation of around 310 million euros over six years[33]. These official measures demonstrate the symbolic emphasis of French memory policy: partial recognition and targeted reparations for specific historical grievances, rather than comprehensive acknowledgment of colonial crimes.

Compounding this ideological rigidity is the rise of far-right movements and populist rhetoric, which have weaponized memory politics to oppose conciliatory gestures toward Algeria. Figures like Marine Le Pen and Éric Zemmour have capitalized on nostalgia for "French Algeria" and narratives of lost grandeur, framing North African migration as a civilizational threat[34]. These narratives exert electoral pressures that constrain centrist and leftist politicians, disincentivizing them from pursuing reconciliation or adopting more open migration frameworks. Closely tied to these identity debates is the securitization of migration, which has become a central domestic factor influencing France's foreign policy stance toward Algeria. In the wake of terrorist attacks, North African communities have faced intensified scrutiny under counterterrorism policies, linking security concerns with migration restrictions and debates on integration[35]. Populations of Algerian-origin/descent in France, among the largest immigrant communities, are frequently positioned at the intersection of concerns around radicalization, unemployment, and integration failures, reinforcing stereotypes and driving restrictive visa and deportation policies.

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[32] The *Harkis* were Muslim Algerians "contracted to support the French armed forces" during the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962). They "were an essential part of French military strategy", recruited to fight against the National Liberation Front (FLN). After Algeria gained independence in 1962, many Harkis "paid a considerable price for their support of the French. They and their families were subject to FLN retribution during the war. When the war was over, despite promises of reconciliation, they were the targets of severe reprisals" since they were seen as collaborators with the colonial regime. "As many as 88,000 Harkis and their families fled to France with help from members of the French army or through other semi-clandestine methods", where they resettled, though they were often marginalized and lived under difficult conditions (The Open University, "*Harkis* and the Algerian War", https://www.open.edu/openlearn/mod/oucontent/view.php?id=115066&section=1).

[33] Présidence de la République, "Loi du 23 février 2022 sur la reconnaissance et la réparation pour les harkis…", *Vie-publique*, February 25, 2022, https://www.vie-publique.fr/loi/282261-loi-23-fevrier-2022-reconnaissance-et-reparation-pour-les-harkis

[34] Vincent Geisser, "Décrypter la controverse France-Algérie: des populismes identitaires en miroir et au mépris de la démocratie", *Migrations Société*, no. 199, (2025/1): 10, https://shs.cairn.info/revue-migrations-societe-2025-1-page-5?lang=fr.

These securitarian discourses frequently impact bilateral relations, transforming visa quotas, deportation measures, and demands for Algerian cooperation on irregular migration into sources of diplomatic tension. France's 2021 decision to reduce visas for Algerians by 50%, framed domestically as a security and migration control measure, was perceived in Algeria as a humiliating and neocolonial gesture, intensifying bilateral friction[36]. Furthermore, domestic lobbying networks shape France's foreign policy discourse toward Algeria. Organizations such as the *Conseil Représentatif des Institutions juives de France* (CRIF), often aligned with securitarian and pro-Israel positions, indirectly influence how Algeria's pro-Palestinian stance is perceived in France[37]. These alliances reinforce negative portrayals of Algeria within French political debates, further complicating diplomatic engagement.

Despite these domestic constraints, France continues to maintain significant economic and security interests in Algeria, particularly in energy cooperation and counterterrorism partnerships in the Sahel. However, the interplay of memory politics, identity anxieties, and securitarian imperatives ensures that France's engagement with Algeria remains strategically ambiguous, oscillating between pragmatic cooperation and symbolic distancing. This ambiguity extends to France's broader strategic recalibrations in Africa, including its pivot toward Morocco in the Western Sahara dispute, shaped by domestic pressures tied to historical ties with North Africa and the interests of economic and defense lobbies. Thus, domestic political imperatives, ideological frameworks, and security concerns collectively ensure that France's relationship with Algeria remains structurally constrained, producing a foreign policy that is reactive, inconsistent, and often hostage to domestic electoral and identity calculations.

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[35] Gilles Kepel, *Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2017), 142.

[36] Jean-Marc Leclerc and Luc Lenoir, "Fin de la restriction des visas: en contrepartie, l'Algérie va-t-elle reprendre ses clandestins?", *Le Figaro*, le 20 décembre 2022, https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/fin-de-la-restriction-des-visas-en-contrepartie-l-algerie-va-t-elle-reprendre-ses-clandestins-20221219

[37] Jessica Stern, "France-Israël. Lobby or Not Lobby?", *Orient XXI*, January 12, 2021, https://orientxxi.info/dossiers-et-series/france-israel-lobby-or-not-lobby,4404.

IV.2 Algeria: Post-Hirak Sovereignty, Memory Politics, and Regime Legitimacy

The domestic landscape in Algeria has profoundly shaped its foreign policy posture toward France, particularly since the Hirak movement in 2019, which challenged the legitimacy of the ruling elite while reaffirming the centrality of anti-colonial identity and sovereignty narratives within state discourse. These domestic drivers have positioned France not simply as a historical adversary but as a contemporary symbol against which Algeria asserts its autonomy and dignity, using foreign policy as a stage for consolidating domestic legitimacy.

The Hirak movement, which erupted in February 2019 demanding systemic change and an end to entrenched authoritarian practices, initially created an opening for democratization and political renewal. However, the post-Hirak period witnessed the regime reconstituting its legitimacy around discourses of sovereignty, emphasizing non-interference and resistance to perceived foreign tutelage, with France often cast as the primary external “other”[38]. This framing serves the dual purpose of rallying domestic support while deflecting criticism during periods of economic hardship and political stagnation, allowing the regime to reassert itself as the guardian of Algeria’s independence and dignity.

The centrality of memory politics in Algeria’s foreign policy became vividly apparent during the diplomatic crisis of October 2021, when Algiers recalled its ambassador to Paris following President Emmanuel Macron’s remarks questioning whether there had been “an Algerian nation before French colonization” and suggesting that post-1962 Algeria was built on a form of “memory rent”[39]. As Yahia Zoubir notes, the reaction of the Algerian authorities was firm and uncompromising, reflecting the extent to which historical memory constitutes a non-negotiable pillar of state legitimacy[40]. The episode reaffirmed that any perceived French trivialization of colonial violence or undermining of Algeria’s national narrative triggers immediate and sharp official responses.

Aligned with its historical non-aligned stance, Algeria’s foreign policy in the post-Hirak era has further emphasized resistance to external pressures from

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[38] Mohamed Hemchi and Abdennour Benantar, “The 2019 Hirāk and the Arab Spring Uprisings: The Limits of the Algerian Exception Narrative?”, *Al-Muntaqa* 6, no. 2 (May/June 2023): 36, https://almuntaqa.dohainstitute.org/en/issue013/Documents/almuntaqa-13-2023-Hemchi-Benantar.pdf. .

[39] Sofiane Orus-Boudjema, “Algérie-France: y avait-il une nation algérienne avant la colonisation française?” [Eng. trans.: “Algeria-France: was there an Algerian nation before French colonization?”], *Jeune Afrique*, October 9, 2021, https://www.jeuneafrique.com/1247481/politique/algerie-france-y-avait-il-une-nation-algerienne-avant-la-colonisation-francaise/

[40] Yahia H. Zoubir, “Algeria’s Foreign Policy in the Post Hirak Era”, *The Middle East Council on Global Affairs* Issue Brief, September 2022, 4, https://mecouncil.org/publication/algerias-foreign-policy-in-the-post-hirak-era/.

European powers, including France, regarding political and economic reforms[41]. Foreign policy thus becomes a tool for demonstrating sovereignty and reinforcing Algeria's aspiration to act as an independent regional actor within the Maghreb, Sahel, and broader African contexts. Central to this approach is memory politics, which remains a cornerstone of the regime's legitimacy structures. The valorization of the anti-colonial struggle and the sacrifices of the *Moudjahidine* are consistently invoked to foster unity, especially during moments of domestic crisis[42]. Any perceived French minimization of colonial violence triggers sharp official reactions in Algeria, reinforcing perceptions of France as dismissive of Algeria's historical suffering.

This memory-based legitimacy is coupled with nationalist populism, which frequently positions France as a symbolic scapegoat to manage internal contestations and redirect popular frustrations outward. Economic challenges, youth unemployment, and broader social discontent are often externalized through narratives portraying France as a neocolonial power seeking to destabilize Algeria and undermine its sovereignty[43]. This dynamic has intensified since the Hirak period, as the regime seeks to consolidate its domestic position by presenting itself as the defender of Algeria's independence against external pressures and interference.

In sum, Algeria's post-Hirak foreign policy toward France is deeply intertwined with domestic imperatives of regime legitimacy, sovereignty narratives, and a persistent struggle over postcolonial memory. These internal drivers ensure that the bilateral relationship remains structurally constrained, as memory politics and unresolved colonial injustices continue to frame France not merely as a historical counterpart but as an active participant in shaping Algeria's contemporary foreign policy identity.

V. Strategic Divergence and Regional Repositioning: Algeria and France in the Changing Maghreb-Sahel Context

This section explores how Algerian-French relations have shifted from postcolonial contention to direct geopolitical divergence. Beyond symbolic disputes, strategic disagreements – particularly over the Western Sahara, military alignment, and energy diplomacy – have deepened the bilateral rift. These divergences reflect not only conflicting national interests but also distinct visions for regional order in North Africa and the Sahel region.

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[41] Laurence Thieux and Rachid Farrah, "Algeria and Western Sahara: Reactivating the Principle of Just Cause in the Post Hirak Era", *The Journal of North African Studies* 30, no. 2 (2025): 228, https://doi.org/10.1080/13629387.2025.2480737.

[42] Benjamin Stora, *La gangrène et l'oubli: La mémoire de la guerre d'Algérie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006), 88.

[43] Denis Bauchard, "Algérie-France: Réflexions sur une crise", *Esprit IFRI* (*Institut français des relations internationals)* (May 2025): 15, https://www.ifri.org/fr/articles/publications-exterieures/algerie-france-reflexions-sur-une-crise.

V.1. The Western Sahara Dispute: Geopolitical Betrayal

The Western Sahara issue remains a fundamental fault line in Algerian-French relations, shaping perceptions of trust and regional balance. France's steady alignment with Morocco's autonomy proposal, particularly under President Macron, has been perceived in Algiers as a strategic betrayal undermining Algeria's regional leadership and principled stance on decolonization and self-determination. In 2022, France reaffirmed its support for Morocco's position, echoing the U.S. recognition in 2020 under the Trump Administration, signaling to Algiers that Western actors were consolidating support for Morocco outside the UN-led negotiation framework[44].

In July 2024, during the 25th anniversary of King Mohammed VI's accession to the throne, President Emmanuel Macron sent an official letter to the Moroccan monarch recognizing Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara – an unprecedented diplomatic move that crystallized Algerian suspicions of a full strategic realignment and the marginalization of Algeria's position within European and transatlantic frameworks[45]. This alignment reinforced Morocco's narrative of irreversible sovereignty, emboldening Rabat's diplomatic outreach across Africa and the Arab world while isolating Algiers within the African Union and complicating its advocacy for the Sahrawi cause.

Algeria, historically a staunch supporter of Sahrawi self-determination and a principal backer of the Polisario Front, perceives French support for Morocco as undermining its credibility within the African Union and the United Nations, particularly amid renewed African Union calls for a referendum on self-determination. This strategic shift has led to the freezing of bilateral forums, suspension of high-level visits, and delays in intergovernmental consultations, reinforcing mutual distrust and resulting in a more confrontational diplomatic posture from Algiers toward Paris[46].

Furthermore, Algeria views France's position as reflective of broader Western inconsistencies regarding territorial integrity and self-determination, particularly in the post-Ukraine invasion context, deepening Algerian skepticism toward French and Western claims of adherence to international law. Consequently, the Western Sahara dispute has evolved from a peripheral point of divergence into a central axis of friction, limiting opportunities for strategic dialogue and regional cooperation between Algeria and France in North Africa and the Sahel[47].

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[44] Samir Zaaimi, "France Has Sided with Morocco on the Western Sahara. How Might Algeria Respond?", *Atlantic Council*, August 1, 2024, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/france-has-sided-with-morocco-on-the-western-sahara-how-might-algeria-respond/.

[45] Oumansour, "Relations franco-algériennes".

[46] International Crisis Group, "Managing Tensions between Algeria and Morocco", *Middle East and North Africa Report* no. 247, November 29, 2024, 19, https://www.crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/2024-12/247-managing-algeria-morocco_0.pdf.

V.2. Recalibrating External Alignments: Algeria's Shift from Historical Dependence to Strategic Diversification

In response to perceived Western bias, Algeria has reoriented its foreign policy toward a multi-vectorial framework. Strategic partnerships with Russia (notably military and energy cooperation), China (infrastructure and technology), and Turkey (economic and cultural exchange) have gained momentum since 2020. These alignments are not merely tactical but reflect a long-term diversification strategy aimed at reducing dependency on French and Western institutions. France, once Algeria's dominant economic partner, has witnessed a marked decline in trade volume, diplomatic engagement, and cultural influence.

Notably, French-language education is being replaced with English in Algerian schools[48]. This erosion is mirrored in a deliberate linguistic and educational shift within Algeria, as highlighted by a *Le Monde* investigation published on September 30, 2025, which reports that the Algerian authorities are actively seeking to marginalize French in favor of English. In primary schools, weekly hours dedicated to French instruction have been reduced, while English is being reinforced. In higher education, faculties of medicine, pharmacy, and dental surgery are transitioning their curricula to English starting from the 2025-2026 academic year[49].

Beyond education, this shift extends to public services: Air Algérie no longer issues tickets in French, and Algérie Télécom now publishes invoices and payment receipts exclusively in English and Arabic. This transformation is further reflected in the declining interest in French, with enrollment in courses at the five branches of the French Institute dropping from 18,000 students in 2022 to around 16,000 in 2024[50]. These measures, framed as both practical and symbolic, reflect not only an effort to modernize Algeria's linguistic infrastructure but also a conscious distancing from France's historic cultural dominance. In this context, the diminishing role of French underscores broader transformations in Algeria's international orientation and domestic identity, signaling a strategic rebalancing of economic, cultural, and diplomatic ties.

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[47] Muhammad Arshad, "France Shifts Its Position on Western Sahara: The Implications for Algeria and Morocco", *Indian Council of World Affairs*, November 21, 2024, https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=12046&lid=7339

[48] Wagdy Sawahel, "Algeria Drops French, Adopts English as University Language", *University World News*, April 17, 2025, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20250415221857998.

[49] Simon Roger and Hamid Nasri, "Algeria seeks to sideline French in favor of English", *Le Monde*, September 30, 2025, https://www.lemonde.fr/en/le-monde-africa/article/2025/09/30/algiers-seeks-to-sideline-speaking-french-in-favor-of-english_6745915_124.html.

[50] Ibid.

French investments face competition from Gulf, Turkish, and Chinese capital. This development signals a structural decentering of France in Algeria's international calculus[51]. This trend can be captured by examining Algeria's evolving trade landscape from 2019 to mid-2025. Figure no. 1 illustrates the shifting shares of Algeria's top five trading partners over this period, highlighting France's gradual decline relative to the consistent presence of China, the rise of Italy due to expanded energy ties, and the steady ascent of Turkey as a significant economic partner. This graphic representation contextualizes the structural decentering of France within Algeria's broader strategy of diversifying its external economic engagements.

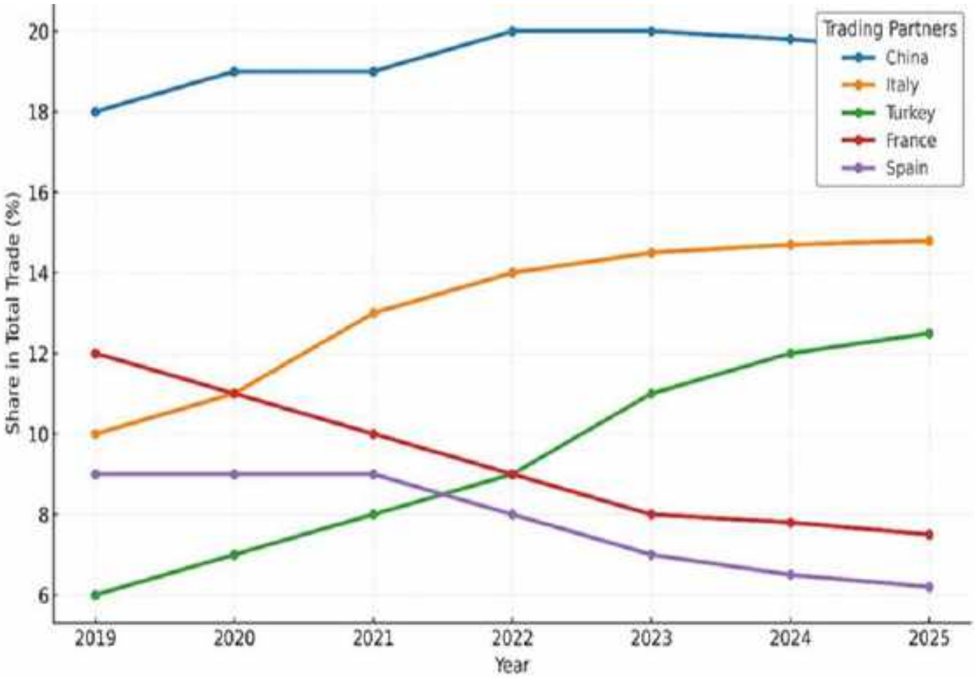

Figure no. 1: Algeria's Top 5 Trading Partners Share in Total Trade (2019-Mid 2025)
Source: Compiled by the author based on data from UN Comtrade Database, ONS Algeria, and French Treasury (2019–2025)

Recent economic data underscore the tangible impact of diplomatic tensions on Franco-Algerian trade. Trade analytics show that during Q1 of 2025, French exports to Algeria fell sharply by 21%, dropping from €1.255

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[51] Brahim Oumansour, "Tensions entre l'Algérie et la France: une crise à enjeux multiples", *Le Rubicon*, May 14, 2025, https://lerubicon.org/tensions-entre-lalgerie-et-la-france-une-crise-a-enjeux-multiples/.

billion in Q1 of 2024 to €992.5 million. Algerian exports to France also declined, albeit more moderately, from €1.42 billion to €1.36 billion – a 3.9% decrease[52]. This contraction was widespread across sectors including machinery, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, and food products, highlighting a comprehensive downturn in commercial exchange. While Algeria continued minimal hydrocarbon shipments, refined petroleum and nitrogenous products experienced significant declines of 17.1% and 22.7%, respectively. These figures follow a broader downward trend: total bilateral trade dropped 4.3% year-on-year in 2024, falling from €11.8 billion to €11.1 billion[53].

This downward trajectory is further illustrated by trade share analytics, which reveal France's declining position within Algeria's overall trade landscape between 2019 and mid-2025. Data from the *Office National des Statistiques* in its March 2024 report on "*Commerce Extérieur 2018–2023*" indicate that while France was Algeria's second-largest trading partner in 2019, it had been overtaken by Italy and Turkey by 2023, relegating it to fourth place. Concurrent reports from the DG Trésor confirm that China remained the dominant supplier (≈22.9%)[54]. France's share has steadily declined from around 12% in 2019 to approximately 7.5% by mid-2025[55]. This decline is symptomatic of Algeria's broader pivot toward diversified strategic partnerships with Asian and alternative European partners and reflects the concrete economic consequences of political tensions, notably following France's recognition of Moroccan claims over Western Sahara.

Taken together, these indicators crystallize a structural realignment in Algeria's foreign economic relations, where France's traditional dominance is eroding amidst Algeria's proactive pursuit of diversification, making space for rising actors such as China, Italy, and Turkey within Algeria's trade calculus.

V.3. Algeria's Energy Diplomacy and Regional Security Competition

The war in Ukraine and Europe's scramble for alternative gas suppliers have elevated Algeria's geopolitical value, positioning it as a pivotal energy actor in the Mediterranean region and North Africa. Leveraging its vast natural gas reserves and established export infrastructure, Algeria has repositioned itself as a critical energy partner for Italy, Germany, and Spain, which seek to diversify away from Russian gas dependencies[56]. Italy, for instance, secured a landmark agreement in July 2022 between the energy companies of the two countries, ENI and Sonatrach, expanding gas supplies through the TransMed pipeline and enabling Algeria to overtake Russia as Italy's primary gas supplier by early 2023[57]. Similarly, Germany has increased LNG and pipeline-based imports from Algeria, viewing Algiers as a strategic partner in its energy transition efforts.

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[52] Hamza Saada, "Algeria–France Trade Relations Plunge Sharply in Q1 2025 amid Political Tensions", *Dzair Tube*, May 16, 2025, https://www.dzair-tube.dz/en/algeria-france-trade-relations-plunge-sharply-in-q1-2025-amid-political-tensions/.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Office National des Statistiques (Alger), "Evolution des échanges extérieurs de marchandises de 2018 à 2023", *Collections Statistiques* no 242, 2024, 16, https://www.ons.dz/IMG/pdf/c.echanges_ext2018_2023.pdf?utm

[55] Saada, "Algeria–France Trade Relations".

France, however, has failed to secure comparable long-term energy contracts, reflecting the cooling of bilateral relations amid disputes over visa policies, historical memory, and France's stance on the Western Sahara issue. Algerian policymakers interpreted Paris's inability to negotiate energy agreements similar to those with the Italian ENI or the Spanish Naturgy as indicative of France's diminishing leverage – aspect further evidenced by France's declining share in Algeria's trade profile since 2019. This energy diplomacy forms part of Algeria's broader strategy to assert itself as an autonomous regional actor, leveraging its energy resources to reinforce foreign policy objectives and diversify partnerships beyond traditional postcolonial ties[58].

Concurrently, the Sahel region has emerged as a theatre of contestation between competing security approaches, particularly between Algeria and France. France's military withdrawal from Mali in 2022, followed by its forced exit from Burkina Faso and increasing challenges to its presence in Niger, has created a vacuum that Algeria seeks to fill through diplomatic mediation and intelligence-sharing initiatives[59]. Algeria's engagement in the Sahel is underpinned by its November 2020 constitutional amendments, which formally permit the deployment of the People's National Army in peacekeeping operations within the frameworks of the United Nations, the African Union, and the Arab League, provided such deployments align with the principles of these organizations. These reforms mark a limited but notable shift in Algeria's security doctrine, enabling external operations while maintaining principled opposition to the permanent presence of foreign military bases in the region.

Algeria's constitutional mandate reaffirms the army's primary mission of safeguarding national sovereignty and defending territorial integrity, while also allowing selective external engagements to protect the country's vital and strategic interests abroad[60]. Within this framework, Algeria's approach to the Sahel prioritizes regional dialogue, mediation, and support for African-led solutions over unilateral military interventions, contrasting sharply with France's expeditionary posture exemplified by Operation Barkhane, a counterinsurgency operation in the Sahel between 2014-2022[61]. By leveraging this constitutional flexibility, Algeria seeks to position itself as a regional stabilizer in the Sahel, using diplomatic channels and targeted security cooperation to fill the vacuum left by France's retreat while ensuring its engagements remain aligned with its principles of non-interference and respect for sovereignty.

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[56] Riad Khelfi et al., "The Impact of the Russian–Ukrainian Conflict on Algeria–EU Energy", *Revista Processus de Estudos de Gestão, Jurídicos e Financeiros* 16, no. 50 (2025): 8, https://periodicos.processus.com.br/index.php/egjf/article/view/1418.

[57] Umberto Profazio, "Pipeline Politics: Algeria, Italy and the Great Game in North Africa", *Observatory of the Maghreb – IRIS* (Institut de relations Internationales et Stratégiques), April 2025, https://www.iris-france.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/04/ObsMaghreb_2025_04_17_Pipeline_algerie_Note_EN.pdf.

[58] Mohammed Almahi, "Multipolar World Order and Algeria Leadership", *Jazair Hope*, February 7, 2025, https://jazairhope.org/en/multipolar-world-order-and-algeria-leadership/.

[59] Lotfi Sour, "French Interventionism in the Sahel: A Flawed Strategy, Imperfect Geopolitics", *Przegląd Geopolityczny* 48 (2024): 104.

The divergence in security doctrines between the two countries is evident: France has historically favored expeditionary interventions, which relied on direct military action against jihadist insurgencies in the Sahel. In contrast, Algeria advocates for regional ownership of security, emphasizing political dialogue, intelligence cooperation, and cross-border security arrangements with Sahelian states to address the root causes of insecurity, such as governance deficits and socio-economic marginalization[62]. Algeria's approach is operationalized through mechanisms like the Joint Operational Staff Committee (CEMOC) in Tamanrasset and mediation efforts in Mali and Niger, reflecting its commitment to African solutions for African problems[63].

Furthermore, Algeria has utilized its renewed energy relations with European partners to expand diplomatic leverage, advocating for security approaches that align with its principles while positioning itself as a stabilizing force in the Sahel amid the geopolitical void left by France's partial retreat. Collectively, Algeria's energy diplomacy and approach to regional security in the Sahel illustrate its evolving foreign policy strategy – one that seeks to leverage natural resources to reinforce geopolitical influence while promoting security doctrines aligned with its historical commitment to non-interference and regional dialogue. This dual-track strategy reflects Algeria's pursuit of strategic autonomy in a rapidly shifting regional and international environment, reshaping relations with traditional powers like France while expanding partnerships with alternative European actors and regional stakeholders.

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[60] Ibid., 95.

[61] Arslan Chikhaoui, "Algeria, a Key Player for Reconciliation in Mali and Sustainable Peace in the Sahel", *Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies (NESA)*, March 30, 2021, https://nesa-center.org/algeria-a-key-player-for-reconciliation-in-mali-and-sustainable-peace-in-the-sahel/.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Lotfi Sour, "Algeria's Role in the African Sahel: Toward a New Security Paradigm", *International Journal of Euro-Mediterranean Studies* 15, no. 2 (2022): 158-159, https://emuni.si/ISSN/2232-6022/15.155-177.pdf.

VI. Conclusion

The analysis of Algerian-French relations from 2019 to 2025 demonstrates that the bilateral crisis is structural, rooted in two interrelated dynamics: the persistent weight of colonial memory shaping elite perceptions and national identity discourses, and the accelerating divergence in strategic orientations, particularly in North Africa and the Sahel region. Rather than representing a series of episodic disputes, the rift reflects profound transformations in the international positioning and foreign policy trajectories of both states. In France, support for Morocco's autonomy plan in Western Sahara, combined with the securitization of the Algerian diaspora and the growing influence of the far-right has exacerbated Algerian perceptions of marginalization. In Algeria, the post-Hirak regime's reassertion of sovereignty, diversification of international partnerships, and proactive engagement in regional security frameworks indicate a deliberate shift away from traditional postcolonial alignments.

From a theoretical perspective, these findings underscore the value of integrating neoclassical realism with postcolonial insights in foreign policy analysis. The study demonstrates that elite perceptions, shaped by historical memory and domestic political dynamics, mediate the influence of structural pressures and systemic changes on state behavior. At the same time, postcolonial frameworks illuminate how symbolic disputes – over memory, identity, and historical grievances – intersect with strategic calculations, producing multidimensional crises that cannot be explained solely through material power or systemic considerations.

Looking ahead, Algerian–French relations are likely to evolve into a pattern of selective cooperation, limited to areas of mutual interest such as energy or counterterrorism, while deep-rooted symbolic ruptures and political mistrust will continue to persist. Without deliberate measures to address historical grievances and institutionalize a revised framework of engagement, the crisis risks becoming chronic. Thus, the study illustrates that postcolonial relationships in foreign policy are not only shaped by historical legacies but are continuously renegotiated through elite perceptions, strategic interests, and systemic transformations, a dynamic that has profound implications for both theory and practice, even more so when considering the precarious nature of the bilateral relations analyzed.

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THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENT CROSS-PARTY COALITIONS ON THE OUTCOME OF LOCAL ELECTIONS IN ROMANIA. CASE-STUDY: THE 2024 ELECTIONS IN CONSTANTA COUNTY

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Abstract: Local elections constitute an opportunity for voters to express their political choices in a more authentic way, closer to their party preferences and ideological convictions, as opposed to other types of elections where they have to act strategically and make compromises to maximize the utility of their choices relative to the available electoral options. What happens when due to political developments at the governmental level, voters find themselves in a position to sanction the ruling parties for mismanaging their trust and express this dissatisfaction in second order local contests that carry less significance compared to parliamentary or presidential elections? In the Romanian case, the 2024 electoral cycle included all types of electoral contests (local, European, parliamentary, and presidential) providing multiple opportunities for voters to exhibit a wide range of electoral behaviors – support, rejection, protest. However, what stood out and eventually culminated with a political crisis of ample dimensions was that voters did not exhibit electoral behaviors outside the mainstream expectations until the first round of the presidential elections, when a majority of them supported a fringe independent candidate in the first round, leading to the annulment of the elections altogether and a rescheduled contest in the Spring of 2025. This article analyzes how the local elections were impacted by the bipartisan decisions of the governmental coalition PSD-PNL in the period leading up to the beginning of the electoral cycle and in its aftermath. Were voters inclined to opt for alternatives outside the two main political options, given the ideological differences that could not be sanded off by the coalition format? Or did they retain traditional voting patterns established in previous electoral cycles, favoring party loyalty, instead of untested electoral alternatives? To address these questions, we analyze the results of the 2024 local elections organized in the county and municipality of Constanta, using a mixed methodological approach that focuses on the mayors' elections across all the 70 municipalities, towns and communes of Constanta County.

Keywords: local elections, political parties, electoral behavior, 2024 Romanian elections, PSD-PNL coalition

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Rezumat: Alegerile locale constituie o oportunitate pentru alegători de a-şi exprima opțiunile politice într-un mod mai autentic, mai apropiat de preferințele lor de partid şi de convingerile ideologice, spre deosebire de alte tipuri de alegeri, unde aceştia trebuie să acționeze strategic şi să facă compromisuri pentru a maximiza utilitatea voturilor lor în raport cu opțiunile electorale existente. Ce se întâmplă atunci când, ca urmare a evoluțiilor politice la nivel guvernamental, alegătorii se află în poziția de a sancționa partidele de guvernământ pentru gestionarea defectuoasă a încrederii lor prin exprimarea acestei nemulțumiri în cadrul alegerilor locale, de ordin secundar, care au o semnificație mai mică în comparație cu alegerile parlamentare sau prezidențiale? În cazul românesc, ciclul electoral din 2024 a inclus toate tipurile de competiții electorale (locale, europene, parlamentare şi prezidențiale), oferind multiple oportunități pentru alegători de a manifesta o gamă largă de comportamente electorale – susținere, respingere, protest. Totuşi, ceea ce s-a evidențiat şi a culminat în cele din urmă cu o criză politică de ample dimensiuni a fost faptul că alegătorii nu au manifestat comportamente electorale în afara aşteptărilor până la primul tur al alegerilor prezidențiale, unde o majoritate a acestora a susținut în primul tur un candidat independent marginal, ceea ce a dus la anularea alegerilor şi la o reprogramare a procesului electoral în primăvara anului 2025. Acest articol analizează modul în care alegerile locale au fost influențate de deciziile bipartizane ale coaliției guvernamentale PSD-PNL în perioada premergătoare începerii ciclului electoral şi în perioada ulterioară acestuia. Au fost alegătorii înclinați să opteze pentru alternative în afara celor două opțiuni politice principale, având în vedere persistența diferențelor ideologice care nu au putut fi eliminate de structura coaliției? Sau au fost menținute modelele de vot stabilite în ciclurile electorale anterioare, bazate pe loialitatea de partid, în dauna alternativelor electorale netestate? Pentru a răspunde la aceste întrebări, analizăm rezultatele alegerilor locale organizate în județul şi municipiul Constanța în 2024, utilizând o abordare metodologică mixtă axată pe alegerile primarilor din toate cele 70 de municipii, oraşe şi comune ale județului Constanța.

Cuvinte cheie: alegeri locale, partide politice, comportament electoral, alegeri în România în 2024, coaliția PSD-PNL

I. Introduction

Local elections constitute a fundamental dimension of democratic governance, shaping political accountability, service delivery, and the allocation of public resources at the level closest to citizens' everyday concerns. Despite their often-limited visibility, local elections are highly consequential for local communities, shaping how public policies are designed and implemented. This, in turn, has a significant impact on the quality of democratic processes.

Local political contests can be a barometer of the political environment, measuring voters' attitudes while reflecting on party performances. Are national parties driving local dynamics or are there regional particularities shaping the electoral behaviors of voters? Are electoral outcomes at the local level, in a county, or even further down the line, in a municipality, city, or commune, relevant when assessing the degree of support for a party at the national level? The results of local elections might not be indicative of national trends since factors specific to local public administration – quality of public services and infrastructure, taxation and budget management, availability of funding for public schools and hospitals, public safety, or economic development opportunities – as opposed to party preference or ideology, shape electoral behavior

In Romania, citizens' interest in local elections has been relatively high, at least for the first two decades after the fall of the communist regime, but started to fade in the last decade. From a comparative perspective, Romania's higher turnout in local elections is an outlier relative to other countries where turnout is significantly lower[1]. After 2008, the interest in local electoral contests has been higher than even the one in parliamentary elections. This has been attributed to the fact that the latter were not held at the same time as the presidential elections anymore (after the constitutional reform from 2003, this can only happen once in every 20 years), but also to the multiple electoral reforms that were adopted in a relatively short period of time (reforms concerning not only general and local elections, but also referendums), that generated confusion and distrust in political institutions, especially political parties[2].

One reason that led to a drop in participation was the reform that changed the procedure for electing the mayors. After 2011, the change of the legal provisions regarding the election of mayors, from a two-round majority electoral system to a single round vote, using the first-past-the-post rule, had a paradoxical consequence: the reform did not lead to a more competitive race for the mayoral office or a higher turnout, instead it further contributed to electoral absenteeism as a decline in turnout could be observed[3]. Since the fall of the communist regime, turnout in these elections has generally remained high and until 2016, it rarely fell below 50%. Moreover, for the last four electoral cycles, participation in local elections has consistently exceeded turnout in national legislative elections, with the gap ranging from 8.68 to 14.68 percentage points – the largest difference occurring in 2020[4].

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[1] Lysek, "Local passion and national apathy: investigating the phenomenon of selective voting behaviour", *Local Government Studies* 51, no. 2 (2025): 203-204, https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2024.2341234.

[2] For more details, see Mihaela Ivănescu, "Romanian Electoral Laws between 1990 and 2012: Reforms and Evolutions, or Absenteeism Generating Instability?", *Annals of the Ovidius University of Constanta – Political Science Series*, no. 2 (2013): 159-173; Mihaela Ivănescu, "Insuperable Rules, Absenteeism and Political Strife: A Comparative Analysis of the Romanian National Referendums (1990-2018)", *Annals of the Ovidius University of Constanta – Political Science Series*, no. 7 (2018): 133-154.

[3] Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Istoric electoral – secțiune cuprinzând date privind toate alegerile desfășurate în România după 1990", 2025, https://www.roaep.ro/prezentare/istoric_electoral/.

While nearly two-thirds of eligible voters participated in the 1992 local elections (65%), subsequent elections recorded declining yet relatively stable turnout levels: 56.47% in 1996, 50.85% in 2000, and 54.23% in 2004[5]. In 2008, turnout dropped below 50% for the first time, reaching 48.81%, but rose again in 2012 to 56.26%, the highest level recorded since 1990[6]. Over the last decade, however, a downward trend has re-emerged, culminating in the two lowest turnout rates in Romania's post-communist history: 48.17% in 2016 and 46.62% in 2020. These figures suggest that the Romanian political parties have become increasingly unable to mobilize voters for local elections, despite the heightened importance ascribed to these contests by the media and political elites, who often treat them as performance predictors for general elections.

The 2024 Romanian local elections took place under a distinctive institutional arrangement. On the one hand, decisions involving the organization of the electoral process were taken by a coalition government comprised of the two main parties in Romania: the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and National Liberal Party (PNL); on the other, because the local elections were held simultaneously with the European elections. This merging of electoral contests altered the usual second-order dynamics of local elections by increasing overall mobilization and bringing national and European issues more strongly into the local campaign arena. This opened the door for strategic advantages for governing and well-resourced parties, which could coordinate their messaging and voter mobilization across both contests. As we have noted in another article, to the extent that "the merger was intended to help increase the turnout in the European elections" since voters are more drawn to local elections, "the measure warped the participation and, in a reversal of expectations, turnout for European elections was higher than for the local ones"[7].

This article examines the local electoral contest from June 20204 in Constanta County, a socio-economically diverse region combining major urban centers, a port economy, tourism-dependent localities, and extensive rural areas. This region features substantial municipal-level variation in turnout, party competition, and incumbency strength. The main research questions concern whether the decision to merge local and European elections generated an increase in voter turnout and whether this favored government parties' candidates for mayoral offices.

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Mihaela Ivănescu and Luiza-Maria Filimon, "Local Elections: Still Second-Order? An Analysis of the 2024 Local Elections in Romania", *Revista de Științe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 87 (2025): 141.

To analyze these aspects, we examined, from a quantitative perspective, the results of the competition for the mayors' election and the turnout rates from all the 70 municipalities, towns and communes of Constanta County. Additionally, to add a qualitative dimension to the analysis, we reviewed the recent literature on models of electoral behavior in Romania. The electoral data used was retrieved from the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority and the official documents of the Central Electoral Bureau. By linking municipal turnout data to political outcomes, the article contributes to research on the general issue of local elections and voting in Europe, while from a national perspective, it expands the area of research on democratic engagement and territorial political dynamics in Romania.

II. Literature Review

Research on electoral participation has traditionally pointed to the interaction between individual resources, mobilization, and political motivation[8]. However, local electoral contests are usually defined as lower-tier or less salient, therefore less consequential, and analyzed mostly in relation to declining voter turnout or directly as second-order national elections[9]. Cross-national evidence supports this pattern. Kouba, Novák, and Strnad find that turnout in local elections is shaped by institutional factors, such as electoral timing and the degree of local autonomy, as well as community-level variables, including population size and urbanization[10]. Kouba, Novák, and Strnad's study confirms that local turnout is significantly influenced by whether local elections coincide with higher salience electoral events[11].

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[8] Aengus Bridgman and Dietlind Stolle, "Mobilization and Political Participation", in The Oxford Handbook of Political Participation, ed. Marco Giugni and Maria Grasso (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 703-724; Gary W. Cox, "Electoral Rules, Mobilization, and Turnout", *Annual Review of Political Science* 18 (2015): 49-68, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-060414-035915; Peter Söderlund, Hanna Wass, and André Blais, "The impact of motivational and contextual factors on turnout in first- and second-order elections", *Electoral Studies* 30, no. 4 (2011): 689-699, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2011.06.013.

[9] Karlheinz Reif and Hermann Schmitt, "Nine Second-Order National Elections – A Conceptual Framework for the Analysis of European Election Results", *European Journal of Political Research* 8, no. 1 (1980): 3-44. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.1980.tb00737.x; Anthony Heath et al., "Between First and Second Order: A Comparison of Voting Behaviour in European and Local Elections in Britain", European Journal of Political Research 35 no. 3 (1999): 389-414, https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1006924510899; Alistair Clark and Timothy B. Krebs, "Elections and Policy Responsiveness", in *The Oxford Handbook of Urban Politics*, ed. Peter John, Karen Mossberger, and Susan E. Clarke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 87-113; Ulrik Kjaer and Kristof Steyvers, "Second Thoughts on Second-Order? Towards a Second-Tier Model of Local Government Elections and Voting", in *The Routledge Handbook of International Local Government Research*, ed. Richard Kerley, Joyce Liddle, and Pamela T. Dunning (London: Routledge, 2019), 405-417.

Discussions about participation in local elections and potential solutions to mitigate electoral absenteeism and revitalize citizens engagement have focused on both single-case studies and comparative analyses[12]. Research in comparative politics highlights that, although often overshadowed by national contests, local elections offer valuable insight into subnational political dynamics and provide an arena in which political parties test their organizational strength, local leaders cultivate networks, and voters evaluate performance in ways that may diverge from national level political behavior[13]. Post-communist democracies offer particularly fertile ground for examining these dynamics. Studies show that legacies of political distrust, uneven institutional consolidation, and persistent socio-economic inequalities contribute to lower levels of political participation, especially in local elections[14]. Romania fits this broader regional pattern: participation has declined over time, and substantial territorial variation shapes local political competition. Scholars highlight the role of clientelist structures, incumbents' organizational advantages, and the socio-economic heterogeneity of municipalities in shaping electoral outcomes[15].

On the relationship between central and local authorities, this issue has been analyzed in terms of vertical and horizontal power relations[16]. Stănuş and

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[10] Karel Kouba, Jakub Novák, and Matyáš Strnad, "Explaining Voter Turnout in Local Elections: A Global Comparative Perspective", *Contemporary Politics* 27, no. 1 (2021): 58-78, https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2020.1831764.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Heath et al., "Between First and Second Order", 1999; Tatiana Kostadinova, "Voter Turnout Dynamics in Post-Communist Europe", *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 6 (2003): 741-759, https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00102; André Blais and Daniel Rubenson, "The Source of Turnout Decline: New Values or New Contexts?", *Comparative Political Studies* 46, no. 1 (2013): 95-117, https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414012453032; John Fenwick and Howard Elcock, "Elected Mayors: Leading Locally?", *Local Government Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 581-599, https://doi.org/10.1080/03003930.2013.836492; Kouba, Novák, and Strnad, "Explaining Voter Turnout", 2021).

[13] Daniele Caramani, *The Nationalization of Politics. The Formation of National Electorates and Party Systems in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Régis Dandoy and Arjan H. Schakel, eds., *Regional and National Elections in Western Europe. Territoriality of the Vote in Thirteen Countries* (Houndmills, Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

[14] Kostadinova, "Voter Turnout Dynamics", 2003.

[15] Clara Volintiru, "Clientelism: Electoral Forms and Functions in the Romanian Case Study", *Romanian Journal of Political Science* 12, no. 1 (2012): 35-66; Sergiu Gherghina and Clara Volintiru, "A New Model of Clientelism: Political Parties, Public Resources, and Private Contributors", *European Political Science Review* 9, no. 1 (2017): 115-137, https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773915000326.

[16] Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers, "Local elections and voting: grasping vertical integration and horizontal variation", in *Handbook on Local and Regional Governance*, ed. Filipe Teles (Cheltenham and Northampton: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023), 145-161; Arjan H.

Gheorghiță consider that vertical power relations are linked to decentralization efforts, noting that, in Romania, the reform of local administrations was not supported "by full fiscal decentralization" – in other words, the government retained control on administering local finances[17]. Meanwhile, horizontal power relations are influenced by electoral rules, with local power split in a "dualist system" comprised of mayors and local councils (the former have executive attributions, while latter exercise legislative functions)[18].

Concerning the relation between the mayor and the local council, Stănuş and Gheorghiță underline a critical aspect regarding the nature of the dualist system, namely how unbalanced it is compared to the central administration: the mayors are full-time officials who "control the bureaucratic apparatus of the local government", while the councilors, who are also elected, are part-time officials and majorities in the council tend to be controlled by the mayor[19]. This leads Stănuş and Gheorghiță to observe that, when examining the role of mayor, the Romanian case functions under a "strong mayor model"[20].

On the importance of the mayor in the political landscape, Richard Stren and Abigail Friendly remark that "local politics in many large cities is no longer purely local. Influences from the outside […] are enlarging the political perspectives of elected officials, and particularly, elected mayors"[21]. The Romanian case is notable because there is a self-reinforcing relationship between the center and local branches of public administration, reflected in the vertical mobility of political representatives from county and local levels to executive and legislative positions in government and parliament. Not coincidentally, three of the five democratically elected presidents were formers mayors (Traian Băsescu, Klaus Iohannis, Nicuşor Dan) while some of the most consequential prime ministers in terms of their reform agenda have also been mayors (Emil Boc, Ilie Bolojan).

Schakel and Valentyna Romanova, "Horizontal and Vertical Spill-over in Multilevel Electoral Systems", *Regional & Federal Studies* 31, no. 3 (2021): 299–311, https://doi.org/10.1080/13597566.2021.1934455; Tomáš Došek and Kent Eaton, "Mayors Unchecked: Vertical and Horizontal Dimensions of Local Autonomy in Latin American Municipalities", *Urban Affairs Review* 61, no. 2 (2024): 556-590, https://doi.org/10.1177/10780874241266222.

[17] Cristina Stănuş and Andrei Gheorghiță, "Romania: A Case of National Parties Ruling Local Politics", in *The Routledge Handbook of Local Elections and Voting in Europe*, ed. Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 453-454.

[18] Ibid, 454.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ibid. See also: Alessandro Sancino, Giacomo Carli, and Davide Giacomini, "Relational Leadership in Local Governance: The Engagement of Mayors with Citizens, Public Managers and Politicians", *Public Management Review* 25, no. 9 (2023): 1730-1754, https://doi.org/10.1080/14719037.2022.2039274; Richard C. Schragger, "Can Strong Mayors Empower Weak Cities? On the Power of Local Executives in a Federal System", *The Yale Law Journal* 115 (2006): 2542-2578.

[21] Richard Stren and Abigail Friendly, "Big city mayors: Still avatars of local politics?", *Cities* 84 (2019): 176, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cities.2018.08.005.

From the voters' perspective, we consider two aspects: participation and behavior. In terms of participation, Lysek divides voters between three categories: core voters (participate regularly in all types of elections); core abstainers (do not participate in elections); and selective voters (participate occasionally)[22]. In the selective voters category, Lysek notes that there is a type of voters who only participates in local elections on account of "intrinsic and specific place-bound reasons for voting, (…) trust, and support of continuity"[23].

Regarding electoral behavior, there are multiple models that can explain the process involved in selecting a candidate that can find an application at the local level as well. These include the sociological model, the social cleavage model, the party identification model, the rational choice model, the economic voting model, retrospective and prospective voting model, the second order model, the valence model, the spatial voting model, the issue voting model, or the protest voting model, etc.[24].

For the present analysis, we will briefly refer to two dimensions of electoral behavior: voting patterns in former communist countries and voting patterns in local elections. Gherghina observes that voters' behavior in Central and Eastern Europe is characterized by electoral volatility, which makes it hard for parties to enjoy "stable support among citizens"[25]. In the post-transition barrenness, Gherghina argues, voters were characterized by political (in)experience, negative attitudes towards the post-communist successor parties, as well as a sense of persistent ideological confusion, undoubtedly fueled by the parties' weak programmatic identities[26]. Pacek, Pop-Eleches, and Tucker add "disenchantment" to the profile of the Central and Eastern voter, noting that political dissatisfaction is a chronic issue in the region, related more to the perceived quality of the democratic state, as opposed to the economic developments usually associated with negative attitudes[27].

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[22] Lysek, "Local passion and national apathy", 2025, 206. See also: Benny Geys, "Explaining voter turnout: A review of aggregate-level research", *Electoral Studies* 25, no. 4, (2006): 637-663, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2005.09.002. See also; Silvia Bolgherini, Selena Grimaldi, and Aldo Paparo, *Local Electoral Participation in Europe: The Roots of Municipal Politics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024); Zoltan L. Hajnal and Paul G. Lewis, P. G., "Municipal Institutions and Voter Turnout in Local Elections", *Urban Affairs Review* 38, no. 5 (2003): 645-668, https://doi.org/10.1177/1078087403038005002.

[23] Ibid., 205.

[24] Kai Arzheimer, Jocelyn Evans and Michael S. Lewis-Beck, eds., *The SAGE Handbook of Electoral Behaviour (Volume 1 and Volume 2)* (London: SAGE Publishing, 2017); section on "Theoretical approaches to the study of voter behavior" (chapter 1 - 4) in Justin Fisher et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Elections, Voting Behavior and Public Opinion* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2018). For details regarding the main economic, psychological and sociological models of electoral behaviors, see also: Mihaela Ivănescu, *Alegeri și comportamente electorale în România. De la local la național* (Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2015), 35-92.

[25] Sergiu Gherghina, *Party Organization and Electoral Volatility in Central and Eastern Europe: Enhancing Voter Loyalty* (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2015), 2.

[26] Ibid.

Local trends in electoral behavior in Central and Eastern Europe reflect a complex albeit understudied dynamic[28]. In Hungary, Dobos finds that voters display a limited interest in local elections, reflected in the rates of turnout compared to parliamentary elections, though the author notes that voters in larger cities are more politically engaged than those in smaller communities[29]. This electoral behavior could be explained by the particularity of the local electoral system, which is divided into two subsystems on the basis that "local politics in smaller communities should be about local issues, while in larger cities it should mirror the divisions of national politics"[30].

In Poland, Gendźwiłł characterizes the outcomes of local elections in terms of "splendid isolation" from national politics, with electoral behavior being shaped by "strongly personalized" local politics attributed to "long-lasting dominance of local independent lists (usually organized around local leaders) and the weakness (underinstitutionalization) of nationwide political parties"[31]. Meanwhile, in Bulgaria, Kalcheva and Ushatova point out that citizens regard local elections as important, with surveys indicating that Bulgarian voters participate in local elections on the assumption that "municipal officials are sufficiently responsible and […] can significantly influence the development of the locality"[32]. Moreover, factors shaping electoral behavior are not limited to party affiliation, voters being more drawn to a candidate's personal qualities that must show a connection to the constituents and be knowledgeable of the issues impacting the local community[33].

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[27] Alexander C. Pacek, Grigore Pop-Eleches, and Joshua A. Tucker, "Disenchanted or Discerning: Voter Turnout in Post-Communist Countries", *The Journal of Politics* 71, no. 2 (2009): 475, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022381609090409.

[28] Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers, "From perennial bridesmaids to fully fledged spouses: Advancing the comparative study of local elections and voting", in *The Routledge Handbook of Local Elections and Voting in Europe*, ed. Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 3-18.

[29] Gábor Dobos, "Hungary The expansion and the limits of national politics at the local", in *The Routledge Handbook of Local Elections and Voting in Europe*, ed. Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 296-297.

[30] Ibid., 295

[31] Adam Gendźwiłł, "Poland: A hyperlocalized system?", in *The Routledge Handbook of Local Elections and Voting in Europe*, ed. Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 335

[32] Desislava Kalcheva and Daniela Ushatova, "Bulgaria More open local electoral rules", in *The Routledge Handbook of Local Elections and Voting in Europe*, ed. Adam Gendźwiłł, Ulrik Kjaer, and Kristof Steyvers (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2022), 388.

[33] Ibid., 390.

In Romania, mayors are elected using a single-round plurality system in accordance with the provisions of Law no. 115/2015[34]. Under this rule, the candidate with the most votes wins, regardless of whether they secure an absolute majority. The first past the post system structurally benefits candidates supported by larger, well-organized parties, whose mobilization of resources nation-wide exceeds those of newer or smaller parties[35]. Comparative literature provides a theoretical basis for these outcomes: plurality systems tend to penalize fragmentation, benefit large parties, and create barriers for challengers lacking organizational networks[36]. In Romania, this effect is amplified by incumbents' access to administrative resources and by the prevalence of local clientelist structures[37].

Experts and civil society organizations have argued that the one-round rule reduces representativeness and strategically favors incumbents and major parties[38]. Empirically, the system can produce mayors elected with relatively small pluralities in competitive municipalities, while incumbents in less competitive rural areas benefit from concentrated local loyalties and organizational capacity[39]. For the 2024 elections in Constanta County, this institutional framework is essential for understanding patterns of partisan control and turnout variations.

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[34] Law no. 115 of 19 May 2015 for the election of local public administration authorities, amending the Law of local public administration no. 215/2001, as well as amending and supplementing Law no. 393/2004 on the Statute of local electees, published in the *Official Gazette of Romania*, part I, no. 349 of 20 May 2015, https://www.roaep.ro/legislatie/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Law-115-2015.pdf.

[35] On the systemic advantange of large parties in plurality systems, see: Shaun Bowler, André Blais, and Bernard Grofman, eds., *Duverger's Law of Plurality Voting The Logic of Party Competition in Canada, India, the United Kingdom and the United States* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2009); Massimo Bordignon, Tommaso Nannicini, and Guido Tabellini, "Single round vs. runoff elections under plurality rule: A theoretical analysis", *European Journal of Political Economy* 49 (2017): 123-133, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2017.02.001.

[36] Gary W. Cox, *Making Votes Count. Strategic Coordination in the World's Electoral Systems* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Matthew Søberg Shugart, "Comparative Electoral Systems Research: The Maturation of a Field and New Challenges Ahead", in *The Politics of Electoral Systems*, ed. Michael Gallagher and Paul Mitchell, 25-56 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

[37] Volintiru, "Clientelism: Electoral Forms and Functions", 2012.

[38] Expert Forum, „Vrem primari aleşi în două tururi!", 28.04.2015, https://expertforum.ro/vrem-primari-alesi-in-doua-tururi/; George Jiglău and Gabriel Bădescu, „De ce ar trebui să alegem primarii în două tururi de scrutin", *Centrul pentru Studiul Democrației*, n.d., https://democracycenter.ro/publicatii/reprezentare-politica-publicatie1/; Elena Crângaşu, „De ce încă alegem primarii dintr-un singur tur. Pe cine avantajează", *Cotidianul*, 20.11.2025, https://www.cotidianul.ro/de-ce-inca-alegem-primarii-dintr-un-singur-tur-pe-cine-avantajeaza/.

[39] On the issue of incumbent reelection, see: Corneliu Iaţu, Andreea-Daniela Fedor, and Silviu-Petru Grecu, "Predictors of mayoral reelection in Romanian local elections. Long-term analysis 1996–2016", *Heliyon* 10, no. 21 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e39812.

As concerns the electoral behavior, in the Romanian case voters show a constant interest in local elections, as observed earlier. However, their options are significantly influenced by two factors: the specifics of the electoral system, developed to give an advantage to larger national parties; and the timing of the elections, which generally precedes the parliamentary elections by several months. According to Stănuș and Gheorghiță, voters' participation reflects the dominance of national parties, acting as a "litmus test" on the outcome of parliamentary elections[40] and, as a result, we would posit that the electoral behavior is symbolically vitiated by these particularities.

III. Methodology

This study employs a cross-sectional research design at the level of the administrative territorial units in Constanta County. To eliminate the risk of sampling bias, we develop a systematic comparison across different types of localities. The dataset includes all 70 communes, towns, and municipalities in Constanta County, enabling us to conduct a comprehensive analysis of local variations, since territorial heterogeneity is known to influence political participation, especially at the local level[41]. A total of 4,949 candidacies were submitted for the 2024 local elections: 302 candidacies for the position of mayor, 4,351 candidacies for local councilor positions, 288 candidacies for the positions of county councilors, and 8 candidacies for the position of president of the county council. In the majority of the administrative units in Constanta County, voters had multiple options for mayor: in 49 of the administrative units, there were a maximum of 4 candidates, while in another 21, there were at least 5 candidates registered on the voting lists.

The research approach follows established methodologies in electoral studies that treat localities as meaningful units for assessing the particularities of electoral competitions, voter mobilization, and territorial political behavior. For example, using the "friends and neighbors voting" model, Górecki, Bartnicki, and Alimowski analyzed the election results in over 700 rural municipalities from Poland and found that local candidates influence voter's options and participation, noting that "voters tend to prefer candidates living close to them and candidates enjoy an additional surplus of votes in their home localities"[42]. Another approach focuses on elite mobilization. Fiva and Smith explain that

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[40] Stănuș and Gheorghiță, "Romania: A Case of National Parties", 2022, 462.

[41] See: Jonathan Rodden, "The Geographic Distribution of Political Preferences", *Annual Review Political Science* 13 (2010): 321-340, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.12.031607.092945.

[42] Maciej A. Górecki, Sławomir Bartnicki, and Maciej Alimowski, "Local voting at local elections revisited: 'Friends and neighbors voting' at mayoral elections in rural Poland", *Political Geography* 94 (2022), https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2021.102559.

"candidates or parties will target their mobilization efforts at individuals or groups who would most likely support them but might not otherwise turn out if not contacted"[43]. Fiva and Smith applied their analysis to Norway's two-round election system and found that there is a "friends and neighbors" effect on voter participation while parties "gain votes through the mobilizational effort of individual candidates, and that this effect is strongest in those candidates' hometowns"[44].

In our research framework, localities represent environments where political competition follows uniform electoral rules, but under heterogeneous social, demographic, and political conditions. In theory, this makes them suitable for assessing how local, decentralized political dynamics interact with institutional arrangements driven from the center. In this sense, the analysis seeks to identify patterns in mayoral electoral competition associated with turnout differences and other legislative particularities, such as merging two types of elections, as was the case in Romania in 2024.

The systematic comparative approach across locality types allows us to identify whether electoral volatility and observed turnout differences are context-dependent and whether the typological differentiation of the localities influences political competition, mobilization capacity, and turnout rates. The empirical analysis uses three primary sources: electoral turnout rates for each municipality of Constanta County in the 2024 local elections; mayoral election results, including candidate identity and party affiliation; and locality type (urban / rural, respectively, for urban areas, municipality / town). The datasets, sourced from the Romanian Permanent Electoral Authority and the Central Electoral Bureau provide reliable and comparable indicators across the administrative units.

The empirical focus on mayoral electoral competition is operationalized through the following indicators: number of candidates; party affiliation; vote concentration or fragmentation We consider mayoral elections to be suitable for local-level analysis because they combine personalized competition with party structures, and we can assess whether they amplify or depress local effects. Regarding the turnout, it is treated as both an outcome and an indicator of mobilization capacity, reflecting the interaction between institutional context, political competition, and voter engagement[45].

From the dataset, the municipality of Constanta was selected as a case-study because it is the county capital and an important economic node as a city-port and touristic destination in the region. In addition to the quantitative analysis of the electoral data, we include a breakdown of the campaign themes of the main candidates running for mayor and try to outline the profile of the average voter in the municipality. After all, when considering place-based dynamics, Schulte-Cloos and Bauer find that "territorial identities and sentiments of local belonging can be powerful in shaping political behavior"[46]. In our analysis, the municipality of Constanta stands out because it registered the lowest turnout rate (42.97%) from the dataset and, therefore, represents a good example of the limitations associated with the single-round plurality system given that the electoral developments in the municipality epitomize the opposite of local politics.

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[43] Jon H. Fiva and Daniel M. Smith, "Local candidates and voter mobilization: Evidence from historical two-round elections in Norway", *Electoral Studies* 45 (2017): 132, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2016.11.021.

[44] Ibid., 138.

[45] See: André Blais, "What Affects Voter Turnout?", *Annual Review Political Science* 9 (2006): 111-125, https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.9.070204.105121.

IV. Discussion

IV.1. Electoral Overview

At the county level, nine political formations (eight political parties and one alliance) participated in the local elections and all contented in at least one electoral contest: 1) *Partidul Social Democrat* (Eng. trans.: Social Democratic Party – PSD); 2) *Partidul Național Liberal* (Eng. trans.: National Liberal Party – PNL); 3) *Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor* (Eng. trans.: Alliance for the Union of Romanians – AUR); 4) *Partidul România Mare* (Eng. trans.: Greater Romania Party – PRM); 5) *Partidul Ecologist Român Mare* (Eng. trans.: Romanian Ecologist Party – PER); 6) *Partidul Umanist Social Liberal* (Eng. trans.: Social Liberal Humanist Party – PUSL); 7) *S.O.S. România* (Eng. trans.: S.O.S. Romania Party – SOS); 8) *Partidul Dreapta Alternativă* (Eng. trans.: Alternative Right Party – AD); and 9) *Alianța Dreapta Unită (Uniunea Salvați România – USR, Partidul Mişcarea Populară – PMP, Forța Dreptei – FD)* (Eng. trans.: United Right Alliance – comprised of Save Romania Union, the People's Movement Party, and Force of the Right – known as ADU). At the locality level, other 7 smaller parties and electoral alliances had only one candidate for the mayor position in the entire county: REPER (in Mangalia municipality); *Partidul Neamul Românesc* (Eng. trans.: Romanian People's Party) (in Năvodari city); *Comunitatea Ruşilor Lipoveni din România* (Eng. trans.: Lipoveni Russian Community in Romania (in Ghindăreşti commune); *Partidul Adevăr, Democrație, Educație, Reconstrucție* (Eng. trans.: Truth, Democracy, Education, Reconstruction Party (in Pecineaga commune); Alliance for Medgidia (in Medgidia municipality – candidate proposed by the Tatar Democratic Union); Alliance for Mangalia (in Mangalia municipality – candidate proposed by the Right Alternative Party); and Alliance for Agigea (in Agigea commune – candidate proposed by USR). Several independent candidates were also registered on the voting lists. At the county level, 16 independent candidates were registered in the mayoral race. Five of them ran for office in the municipality of Constanta.

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[46] Julia Schulte-Cloos and Paul C. Bauer, "Local Candidates, Place-Based Identities, and Electoral Success", *Political Behavior* 45 (2023): 680, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11109-021-09712-y.

At the party level, there was a high discrepancy in the number of candidates proposed by the parties for the position of mayor. In this regard, PSD was the only political party that ran candidates in all 70 administrative units in the county; PNL had candidates in 66 administrative units; and AUR had candidates in 58. In the case of ADU, the alliance supported the same candidate in 19 administrative units, but the parties composing it also ran candidates independent of the alliance, as follows: USR had separate candidates in other 14 administrative units, PMP in 9, and FD in 5.

From this outline, we can draw several conclusions: large, traditional center-left and center-right parties are well-represented in the territory; small parties are present, but in a limited capacity; new and small center-right parties reproduce locally the same patterns of fragmentation as observed at the national level (see the case of ADU), while minority groups are represented in electoral contests reflecting the ethnic makeup of the localities. Another significant aspect to consider is the growing presence of the radical right represented by AUR, which was third in terms of territorial representation, behind PSD and PNL. AUR was only able to win in one of the 58 mayoral races and, while these results could indicate a rejection of radical ideologies, given the nature of local politics it is more likely that the voters supported representatives from the PSD-PNL continuum based on political identification or incumbency. Moreover, in the case of AUR, we have to consider the party's long-term ambitions and electoral perspectives at the end of the 2024-2028 electoral cycle, in view of the fact that all the other important parties formed a coalition government after the December 2024 parliamentary elections, that left AUR as the main opposition party. Their participation in local elections in a majority of localities – from large municipalities to the smallest communes, could allow AUR to become an electoral alternative, given how fragile the majorities in the 2024 parliamentary elections were and how unpopular the coalition government became after the adoption of austerity measures in the succeeding period.

IV.2. The County of Constanta: The Domination of Large Parties

At the county level, there were 561 voting sections The number of total registered voters was 618,238 of which 304,126 presented to the polls. The overall turnout registered was 49.19%, with the county ranking 31st out of 41 Romania counties[47]. In 62 of the 70 localities, turnout was higher than 50% (see Annex no. 1). In terms of electoral outcomes, of the political formations identified, we will mention only those that obtained at least one mayoral mandate. In this sense, the results were as follows: PNL received 114.459 votes or 38.22% of the cast votes and won 34 mayorships; PSD received 85,019 votes or 28,89% of the cast votes and won 31 mayorships; AUR received 26.389 votes or 8.96% of the cast votes and won 1 mayorship (Negru Vodă); ADU received 25.195 votes or 8.56% of the cast votes and won 1 mayorship (Fântânele); USR received 4.557 votes or 1.54% of the cast votes and won 1 mayorship (Ghindărești); FD received 2.704 votes or 0.91% of the cast votes and won 1 mayorship (Ion Corvin)[48]. From the independent candidates, only one was able to win a mandate in Săcele, placing fifth at the county level in terms of turnout, above established parties, after receiving 11.464 votes or 3.89% of the cast votes[49] (see Annex no. 1).

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[47] Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Alegeri locale – Detalii generale (Filtru: Județul Constanța)", 2024, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale09062024v2/romania/pv-final.

For the local councils, the results were more diversified, with 13 political formations and two independent candidates gaining seats, however over 80% of votes were obtained by just 4 political formations: PNL (32.83% – 378 mandates), PSD (29.22% – 358 mandates), AUR (13.02% – 101 mandates), and ADU (8.57% – 27 mandates). For the county council, only four political formations obtained seats: PNL (15 seats), PSD (10 seats), AUR (6 seats), and ADU (5 seats). Meanwhile, the election for the president of the county council was won by the PNL representative, Florin Mitroi, who obtained 110.863 votes and 38.10% of the votes cast[50].

The analysis of the results shows that the two largest parties – PNL and PSD – dominate the electoral scene, just as they did in the 2020 elections, when PNL received 37.36% of the votes and obtained 31 mayorships, while PSD received 25.78% of the votes and 33 mayorships respectively. In the beginning of the article, we posited that results might be affected by the fact that since 2021, the two parties were part of a governmental coalition and that local elections were organized at the same time as the ones for the European Parliament. However, the results do not indicate that the parties' performance suffered on account of these dynamics in the local elections. As with previous electoral cycles, the large parties benefited from the single-round plurality system established by Law no. 115 of 19 May 2015, which, as we have analyzed, is prone to maximize the electoral advantage of these parties. Small parties and independent candidates can win mayoral elections, but only in context-dependent outliers (six instances in 2020 and five in 2024 respectively).

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[48] Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă, (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Alegeri locale – Prezență la vot (Filtru Județul Constanța, Primar)”, 2024, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale09062024v2/romania/pv-final.

[49] The turnout at the level of Săcele commune was the highest in the county: 94,12 %.

[50] Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Alegeri locale – Prezență la vot (Filtru Județul Constanța, Consiliu Local)”, 2024, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale09062024v2/romania/pv-final.

In terms of trends, we would note the issues associated with political fragmentation that accompany small center-right wing parties, regardless of whether they are part of coalitions (see the case of PMP, which wins three mayor elections in 2020, while as part of the ADU, the coalition wins two mayorships, but none of the candidates are from PMP). Coupled with the absence of territorial networks of representation and limited organizational power, small parties cannot be electorally competitive in the county of Constanta. For example, nation-wide, USR was able to win 28 elections for mayor, but only three of these were in municipal urban centers: Dominic Friz in Timişoara, Elena Lasconi[51] in Câmpulung, and Lucian-Daniel Stanciu-Viziteu in Bacău[52]. Another notable trend would be the continued electoral decline of PSD over the last two electoral cycles, both at local and national levels. In the case of Constanta, the decline is more preeminent since, between 2004-2016, PSD used to dominate the elections at the municipality and county level in all the four types of elections (mayor, local council, county council, president of the county council)[53]. The local downswing can be a sign of voter's fatigue with the party (former mayor of Constanta was embroiled in various corruption scandals that tarnished the image of the party) but coupled with the middling performance in the parliamentary elections, the results point to a party in systemic crisis. This situation might have wide-ranging ramifications in future elections, especially when considering the rise of AUR, as a radical alternative, even if AUR is not presently regarded as an alternative by the general electorate and by the PSD electorate, in particular.

IV.3. The Municipality of Constanta: The Nationalization of Politics

The municipality of Constanta recorded the highest number of candidates for mayor compared to the other administrative unites: 9 representatives from the political formations identified and 5 independent candidates. For the present analysis, we will analyze the first four candidates who obtained the highest scores. The turnout in the municipality of Constanta was the lowest compared to the other administrative units but, relative to the 2020 elections, it was higher by four percentage points (42.97%). Obtaining 29.44%, the candidate who won the elections for mayor was Vergil Chițac, the PNL representative and incumbent mayor. The runner-up was the ADU candidate, followed by the PSD candidate, while the fourth place was occupied by the representative from AUR (see Table no. 1).

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[51] It should be noted that in the first round of the presidential elections that were annulled at the end of 2024, Elena Lasconi, who was the president of USR at the time, was the runner-up candidate, ahead of the PSD and PNL candidates.

[52] USR, „Primari”, https://usr.ro/organizatie/primari?page=1.

[53] For a timeline of results for local election beginning with 1996, see Commit Global, „Rezultate vot (județul Constanța)”, https://istoric.rezultatevot.ro/elections/114/results? division=county&countyId=6793.

2020 Mayor Election			**2024 Mayor Election**		
Candidate	**No. of votes**	**% votes**	**Candidate**	**No. of votes**	**% votes**
Vergil Chițac PNL	27,569	28.48	Vergil Chițac, PNL	31,042	29.44
Stelian Ion USR	23,523	24.30	Stelian Ion, ADU	21,889	20.76
Decebal Făgădău PSD	23,414	24.19	Horia Constantinescu PSD	21,840	20.71
Horia Constantinescu PPU-SL	4876	5.03	Ovidiu Cupșa, AUR	11,752	11.14
Total registered voters: 262,237 Total voters present at the polls: **100,256** Turnout: **38.23%** Total valid votes cast: 96,781 Total invalid votes: 2,611			Total registered voters: 252,662 Total voters present at the polls: **108,571** Turnout: **42.97%** Total valid votes cast: 105,416 Total invalid votes: 3,004		

Table no. 1: Results of the mayor election in the Constanta Municipality in comparative perspective (2020 – 2024). Source: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Alegeri locale – Prezență la vot”, 2020, 2024, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale27092020/romania-pv-final, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale09062024v2/romania/pv-final

In terms of the electoral programs, Vergil Chițac, the PNL candidate, who was the incumbent mayor of Constanta, campaigned on the idea of continuity. Chițac's focus was on the development of the municipality, pledging that he would continue the rehabilitation of the major boulevards; would build five large multistorey car parks and road crossings that will contribute to traffic decongestion; would prioritize the construction of the coastal road, essential for the development of the seaside; and that he would encourage investments in the Mamaia resort, which he envisioned as an all-season resort[54].

Horia Constantinescu, the candidate supported by the PSD, was the former head of the National Authority for Consumer Protection. One of the main campaign themes focused on issue of parking and infrastructure, proposing the construction of new parking lots and lower parking fees in the city; the creation of new sidewalks or pedestrian paths; the development of green spaces around residential parking areas[55]. Regarding social policies, Constantinescu promised the establishment of a call center for vulnerable categories, as well as the reduction of prices for certain categories of food products and medicines for seniors[56]. Other measures included the construction of neighborhood multifunctional centers and a logistic hub for young people[57].

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[54] Vergil Chițac, „Ordine și seriozitate. Constanța puternică. Program electoral”, 2024, https://www.vergilchitac.ro/wp-content/themes/avc/Program_Electoral.pdf; see also: Vergil Chițac, „Progam de guvernare locală (2024-2028), 2024, https://vergilchitac.ro/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Program-electoral-Vergil-Chit%CC%A6ac.pdf.

Stelian Ion, the candidate supported by ADU, was the former USR Minister of Justice. Of all the candidates, Stelian Ion's electoral program had the least mentions of social policies, focusing more on issues regarding the sustainable development of the city through initiatives aimed at reducing pollution, recycling, or using environmentally friendly transport alternatives[58]. Like the other candidates, he also addressed the issue of parking, with promises to build new multistorey car parks. Among other topics included in the electoral program were the development of an educational center for children with special needs, the rehabilitation of pedestrian sidewalks, or the construction of a new theater[59].

Ovidiu Cupşa, the AUR candidate, is a former member of PNL, who had previously been the manager of the Romanian Center for the Training and Improvement of Naval Transport Personnel (CERONAV) until 2023. His electoral program was one that abounded in populist promises and social measures, such as subsidizing the down payment that young people needed to buy a home through the "New House" program; building homes that could be purchased at prices below 40,000 euros; creating 20,000 jobs in the next 12 years; and increasing the average salary, GDP per capita and the local budget of Constanta by 100%. Other initiatives included: building social canteens for the elderly or offering vouchers to support pregnant women[60].

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[55] Tomis TV Constanta, „Soluțiile lui Horia Constantinescu pentru parcări şi trafic", 22.05.2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vth9eXKIMG4.

[56] HotNews, „Magazinele RESPECT, un proiect marca Horia Constantinescu. „Oamenii au nevoie de protecție, le-o voi oferi din prima zi a mandatului meu!"", 26.05.2024, https://hotnews.ro/p-magazinele-respect-un-proiect-marca-horia-constantinescu-oamenii-au-nevoie-de-protectie-le-o-voi-oferi-din-prima-zi-a-mandatului-meu-909023.

[57] Călin Gavrilaş, „Profil de Candidat. Horia Constantinescu (PSD)", *Dobrogea Live*, 25.04.2024, https://dobrogealive.ro/profil-de-candidat-horia-constantinescu-psd-as-fi-un-primar-si-jumatate-nu-stiu-sa-lucrez-doar-8-ore-pe-zi-eunudorm/.

[58] USR, „Stelian Ion şi-a depus candidatura pentru funcția de primar al municipiului Constanța", 30.04.2024, https://usr.ro/stiri/stelian-ion-si-a-depus-candidatura-pentru-functia-de-primar-al-municipiului-constanta. See also: Replica de Constanța, „Stelian Ion, despre programul electoral „Constanța contează!"", 17.05.2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BEq3Hf4sjs8.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Gabriela Gevelegean, Nicoleta Baciu, and Nicuşor Buşurică, „Ovidiu Cupşa îşi depune candidatura la Primăria Constanța din partea AUR", *Ziua de Constanța*, 29.04.2024, https://www.ziuaconstanta.ro/informatii/alegeri-electorale-romania/live-text-video-ovidiu-cupsa-isi-depune-candidatura-la-primaria-constanta-din-partea-aur-854997.html; see also: Ovidiu Cupşa, „Program", 2024, https://www.ovidiucupsa.ro/program; Redacția Dezvlăuiri.ro, „Cine e

In the sample analyzed, aside from the PNL candidate, two others had also participated in the elections from 2020: Stelian Ion, the ADU candidate and Horia Constantinescu, the PSD candidate. Stelian Ion previously ran on the part of USR, though he retained the support of party in the ADU coalition, while Horia Constantinescu had been the candidate of the *Partidul Umanist Social Liberal* (Eng. trans.: Social Liberal Humanist Party – PPU-SL) in the 2020 elections. Notably, while Constantinescu improved his score – arguably aided by the PSD electoral apparatus – the 2024 scores of ADU and PSD were worse compared to 2020 (minus four percentage points), when USR had not been part of a coalition, while the PSD candidate had been the incumbent mayor at that time, Decebal Făgădău.

The 2024 results reflect the consolidation of the National Liberal Party's position at the municipal levels, reconfirming the electorate's decoupling from the Social Democrat Party, first observed in the 2020 elections. When considering the percentage of votes and the rate of turnout, we can assess how PNL benefited from electoral system to further entrench its institutional presence in the municipality of Constanta. As for the impact of the electoral programs, we would posit that their influence on voters' options was limited, given that, on the one hand, there was an overlap between certain topics adopted by the candidates, while, on the other, certain proposal were too technical or abstract (see the case of the multifunctional centers) as to garner the interest of the general electorate.

V. Conclusion

In Constanta County and the Municipality of Constanta, the 2024 local elections reflected broader national patterns of political consolidation, supported by legal frameworks that favor established parties. The local context analyzed also showcased the challenges that new or small parties face in gaining meaningful electoral support. The elections, held on 9 June 2024, coincided with the European elections, following a government decision to merge the two contests. This decision, which the coalition government believed would be efficient in administrative terms and help mobilize a higher turnout in European elections, was criticized for compressing the campaign period and creating difficulties for electoral engagement for smaller political formations.

In the municipality of Constanta, incumbent Vergil Chițac won the mayoral contest with about 30% of the votes cast against a crowded field of 14 candidates, demonstrating again how plurality systems can reward candidates even without absolute majority. PNL also led in the county council election,

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în spatele candidatului AUR la Primăria Constanța. Interviu cu omul Ovidiu Cupșa", 24.02.2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VC2cWr8wnO8.

followed by PSD and AUR, while smaller parties and independent candidates accounted for a modest share of votes, often failing to surpass thresholds for proportional representation for local and county councils.

This dominance of the large parties, PNL and PSD, is consistent with national results, where the parties captured the highest share of mayoralties and council seats. National data show that the two parties together garnered over 60% of the vote share and a disproportionately high share of seats due to vote redistribution from parties that failed to cross the electoral thresholds. This structural advantage stems from both electoral law and political practice: larger parties have deeper organizational networks, broader name recognition, and greater access to resources. These factors represent an additional advantage in the case analyzed, when local elections were merged with European contests that tend to emphasize national party identities.

For smaller and new parties, the electoral environment proved inhospitable. Parties like USR (which struggled even under the ADU banner to convert candidacies into institutional representation in Constanta) and others mirrored nationwide patterns, where they placed near or below the electoral thresholds and won few mandates. Moreover, the need to compete simultaneously in local and European elections diluted the visibility of niche platforms, as voter attention centered on major party coalitions and the broader implications of European representation.

The degree to which PSD and PNL were penalized by the electorate for being in a coalition government – antithetical to traditional partisan positions – was not evident at the local level, which, as noted elsewhere[61], may very well have created a false sense of security and undue electoral confidence for which both parties would be sanctioned by swathes of the electorate in the national elections from November-December 2024.

In conclusion, the 2024 elections in Constanta highlighted how electoral law, timing, and entrenched party dominance shape local political outcomes. The single-round plurality system tended to consolidate power among established parties, particularly in a crowded field, while the merging of local with European elections may have exacerbated the challenges for smaller parties to campaign in local elections. As a result, in the 2024-2028 electoral cycle, local governance in Constanta continues to be monopolized by the larger national political parties, with limited breakthroughs for emerging political actors. However, where breakthroughs were registered, as in the case of AUR, however small (winning one mayorship out of 70), these should be analyzed more in-depth to determine whether they are context-dependent outliers or whether they might signal that radical politics are electorally viable under the right conditions.

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[61] Ivănescu and Filimon, "Local Elections: Still Second-Order?", 2025; see also: Luiza-Maria Filimon and Mihaela Ivănescu, "The SOE Redux: The 2024 European Parliament Elections in the Romanian Context", *L'Europe Unie* 23 (2025): 132-150, https://leuropeunie.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/art-9-132_150.pdf.

Finally, we would argue that a focused study of the 2024 local elections in Constanta County and the Municipality of Constanta advances the literature on local elections by providing a detailed, sub-national perspective on how electoral laws and institutional design shape political competition. While existing literature often emphasizes national-level outcomes, the analysis of the Constanta case-study allows for an examination of how plurality systems, the nationalization of politics by large parties, and the organization of simultaneous local and European elections impact electoral results at the local level. In this sense, the present research also contributes to comparative studies on local elections, party dynamics, and voter behavior in multi-level elections, providing empirical insights relevant beyond the Romanian context.

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Annex no. 1

Election Results and Turnout at the Level of the Administrative Units of Constanta County (Municipalities, Cities, Communes)

Territorial Administrative Units					
Municipalities					
No.	**Municipality**	**Turnout (%)**	**Elected Mayor**	**% of votes**	**Party affiliation**
1.	Constanta	42.97%	Chițac Vergil	29.44%	PNL
2.	Mangalia	51.02%	Radu Cristian	48.85%	PNL
3.	Medgidia	41.92%	Vrabie Valentin	63.49%	PNL
Cities					
No.	**City**	**Turnout (%)**	**Elected Mayor**	**% of votes**	**Party affiliation**
4.	Cernavodă	48.92%	Negoiță Liviu-Cristian	34.20%	PNL
5.	Eforie	50.28%	Șerban Robert-Nicolae	64.24%	PNL
6.	Hârşova	54.13%	Ionescu Viorel	37.95%	PNL
7.	Murfatlar	54.34%	Cojocaru Gheorghe	77.33%	PNL
8.	Năvodari	43.94%	Chelaru Florin	32.25%	PSD
9.	Negru Vodă	54.23%	Argintaru Mihai-Adrian	41.28%	**AUR**
10.	Ovidiu	52.06%	Scupra George	65.25%	PNL
11.	Techirghiol	57.02%	Soceanu Iulian-Constantin	64.36%	PNL
Communes					
No.	**Commune**	**Turnout (%)**	**Elected Mayor**	**% of votes**	**Party affiliation**
12.	23 August	51.66%	Mitrana Mugur-Viorel	85.56 %	PNL
13.	Adamclisi	71.44 %	Floca Ionuț	36%	PSD
14.	Agigea	61.80 %	Cîrjaliu Cristian-Maricel	54.75%	PSD
15.	Albeşti	60.84 %	Moldovan Paul-Mihăiță	62.01%	PNL
16.	Aliman	62.88 %	Nicola George	68.59%	PNL
17.	Amzacea	56.44 %	Gobeajă Laurențiu-Adrian	68.81%	PNL
18.	Băneasa	61.43 %	Blagan Eleonor	60.97%	PNL
19.	Bărăganu	57.52 %	Neague Magdalena	41.21%	PSD

20.	Castelu	61.07 %	Anghel Nicolae	55.54%	PSD
21.	Cerchezu	65.45 %	Chelaru Dumitru	47.95%	PSD
22.	Chirnogeni	44.04 %	Manta Gheorghe	60.16%	PSD
23.	Ciobanu	61.09 %	Gurgu Tudorel	55.87%	PSD
24.	Ciocîrlia	68.02 %	Şerbu Ionuţ	51.14%	PNL
25.	Cobadin	47.53 %	Telehoi Cristian	50.93%	PSD
26.	Cogealac	72.01 %	Cati Hristu	68.53%	PSD
27.	Comana	58.33 %	Osman Erdal	60.06%	PNL
28.	Corbu	58.33 %	Lumînare Vasile	64.95%	PSD
29.	Costineşti*	72.53 %	Jeanu Dumitru	48.24%	PSD
30.	Crucea	58.64 %	Tudorache Iulian	80.34%	PNL
31.	Cumpăna	50.21 %	Gâju Mariana	68%	PSD
32.	Cuza Vodă	55.40 %	Dulgheru Viorel	74.54%	PNL
33.	Deleni	72.39 %	Dan Marian	66.23%	PSD
34.	Dobromir	71.02 %	Iliescu Eugen	55.58%	PNL
35.	Dumbrăveni	80.76 %	Şandru Luminiţa	62.99%	PNL
36.	Fântânele	71.45 %	Ciobanu Niculina	55.15%	**ADU (USR)**
37.	Gârliciu	66.90 %	Tufã Anica	65.57%	PNL
38.	Ghindăreşti	49.42 %	Vîlcu Mihai	40.66%	**USR**
39.	Grădina	61.49 %	Iacobici Gabriela	100%	PSD
40.	Horia	58.53 %	Ioniţă Nicolae	75.34%	PNL
41.	Independenţa	62.96 %	Ştefan Marius	42.82%	PNL
42.	Ion Corvin	69.93 %	Cazacu George	47.17%	**ADU (FD)**
43.	Istria	61.72 %	Ionescu Mihai	75.77%	PSD
44.	Limanu	54.76 %	Georgescu Gheorghe-Daniel	68.14%	PSD
45.	Lipniţa	61.39 %	Dinu Nicolae-Florin	47.20%	PNL
46.	Lumina	50.99 %	Chiru Dumitru	33.78%	PSD
47.	Mereni	63.82 %	Guriţă Dumitru	33.83%	PNL
48.	Mihai Viteazu	56.73 %	Costache Adrian	40.53%	PNL
49.	Mihail Kogălniceanu	53.86 %	Belu Ancuţa-Daniela	77.67%	PNL
50.	Mircea Vodă	56.53 %	Ionaşcu George	62.11%	PSD
51.	Nicolae Bălcescu	62.71 %	Bălan Viorel	53.71%	PNL
52.	Oltina	69.24 %	Cealera Ştefania	61.64%	PSD
53.	Ostrov	56.13 %	Dragomir Niculae	42.95%	PSD
54.	Pantelimon	68.02 %	Armăşescu Costel	68.78%	PNL
55.	Pecineaga	56.02 %	Makkai Marian	75.17%	PSD
56.	Peştera	50.85 %	Demirel Bobe Paraschiva	55.79%	PSD
57.	Poarta Albă	58.49 %	Delicoti Vasile	70.17%	PNL
58.	Rasova	60.68 %	Neamţu Mihalache	57.27%	PSD
59.	Saligny	47.21 %	Beiu Ion	83.19%	PSD

60.	Saraiu	67.07 %	Irimia Dorinela	75.36%	PSD
61.	Săcele	94.12 %	Tucă Ştefan	37.39%	**Independent**
62.	Seimeni	59.18 %	Şerban Mitică	61.22%	PSD
63.	Siliştea	68.07 %	Soare Mihai	53.85%	PSD
64.	Tîrguşor	71.20 %	Negru Mădălina	63.30%	PSD
65.	Topalu	67.90 %	Stanciu Valentin	60.98%	PNL
66.	Topraisar	53.89 %	Gheorghe Stelian	44.55%	PSD
67.	Tortoman	63.02 %	Grosu Gheorghe	34.67%	PNL
68.	Tuzla	56.52 %	Reşit Taner	27.77%	PSD
69.	Valu lui Traian	53.05 %	Iurea Iulia-Claudia	77.31%	PNL
70.	Vulturu	59.29 %	Berbec Eugen-Marius	100%	PSD

Source for aggregated data: Autoritatea Electorală Permanentă (Eng. trans.: Permanent Electoral Authority), „Alegeri locale – Date finale", 2024, https://prezenta.roaep.ro/locale09062024v2/romania/pv-final.

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POVERTY, AUTONOMY AND DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract: This study undertakes a philosophical exploration of the relationship between material deprivation and democratic participation in Nigeria. It interrogates the moral and political implications of conducting elections in contexts where poverty severely constrains individual autonomy and distorts the collective will of deprived people. As an exercise in philosophy, the analysis adopts the radical approach over the empirical model of sovereignty. The paper questions whether the democratic outcome in such settings can be considered truly representative or what an approximate of democracy. It juxtaposes liberal democratic ideals with real-world electoral practices shaped by clientelism, a sense of hopelessness and systemic inequality and whether the intersection between ideal and its application creates legitimacy for the model of democracy in practice. Furthermore, the paper engages with the idea of technocratic alternatives such as in the Chinese model not as a prescription, but as a potential alternative philosophical provocation that can enable one to reconsider what constitutes appropriate rule in societies where freedom of choice is undermined by poverty conditions. In the end, the paper calls for the need to redefine and reimagine democracy to prioritizes human dignity and provide substantive freedom over mere proceduralism or other democratic simulacra like the ones that exists in Nigeria.

Keywords: structural poverty, democracy, democratic participation, legitimacy, autonomy, political justice, African philosophy, Nigeria

Rezumat: Acest studiu întreprinde o explorare filosofică a relației dintre privațiunile materiale şi participarea democratică în Nigeria. Analiza interoghează implicațiile morale şi politice ale desfăşurării alegerilor în contexte în care sărăcia constrânge sever autonomia individuală şi distorsionează voința colectivă a persoanelor defavorizate. Ca exercițiu de filosofie, analiza adoptă abordarea radicală în detrimentul modelului empiric al suveranității. Studiul pune sub semnul întrebării dacă rezultatul democratic în astfel de contexte poate fi considerat cu adevărat reprezentativ sau, este mai degrabă o aproximare a democrației. Prezenta analiză juxtapune idealurile democratice liberale cu practicile electorale din lumea reală, influențate de clientelism, deznădeje şi inegalitate sistemică, interogând dacă intersecția dintre ideal şi aplicarea sa creează legitimitate pentru modelul aplicat al democrației. Mai mult, studiul abordează ideea alternativelor tehnocratice, cum ar fi în modelul chinezesc, nu ca o prescripție, ci ca o potențială

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provocare filosofică alternativă care poate permite reconsiderarea a ceea ce se constituie într-o guvernare adecvată în societățile în care libertatea de alegere este subminată de condițiile marcate de precaritate. În cele din urmă, studiul subliniază necesitatea redefinirii şi reimaginării democrației în vederea prioritizării demnității umane şi a respectării libertății în deplinătatea sa, în contrast cu abordări procedurale sau alte simulacre democratice precum cele existente în Nigeria.

Cuvinte cheie: sărăcie structurală, democrație, participare democratică, legitimitate, autonomie, justiție politică, filosofie africană, Nigeria

I. Introduction

In the classic understanding, democracy is grounded on the premise of individual autonomy i.e. the capacity of citizens to reason, deliberate and make informed choices regarding the direction of their political community. Rooted in the Enlightenment ideals, democratic theory assumes as certain reference points the ideals of freedom, education, and economic security without which the citizens' political agency may be fundamentally impaired[1]. Yet, for many societies in the Global South, predominantly in Africa, these prerequisites are a far cry from what democratic theory envisions. Nigeria offers a blunt illustration of this paradox: a formal democracy where the majority of the electorate struggle with the incapacitating effects of poverty, illiteracy, and systemic exclusion. In such a context, a persistent philosophical question emerges: can a democracy flourish where the people are not fully free to choose? Or better put, how does the state of poverty relative to political legitimacy impact the practice of democracy in Nigeria?

Democracy essentially is not simply the act of voting but an expression of the autonomous will within a just political system. As Amartya Sen argues, freedom is both the end and the means of development since without economic and social freedom, political freedoms are hollow[2]. In Nigeria, where over 60% of the population lives below the poverty line, democratic involvement often degenerates into a transactional exercise shaped by immediate material needs rather than by enduring political principles and convictions[3]. Citizens are not purely "free voters" but distressed and desperate individuals circumventing a structure that exchange their votes for bags of rice, cash tokens, or empty promises. This reality calls into question the moral legitimacy of democracy via electoral outcomes. As Philip Petit notes, freedom in the republican sense involves non-domination and the ability to make unforced choices i.e. conditions that poverty systematically undermines[4].

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[1] John Dewey, "Democracy and Educational Administration", *School and Society* 45, no. 1167 (1937): 457.

[2] Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 152.

[3] World Bank, *Nigeria Development Update: The Continuing Urgency of Business Unusual* (Washington, DC: World Bank Publications, 2022), https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/099740006132214750/pdf/P17782005822360a00a0850f63928a34418.pdf.

The commodification of votes through clientelism and vote-buying reduces the electorate to mere instruments in the hands of the political elites and this, in turn, distorts democratic competition and establishes the rule from the top or of the highest bidders rather than the that of the most competent or just leaders. This situation aptly reflects Rousseau's concern that inequality can corrupt the general will, rendering elections mere expressions of power rather than true reflections of collective autonomy[5]. In this light, democracy in Nigeria though procedurally active yet, is basically compromised. It is a democracy of appearance rather than essence, a "façade democracy"[6] where elections occur, but in the absence of democratic virtues of accountability, justice and equality.

The dilemma of the democratic outcomes led some to consider alternative governance models that emphasize merit, order and long-term planning over mass electoral participation. The Chinese model of elite-led, technocratic governance can be seen as an example where competence and state-driven development are prioritized, albeit at the expense of liberal democratic norms[7]. While this model is not without shortcomings, particularly as it undermines human rights and dissent, it poses a challenging question for democracy in Nigeria: is procedural democracy sustainable or even desirable in conditions of mass poverty? This paper rejects any authoritarian premises, but, rather, calls for a reconsideration of what democracy must mean in societies where poverty essentially limits human agency and autonomy. It advocatess for a philosophical shift from a procedural understanding of democracy to a functional one where political legitimacy is not measured by the number of routine elections but by the degree to which citizens are empowered to act as free and informed agents

To pursue these questions systematically, the study is structured into five sections. Following the introductory section, the second section examines the relationship between poverty and political autonomy, by drawing on the capability approach of Amatya Sen and Martha Nussbaum as well as on classical notions of freedom in political philosophy. The third section interrogates the phenomenon of electoral manipulation, exploring how hunger-driven choices undermine democratic legitimacy and reduce elections to rituals devoid of substantive agency. The fourth section engages the normative debate on political participation, contrasting liberal democratic universalism with meritocratic or elite-driven alternative such as the Chinese political model, supported by theorists like Daniel A. Bell. The fifth section critically evaluates these models and proposes a reimagined conception of democracy grounded in African philosophical tradition, particularly drawing from the participatory and justice-oriented framework articulated by Claude Ake. The analysis concludes by reflecting on the moral burden of sustaining democracy in conditions of deprivation and the need for substantive, rather than merely procedural freedom. Overall, the paper is guided by a philosophical framework that combines capability theory, the republican notion of freedom and African communitarian political thought, enabling the development of a multidimensional interrogation of how poverty constrains autonomy, distorts legitimacy, and challenges the very meaning democratic rule.

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[4] Philip Pettit, *On the People's Terms: A Republican Theory and Model of Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 76.

[5] Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 50. Originally published in 1762.

[6] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs* 76, no. 6 (1997): 24

[7] Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 113.

II. Theoretical Framework and Philosophical Approach

This paper is premised on a multidisciplinary philosophical framework that brings together political philosophy, African philosophical thought and critical social theory to interrogate the tension between poverty, autonomy, and democratic legitimacy. The analysis proceeds from the assumption rooted in both liberal and republican traditions that political agency requires a minimum threshold of material and social capability. In this regard, the paper adopts Amatya Sen's[8] and Martha Nussbaum's[9] *capability approach* as a foundation for understanding how deprivation undermines the substantive freedoms necessary for meaningful democratic participation. This approach is complemented by republican notion of freedom, particularly Philip Pettit's idea that domination restricts non-arbitrary choice, which is used to explain how economic vulnerability transforms citizens into politically dependent subjects susceptible to manipulation. Additionally, the framework integrates Africa communitarian political theory, with special emphasis on Claude Ake's critique of liberal democracy and his call for participatory, justice-oriented and culturally grounded democratic structures in Africa.

Methodologically, the paper adopts a philosophical-analytical approach. This involves critically examining the conceptual linkages between poverty, autonomy, and legitimacy and interrogating normative assumptions embedded in democratic theory. Rather than conducting empirical fieldwork, the study relies on conceptual analysis, normative reasoning and comparative theoretical evaluation. This approach is appropriate because the central task is not to measure voter behavior statistically but to explain and evaluate the moral and political implication of conducting elections under conditions of extreme deprivation. By interrogating existing philosophical argument and political models, the paper aims to further contribute to the broader discourse on democratic ethics and political justice in Africa.

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[8] Amartya Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1985).

[9] Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011).

The selection of the philosophical sources is guided by three main criteria. First, sources were selected from major traditions in political philosophy, including liberalism (John Rawls and Isaiah Berlin respectively), republicanism (Philip Pettit) and communitarianism (Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye) to ensure a plurality of perspectives on autonomy, freedom, and democratic legitimacy. Second, the paper draws on African political philosophers such as Claude Ake and Kwasi Wiredu because their works offer a contextually grounded critique of Western democratic models and provide unique insights relevant to African political conditions. Third, the paper incorporates contemporary theorists of meritocracy and technocracy, such as Daniel A. Bell whose work on the Chinese political model provides a contrasting framework for thinking about political participation in societies heavily burdened by inequality.

In analyzing these sources, the paper adopts a critical-hermeneutic method focusing on how each thinker conceptualizes key ideals such as autonomy, justice, legitimacy, and participation. Texts are not treated merely as repositories of arguments but as interventions shaped by historical, cultural, and political contexts. The analysis is therefore comparative and reconstructive, seeking to understand not only what each theorist argues but also how their ideas illuminate the African experience of democracy under conditions of structural poverty.

III. Poverty and the Erosion of the Political Autonomy

At the heart of any democratic society lies the assumption that citizen are expected to make rational, informed, and autonomous decisions. However, the presence of prevalent poverty calls this assumption into question. In political philosophy, autonomy is not merely the absence of coercion but the presence of conditions that enable one to act meaningfully and deliberately. Isaiah Berlin's distinction between "negative" and "positive" liberty is helpful here: while a poor person may not be physically coerced to vote in a certain way (negative liberty), their circumstances may render them incapable of making a genuinely free choice (positive liberty)[10]. Inadvertently, poverty becomes a powerful form of coercion from a democratic perspective.

In Nigeria, where poverty is endemic, this lack of autonomy becomes politically dangerous. The 2023 elections for instance witnessed pervasive reports of massive vote-buying and electoral fraud, with some candidates openly distributing food and cash in exchange for support. In many rural areas where state presence is minimal and access to social services is virtually non-existent, these gifts were not perceived as corruption but as immediate survival strategy. As Ake notes, African politics often become "a matter of life and death", not of ideology[11]. Under such conditions, the electorate becomes more vulnerable to manipulation, not due to ignorance or moral failure, but due to a rational calculation within an unjust socioeconomic arrangement and circumstances. This instrumentalization of poverty in the political process weakens the moral basis for democratic validity. According to Rawls, a just society is one where social and economic inequalities are arranged to benefit the least advantaged[12]. When poverty becomes a tool for political manipulation rather than a condition to be alleviated, the political system itself becomes complicit in propagating unfairness. In this case, election, rather than being a means of rectifying injustice, becomes an instrument through which unfairness is embedded.

Additionally, poverty impairs the faculties needed for meaningful political participation. Access to education, healthcare, and reliable information essential for civic engagement are often beyond reach for a large part of the Nigerians population. This not only affects voting but the capacity to understand, interpret, and interrogate political discourse. Paulo Freire argues that oppressed individuals, if not critically aware of their situation, may internalize and suppress their subjugation and participate in systems that reproduce it[13]. In Nigeria, many voters have come to accept corruption and incompetence as inevitable political realities, creating a dangerous cycle of fatalism.

Beyond the individual, poverty also shapes the structural environment in which politics develops. Political parties lacking ideological depth and coherence, often function as patronage machines whose success depends on their ability to mobilize resources to secure electoral victory. The focus of these parties is not on building stronger and sustainable institutions or articulating or projecting visionary policies, but on distributing immediate material relief as rewards for party loyalty. This has deep implication: democracy, ideally a collective deliberation on the common good, is then reduced to a transactional market of short-term gains. As Michael Sandel argues, when market logic pervades an area meant to be governed by moral reasoning, such as politics, civil virtue is completely eroded[14].

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[10] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969), 131.

[11] Claude Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 1996), 8.

[12] John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 3.

[13] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 72.

It is therefore imperative to note that this situation may not be exclusive to Nigeria. In his analysis of populism in Latin America, De La Torre observes that poverty often makes citizens defenceless and susceptible to charismatic leaders who offer symbolic inclusion but deliver little or no structural change[15]. Nonetheless, what makes Nigeria's case predominantly glaring is the scale of poverty and the fragility of its institutions. The yawning gap between the political elite and the vast populace is not just economic but also epistemic: the rulers and the ruled live in fundamentally different realities, which further complicates democratic accountability and responsibility. This raises the following questions: can consent be meaningful in the absence of basics needs? And if a person votes not out of conviction but out of desperation, can that vote be said to confer legitimacy to the elected? Rousseau warned that when inequality becomes extreme, the social contract ceases to reflect a collective will and begins to mirror the will of the powerful[16]. In such cases, elections become rituals of consent rather than genuine expressions of democratic choice.

Consequently, addressing the role of poverty in politics is not only a matter of policy but also a philosophical imperative. It compels a re-assessment of foundational democratic ideals, particularly the notion of equal moral worth. If all citizens are to be treated as equals in the political process, then the structures that deny some members of that society the capacity to have autonomy must be seen as an ethical violation, not just as an administrative failure. Until poverty is addressed as a barrier to freedom and dignity, democracy in Nigeria and in similar contexts will remain profoundly problematic.

IV. The Illusion of Choice: Election, Manipulation, and Democratic Façade

Democracy is often celebrated as the most legitimate form of governance because it ostensibly reflects the will of the people. In practice, however, the procedural mechanisms of democracy, most notably the elections, can become rituals of legitimacy that mask deep political dysfunction and inequality. In Nigeria, the appearance of electoral competition does no always equate to genuine or meaningful participation. What exists is not a robust democratic culture but what theorists term as "façade democracy", a system where democratic institutions exist in form but are functionally hollow[17].

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[14] Michael J. Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2012), 110.

[15] Carlos de la Torre, "Populism and the Politics of the Extraordinary in Latin America" *Journal of Political Ideologies* 21, no. 2 (2016): 121.

[16] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 58.

Central to this façade lies the illusion of electoral choice. Citizens are often given the ballot that features a rotating cast of political elites drawn from the same socio-political class, with little or no ideological distinction between them. Party platforms in Nigeria tend to be vague, interchangeable, driven less by policy conviction and more by individual politicians' personalities and networks. This breeds what Sartori called a "cartel democracy," where political competition becomes collusion among elites to manage and alternate in power without true transformation[18]. Furthermore, the electoral process itself is plagued with manipulations. Incidents of ballot-box snatching, voters' suppression, falsified results, and intimidation of electoral officers are common in various regions. Such occurrences not only undermine the legitimacy of the outcome but create a general atmosphere of disillusionment[19].

The problem here is not simply that elections are flawed, but that they no longer function as a mechanism for accountability. Rather than enabling the people to choose their leaders, the process is increasingly manipulated to ensure predetermined outcomes, thereby eroding trust in the entire democratic structure as in the case of Nigeria. This distrust breeds political apathy overtime among youths. For example, voters' turnout in Nigeria in recent years has be declining sharply; with the 2023 presidential election recording only a 27% voter turnout – the lowest since 1999[20]. Such figures point not only to a disinterest in politics but also to a deep-seated disillusionment with the possibilities offered by the ballot. People increasingly feel that their vote do not matter, that change is impossible through the system. As Fanon noted in his reflections on colonialism and post-colonial betrayal, the oppressed often come to see political processes as extensions of their alienation rather than instruments of liberation[21].

In philosophical terms, this represents a crisis of legitimacy. Marx Webber argued that legitimacy is what transforms *naked power* into recognized authority[22]. In Nigeria, the repeated abuse of democratic procedures without substantive outcomes has led to a hollowing-out of political legitimacy. When people no longer believe in the system, they either withdraw or turn to alternative forms of loyalty such as ethnic, religious, or revolutionary. This dynamic explains the rise of secessionists' sentiments in Nigeria's Southeast region and in other regions, along with widespread mistrust in state institutions, and the increasing popularity of charismatic, often messianic non-state actors.

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[17] Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy", 24; Larry Diamond, *The Spirit of Democracy: The Struggle to Build Free Societies Throughout the World* (New York: Henry Holt, 2008), 16.

[18] Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems: A Framework for Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 297.

[19] Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), *Post-Election Report on the 2023 General Elections* (Abuja: INEC, 2023), https://inecnigeria.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2023-GENERAL-ELECTION-REPORR-1pdf.

[20] Yiaga Africa, *Dashed Hopes? Report on the 2023 Nigerian Presidential Elections* (Abuja: Yiaga Africa, 2023), 9, https://yiaga.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Dashed-Hopes-Yiaga-Africa-Report-on-the-2023-General-Election_.pdf.

[21] Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1961), 27.

Moreover, the illusion of democratic choice is further compounded by the monetization of political participation. To contest elections in Nigeria requires enormous financial capital. Political aspirants must pay exorbitant nomination fees, run expensive campaigns, and often bribe party officials or delegates to secure tickets[23]. This creates a system where only the wealthy or those sponsored by the wealthy can viably compete for power. Thus, the electoral process systematically excludes the very citizens it claims to empower. As Aristotle warned in *Politics,* when a polity is governed by the rich rather for the good of the whole, it degenerates into oligarchy[24].

The situation in Nigeria today bears such uncomfortable similarities. Political office has become a means of wealth accumulation rather than service and elections are the gateway to economic privilege. This commodification of power turns the democratic process into a marketplace of interests where voters are bought, loyalty is leased, and public service are replaced by private gains[25]. It is no surprise that many politicians switch parties regularly not because of some major ideological shift but out of strategic calculations. This distortion of democratic values emphasizes the need to go beyond proceduralism in defining democracy. As Chantal Mouffe argues, democracy is not just about rules and procedures but about the ongoing struggles for inclusion, recognition, and justice[26]. If elections no longer serve this function, then they must be critically re-evaluated, not abolished but reformed. The illusions of choice must give way to genuine political alternatives, informed by civic education, robust debate, and institutional integrity.

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[22] Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. and trans. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 78. Originally published in 1919.

[23] INEC, *Post-Election Report*, 2023.

[24] Aristotle, *The Politics*, trans. Carnes Lord (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 1280a-b.

[25] Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, 7.

[26] Chantal Mouffe, *The Democratic Paradox* (London: Verso, 2000), 99.

V. Between Merit and Representation: Should Democracy Be for All?

One of the enduring tensions in political philosophy is the balance between universal participation and merit-based governance. While modern liberal democracies uphold the principle of political equality of *one person one vote*, this ideal is often challenged in practice where material deprivation, low political literacy, and elite manipulation shape political outcomes. Nigeria exemplifies this dilemma. If democratic representation becomes compromised by systemic poverty and clientelism, should such a society consider limiting participation to the educated or the economically stable, as seem in the elite-driven systems like China's? Or would such a move betray the ethical foundations of democracy itself? As Bell puts it: such system privileges the educated and politically competent in the selection of leaders, operating on the assumption that rule by the best yields better outcomes than rule by the many, especially when the many are poor, uninformed or easily manipulated[27].

To begin, the ideal of universal suffrage is rooted in the concept of moral equality that is the idea that each person possesses equal worth and should therefore have an equal voice in the determination of collective affairs. This principle, essential to the political philosophies of thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau and John Stuart Mill, is the bedrock of democratic legitimacy. Rousseau, for example, argued that sovereignty resides in the general and all citizens must be equal participants in its expression[28]. Consequently, any limitation on this participation would fracture the political body and reduce democracy to oligarchy or tyranny. Nevertheless, the historical record of democratic thought includes a parallel tradition that is far more sceptical of mass participation. In *The Republic*, Plato famously argued that the rule of the many would result in chaos, as the average citizen lacks the knowledge and discipline necessary for wise governance. He advocated for the rule of philosopher-kings – individuals trained in reason, virtue, and the art of ruling[29]. This tension between competence and inclusion continues to shape debates around technocracy, meritocracy, and elite governance in modern political systems to this day.

However, the Chinese model offers a contemporary variant of this Platonic ideal. Governance is centralized within the Communist Party and the leaders are promoted through a rigorous system of performance-based evaluation, education, and party loyalty. While this system limits popular participation, it arguably enables long-term planning, stability, and development-focused governance[30]. Given Nigeria's history of populist politics, electoral violence, and development failure, some have provocatively asked: could such a model work in Nigeria? On a certain level, the appeal is understandable. If democracy has consistently produced leaders who are corrupt, incompetent, or unaccountable and if the poor are routinely exploited during elections, then a system that prioritizes expertise over populism seems attractive.

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[27] Bell, *The China Model*, 17.

[28] Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 71.

[29] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, rev. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1992), 473c–d. Originally published ca. 380 BCE.

The key argument here is that rule by the informed few (*Epistocracy*)[31], rather than the manipulated many, could better serve national development goals. But this may also raise troubling philosophical questions as to who determines what counts as "merit"? Who decides which citizens are "fit" to vote or govern? These questions echo colonial logics that excluded indigenous population on grounds of cultural inferiority or educational inadequacy. To embrace elite rule therefore risks reproducing structural disenfranchisement, deepening existing inequality, and entrenching power in the hands of a self-perpetuating class. As Amatya Sen cautions, development without democratic participation is prone to paternalism and alienation[32].

African philosophical traditions also serve as a challenge to this elitist orientation. Communitarian thinkers like Kwasi Wiredu and J.S. Mbiti emphasize consensus-building, dialogue, and the communal exercise of political power. Wiredu stresses that traditional African systems valued inclusive deliberation, even if formal voting was absent[33]. Power was not simply handed to the most educated or powerful, but earned through moral integrity, service, and the trust of the community. This suggests that democracy in Africa must be reimagined not as an import of the Western liberalism or Chinese authoritarianism, but as a hybrid system rooted in indigenous values and modern realities. Rather than restricting participation, therefore, the more just and philosophically coherent approach is to enhance the quality of participation. This means investing in civic education, public deliberations, and institutional accountability. It means creating structures that allow for qualified leadership to emerge without disenfranchising the poor or less educated. As Martha Nussbaum argues, democracy must be about creating the condition under which people flourish not just politically, but socially, economically, and intellectually[34]. In this light, the central question is not whether democracy should be for all, but how democracy can be made realistically inclusive. Inclusion does not mean reducing all voices to the same level regardless of knowledge or experience; rather, it means ensuring that every citizen has the opportunity to develop and express their political agency. This is where Nigeria's current challenge lies, not in limiting democracy, but in deepening it, so that it becomes a tool of liberation rather than manipulation.

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[30] Bell, *The China Model*, 107.

[31] Epistocracy is a proposed alternative to democracy in which political power is distributed according to knowledge or competence rather than equally among all citizens. The term comes from the Greek *episteme (*knowledge*) kratos* (rule or power), literally meaning "rule of the knowledgeable. While democracy is based on the principle of "one person, one vote," epistocracy argues that political decisions should be made or, at least, heavily influenced by those who are better informed, more educated, or more competent in political matters.

[32] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 148.

[33] Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 185.

[34] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 36.

VI. Reimagining Democracy Beyond the Ballot: A Call for Substantive Freedom

The repeated failures of procedural democracy in poverty-stricken societies such as Nigeria point to a critical philosophical oversight rooted in the conflation of democracy with the ballot-box. Elections, while essential to the democratic process, are not a sufficient condition for democratic legitimacy or political justice. A society may hold regular, multi-party elections and still be deeply undemocratic if its political structures exclude the majority from the real decision-making process or if the socio-economic conditions prevent citizens from making free and informed choices. This situation necessitates a radical shift in how democracy is conceptualized not merely as a period of voting, but as the institutionalization of substantive freedom.

Amartya Sen's capability approach provided a useful framework for the rethinking of democracy in this light. According to Sen, development should be understood as the expansion of people's capabilities, of their actual freedom to live the kinds of lives they value[35]. In this account, democracy is not merely a system of governance, but a condition of empowerment; a space where the individuals have access to education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and the civic tools necessary for informed participation, without which democratic participation becomes a hollow ritual, because voting under conditions of hunger, ignorance, and manipulation is no more democratic than coerced submission.

In Nigeria, the failure to provide such substantive freedoms has invariably led to the institutionalization of poverty within the democratic framework. Citizens are invited periodically to participate in the political process, but the terms of their participation are defined by structural deprivation. Their votes are counted, but their voices are not heard; their agency is solicited, yet their dignity is undermined. This paradox is what Fanon termed the "colonial legacy of mimicry" where institutions are adopted in form but stripped of their liberatory content and intent[36]. The ballot becomes a spectacle, a mechanism of false inclusion that legitimizes the same systems that disempower the people. To overcome this, democracy must be reimagined as a lived experience, not an episodic event. This means developing a political culture that emphasizes deliberation, education and accountability. Deliberative democracy, as theorized by Habermas for instance, insists that political legitimacy arises not from aggregation of preferences through voting, but from rational discourse among equal participants[37]. Such a model, adapted to Nigeria's pluralistic and communal traditions, would involve strengthening local forums, town hall meetings, and civic institutions where citizens can collectively shape policies that affect their lives.

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[35] Sen, *Development as Freedom*, 87.

[36] Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 52.

This idea aligns with Clause Ake's recommendation on the four features of the type of democracy that Africa needs. Ake in his seminal work *Democracy and Development in Africa* argues that Africa requires a radically different model of democracy, one rooted in local realities, participatory governance, and social justice, rather than on imposed Western liberal forms. He outlines four key features of the kind of democracy Africa truly needs. Firstly, democracy as a means to development – Ake argues that democracy in Africa should not be pursued as an end in itself, but as a means to achieving social and economic development[38]. It must be grounded in the lived experiences and developmental needs of the people. Secondly, participation must be broad-based and meaningful. Ake stresses the need for genuine, widespread participation not just elite or symbolic inclusion. Democracy must empower ordinary citizens to influence decisions that affect their lives beyond the ballot box[39].

Thirdly, democracy must be oriented to social justice. For democracy to be relevant and sustainable in Africa, it must focus on addressing inequality and injustice. In other words, political power must be used to correct historical and structural imbalances in society. Finally, democracy must evolve from African cultures and institutions. Ake argues against the transplantation of Western democratic models. Instead, democracy in Africa must grow organically from indigenous political traditions, values, and institutions, such as consensus-building, communalism, and moral authority. According to Ake, "The democracy Africa needs must be profoundly participatory and oriented to concrete problems of material well-being and social justice. It must not be alien and imposed, but indigenous and inclusive"[40].

Likewise, there must be a restructuring of political priorities to focus on social justice. The delivery of basic services such as housing, water, healthcare, and employment should not be seen as post-colonial benefits but as foundational democratic rights. These are not charity, they are conditions of freedom. As Nussbaum argues, democracy must be rooted in the recognition of every person as an end in themselves, not as a means to political power[41]. The challenge then, is to build institutions that treat people not merely as voters, but as citizens capable of critical thought, autonomous judgement, and collective action.

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[37] Jürgen Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1996), 304.

[38] Ake, *Democracy and Development in Africa*, 132-135.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

Education is also critical to this reimagining. In a society where political illiteracy is high, democracy becomes especially vulnerable to demagoguery, ethnic chauvinism, and religious manipulation. Civic education must be embedded in school curricula, public discourse, and community life not simply as a tool for voting correctly, but as a means of cultivating critical consciousness. Drawing on Paulo Freire, political education must awaken individuals to their socio-political realities and empower them to transform those realities. It is only through such an awakening, that democracy can become transformative rather than transactional.[42]

Furthermore, democratic reform must involve a reconfiguration of institutional accountability. Nigeria's political institutions such as the Independent Electoral Commission (INEC), the Judiciary, and the Anti-Corruption agencies must be consolidated not only to function impartially, but to command public trust. This trust cannot be legislated; it must be earned through transparency, responsiveness, and a track record of protecting the public good. Without such reforms, elections will continue to be manipulated and participation will remain cynical or coerced.

Finally, democracy must be meaningful by cultivating a public ethic rooted in solidarity, justice and shared responsibility. In contrast to the prevailing culture of individualism and elite accumulation, a reimagined democracy would seek to restore the communal values of African political thought. As Wiredu emphasized, African systems traditionally valued consensus, elder deliberation, and moral leadership. While not perfect, these models underlie the possibility of democracy as a moral project, not just a political one[43].

As a matter of urgency, reimagining democracy in Nigeria and other similar contexts in Africa would mean expanding it beyond ballots and periodic elections. It would require grounding democratic legitimacy in the substantive freedom of all citizens, ensuring that political participation is not only available but also meaningful, not only procedural but also substantive. Only when the people are free in the deepest sense: free from hunger, free from ignorance, exclusion and fear can democracy truly reflect the will of the people. The future of Nigerian democracy lies not in imitating the external models but in building systems that are rooted in justice, nourished by education, and driven by the everyday experiences of the people themselves.

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[41] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 56.
[42] Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 79.
[43] Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, 192.

VII. Conclusion

This study has examined the complex relationship between hunger, poverty, and democratic legitimacy in Nigeria, arguing that political choice becomes morally and philosophically compromised when citizens vote under conditions of deprivation. Building on insights from political philosophy, African communitarian ethics, and democratic theory, the analysis has demonstrated that liberal proceduralism alone cannot sustain democracy in societies where socioeconomic precarity undermines autonomy, participation, and trust. The critique of the Chinese meritocratic-authoritarian model used here as a comparative foil, reveals its limited applicability to the African context, particularly because its hierarchical structure contradicts African egalitarian and communal traditions and its suppression of dissent undermines the moral value of political agency. However, examining the model's selective strength (developmental focus, long-term planning, and bureaucracy-driven governance) highlights the need for a hybrid African democratic model that embraces both participation and performance.

To move beyond theoretical critique, Nigeria's democratic reform must pursue concrete, multi-level transformation that address both the structural and epistemic foundations of democratic failure. First, the economic democratization must be prioritized. Hunger compromises autonomy; thus, policies that guarantees food security, expand employment and support small-scale enterprise are necessary preconditions for meaningful political participation. Without addressing basic needs, discussions about democracy remain hollow abstractions.

Second, the study argues for deepening civic capacity through mass literacy, democratic education, and publication platforms. A democracy of hungry and uninformed citizens is easily manipulated, hence, Nigeria must institutionalize civic education at both formal and informal levels. Community forums, local town-hall systems, and digital participatory platforms can create a dialogical democratic culture that aligns with African traditions of consensus-building.

Third, institutional reforms must also target clientelism and vote-buying which create a transactional political economy that legitimizes the state and erodes trust. Strengthening campaign finance regulations, empowering electoral monitoring bodies, and enforcing party transparency are essential steps. Furthermore, social safety nets such as conditional cash transfers, unemployment insurance, and universal healthcare should be designed to reduce the endemic vulnerability that fuels vote-buying.

Fourth, the government must also address the link between political dysfunction and the issue of alternative loyalties – reflected in the underhanded support for ethnic militias, separatist movement, and other non-state actors.

Given the persistence of this issue, citizens conclude that the state lacks moral authority or distributive fairness. As such, strengthening local governments, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and recognizing groups through constitutional reforms can mitigate the rise of these parallel loyalties.

Finally, drawing on Ake's call for a people-centred democracy, Nigeria should move toward a deliberative participatory model that values accountability, inclusion, and socioeconomic justice. This would include enforcing internal party democracy, decentralizing the decision-making process, and implementing community-driven development mechanisms like participatory budgeting. Such reforms ensure that political power is not merely contested through elections but continuously shaped by citizens in everyday governance. Democracy in regions with structural poverty requires more than electoral competition; it requires a moral and structural transformation that humanizes political participation.

In conclusion, Nigeria must therefore cultivate a democracy where citizens do not choose between hunger and the ballot box, but where political agency is grounded in dignity, autonomy, and shared prosperity. This vision requires the development of a hybrid democratic model, rooted in African philosophical values, supported by economic justice, and sustained by robust participatory institutions. Without these directions of action, democratic legitimacy will remain fragile; while with them, democracy in Nigeria can evolve into a truly emancipatory project.

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THE CLAREMONT INSTITUTE AND THE POSTLIBERAL RIGHT. FROM IDEAS TO POLITICAL POWER

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This article explores the evolution of the Claremont Institute into a key ideological node of postliberalism in the United States. Using content and discourse analysis of Claremont publications, speeches, and policy outputs, the study traces the think-tank's transformation after 2016 from a scholarly Straussian think tank into a driving force of the New Right. Key findings indicate that Claremont, through strategic mechanisms, exerts influence and sets the GOP policy program – for example, Claremont's Washington programs helped translate postliberal themes into policy influence. The study concludes that the Institute functions as a vehicle for postliberal and increasingly illiberal ideology within American conservatism and illustrates how think-tank infrastructure can mainstream radical ideas. The research conducted uses a qualitative case study of the Claremont Institute, combining analysis of its publications, discourses and media appearance of influential leaders from the institute with an institutional analysis of its networks and activities.

Keywords: Claremont Institute, conservative ideology, illiberalism, postliberalism, think tanks

Rezumat: Acest articol analizează evoluția Institutului Claremont într-un nod ideologic central al postliberalismului din Statele Unite. Analizând conținutul promovat în publicațiile sale, cercetarea urmărește transformarea institutului, după 2016, dintr-un think tank conservator tradițional în imaginea Noii Drepte. Concluziile principale arată că, prin mecanisme strategice, Institutul Claremont exercită influență și contribuie la conturarea agendei Partidului Republican – de exemplu, programele sale au ajutat la transpunerea temelor postliberale în politici concrete. Analiza evidențiază că, prin instrumentele sale, Claremont a modelat semnificativ retorica și prioritățile republicane (în domenii precum puterea executivă sau politicile culturale). Studiul concluzionează că instituția funcționează astăzi ca un vehicul pentru promovarea unei ideologii tot mai iliberale în cadrul mișcării conservatoare americane, ridicând semnale de alarmă privind erodarea normelor democratice liberale și ilustrând modul în care infrastructura ideologică a unui think tank poate normaliza idei radicale. Articolul utilizează analiza

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calitativă a publicațiilor Claremont, discursurilor și aparițiilor media ale personalităților din cadrul institutului precum și o analiză instituțională a rețelelor și activităților desfășurate de think-tank.

Cuvinte cheie: Institutul Claremont, conservatorism ideologic, iliberalism, postliberalism, think tank-uri

I. From Intellectual Margins to Political Influence

Postliberalism in the United States has moved from academic debate to the political mainstream, reshaping the ideological foundations of the American right. Thinkers like Patrick Deneen and Adrian Vermeule have argued that classical liberal ideals – such as individual rights or free markets – have corroded the moral and communal order of society. Deneen, for example, faults mainstream conservatives for embracing "seven liberal principles" (from religious liberty to free markets) that in his view enabled a "liberal totalitarianism" destructive of institutions like family, community, and church[1]. Such postliberal critiques remained on the intellectual margins for years, their wider impact depending on institutions capable of transferring these ideas into political action. Among such institutions, the Claremont Institute has emerged as a pivotal force in converting postliberal theory into practical influence. This study asks: how and through what mechanisms did the Claremont Institute translate postliberal ideas into policy influence after 2016? The main hypothesis is that by strategically placing its personnel in positions of power and producing targeted publications, the Institute amplified its ideological agenda within the Republican policymaking sphere.

The paper draws on three complementary strands of literature to ground its analysis. First, the think tank influence literature examines how policy research organizations shape political agendas and decision-making. Foundational work by scholars such as Donald Abelson, James G. McGann, and Diane Stone demonstrates that think tanks operate through multiple channels: producing research, cultivating policy networks, training personnel, and framing political debates[2]. Importantly, this literature distinguishes between different levels of influence: agenda-setting influence (defining which issues matter), policy influence (shaping specific proposals), and ideological influence (reframing underlying values and frameworks)[3]. Abelson argues that influence operates on a spectrum, and that demonstrating causal primacy requires careful empirical specification[4]. Second, the literature on policy networks and institutional politics, particularly the work of scholars such as Kathleen Thelen and Wolfgang Streeck on institutional change, provides conceptual tools for understanding how organizations like the Claremont Institute embed themselves in the broader political ecosystem[5]. This literature emphasizes that institutional influence is often diffuse and mediated through networks rather than unilateral, noting that multiple actors and contextual factors shape outcomes[6]. Third, scholarship on the American conservative movement, including works by Stefan Borg and Laura K. Field, situates the Claremont Institute's rise within the broader trajectory of the Republican Party's ideological evolution, particularly considering the post-2016 populist realignment[7]. This contextual understanding prevents attributing to the Claremont Institute, the sole responsibility for transformations that reflect wider political currents. Moreover, Field explicitly adopts the "ideas first" approach underlying this article's methodology, focusing "squarely on the intellectuals and ideas behind right-wing populism" rather than

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[1] Patrick J. Deneen, "Abandoning Defensive Crouch Conservatism", *Postliberal Order*, May 14, 2022, https://www.postliberalorder.com/p/abandoning-defensive-crouch-conservatism.

[2] For foundational work on the role of think tanks in contemporary policy-making, see: Donald E. Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2018); James G. McGann, *The Fifth Estate: Think Tanks, Public Policy, and Governance* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2016); and Diane Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination: Think Tanks and the Policy Process* (London: Frank

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Cass, 1996). See also James G. McGann and R. Kent Weaver, eds., *Think Tanks and Civil Societies: Catalysts for Ideas and Action* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2000).

[3] On agenda-setting influence and the role of think tanks as policy entrepreneurs within broader networks, see especially: Stone, *Capturing the Political Imagination*. On policy influence across different stages of the policy cycle (from issue articulation to formulation and implementation), see: Abelson, D*o Think Tanks Matter?*. On ideological influence and the "war of ideas" over public discourse, see McGann, *The Fifth Estate,* as well as McGann and Weaver, eds., *Think Tanks and Civil Societies.*

[4] Abelson, *Do Think Tanks Matter? Assessing the Impact of Public Policy Institutes,* especially the chapters on: "A Conceptual Framework" and "Assessing the Influence of Think Tanks," where he argues that think tank influence must be analyzed across different stages of the policy cycle and cautions against straightforward claims of direct causal impact.

[5] On institutional change and the embedding of organizations within broader political-economic arrangements, see: Wolfgang Streeck and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Beyond Continuity: Institutional Change in Advanced Political Economies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); and James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Explaining Institutional Change: Ambiguity, Agency, and Power* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[6] Mahoney and Thelen, *Explaining Institutional Change*; see also Streeck and Thelen, *Beyond Continuity*. Both works emphasize that institutional outcomes emerge from incremental change driven by multiple actors in specific political contexts, highlighting that institutional influence is diffuse, contested, and mediated through broader networks rather than exercised unilaterally.

[7] See Laura K. Field, *Furious Minds: The Making of the MAGA New Right* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025), especially the chapters on the "Claremonters"; and Stefan Borg, "A 'NatCon takeover'? The New Right and the future of American foreign policy," *International Affairs* 100, no. 5 (2024): 2233-2245.

on the financing networks, and thereby reinforcing the research framework based on discourse and institutional analysis[8].

This study contributes to the think-tank influence literature by providing a detailed case study of how a single organization leveraged ideological infrastructure, personnel networks, and strategic positioning to amplify postliberal thought when the political opportunity arose. Specifically, the analysis illustrates the mechanisms through which intellectual movements transition from marginal status to institutional salience and policy relevance. The study also demonstrates the importance of distinguishing between the visibility of an organization, the coherence of its network, and the causal efficacy of its influence, distinctions often blurred in popular and journalistic accounts.

Founded in 1979 by students of Harry V. Jaffa, a prominent Straussian political philosopher, the Claremont Institute originally focused on teaching the principles of the American founding and "statesmanship" through a Straussian lens[9]. For decades it was a modest think tank devoted to Lincoln scholarship, constitutional law, and cultivating young conservative thinkers. However, since 2016, the Claremont Institute has embraced a far more radical mission.

This paper employs a qualitative institutional case study of the Claremont Institute to examine how a think tank can drive ideological change. The Claremont Institute was selected because of its prominent role in mainstreaming postliberal ideas within the American right, making it an illustrative example of the influence exerted by think tanks. The study combines discourse and content analysis on the Institute's print publications, supplemented by organizational analysis of its activities and networks. It analyses primary documents (published Claremont materials, reports, official statements), outputs of ideologically aligned think tanks, policy proposals (including Project 2025 materials), and investigative journalism pieces. The study examines how Claremont publications frame political problems, define key concepts (e.g., "the regime,", "postliberalism"), and advocate policy positions. Discourse analysis identifies recurring themes, rhetorical strategies, and ideological shifts within the Claremont Institute's output over time. Moreover, the study traces the Claremont Institute's organizational evolution, including changes in leadership, funding, organizational structure (e.g., the establishment of the D.C. branch in 2021), and strategic priorities. This approach situates the Institute's development within the broader history of conservative institution-building. The study also documents the Institute's personnel networks by identifying key individuals, their transition from the Claremont Institute to government positions, and their roles in Republican political circles. While the research does not engage in formal network analysis, it seeks to provide a descriptive mapping of connections.

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[8] Michael E. Hartmann, "Philanthropy and *Furious Minds*", *Capital Research Center*, November 17, 2025, https://capitalresearch.org/article/philanthropy-and-furious-minds/.

[9] Laura K. Field, "What the Hell Happened to the Claremont Institute?", *The Bulwark*, July 13, 2021, https://www.thebulwark.com/p/what-the-hell-happened-to-the-claremont-institute.

Several methodological limitations warrant acknowledgment. The reliance on published sources, journalistic accounts, and public documents means that behind-the-scenes decision-making, private communications between Claremont leaders and political figures, and confidential strategic planning remain inaccessible. This limits the ability to establish direct causal links in some cases. Furthermore, distinguishing between the Claremont Institute's independent influence and its participation in broader conservative institutional networks is challenging. The Institute operates within an ecosystem of conservative think tanks, foundations, and media – all mutually reinforcing, and therefore, isolating the Claremont Institute's specific contribution requires careful consideration.

II. Postliberalism in American Conservative Thought

Postliberalism has emerged as a notable intellectual current on the U.S. right – a reaction against the tenets of classical liberalism. American postliberal thinkers argue that liberalism's emphasis on the autonomous individual, free markets, and a secular, limited state has eroded the moral and social foundations of society[10]. They contend that prioritizing individual rights and personal choice above all has come at the expense of community, family, and spiritual cohesion[11]. In place of the liberal *status quo*, postliberals advocate a more communitarian and tradition-oriented politics that explicitly pursues the common good and social solidarity over values-neutral governance[12]. This school of thought has gained traction among American conservatives disenchanted with the longstanding fusionist consensus, instead seeking to redefine conservatism beyond the "liberal" framework shared by both mainstream left and right[13].

One of the leading voices of this movement, political theorist Patrick Deneen, argues that liberalism has fundamentally undermined its own promises.

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[10] Stefan Borg, "In Search of the Common Good: The Postliberal Project Left and Right", *European Journal of Social Theory* 27, no. 1 (2024): 3-21, https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310231163126.

[11] Adrian Pabst, "Postliberalism: The New Centre Ground of British Politics", *The Political Quarterly* 88, no. 3 (2017): 500-509, https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-923X.12363.

[12] Rod Dreher, "Further Thoughts on Postliberalism", *The American Conservative*, October 20, 2021, https://www.theamericanconservative.com/national-conservatism-further-thoughts-on-postliberalism/.

[13] Matt McManus, "National Conservatives, Postliberals and the Nietzschean Right: Meet Today's Terrifying GOP", *In These Times*, December 14, 2023, https://inthesetimes.com/article/the-new-right-far-right-ideology-liberalism-democracy.

Deneen observes that modern liberalism came to define liberty as radical personal autonomy – "the condition in which one can act freely… unconstrained by positive law" – in stark contrast to the older classical idea of liberty as virtuous self-rule[14]. Both progressives and mainstream conservatives, in Deneen's view, have thus made "the liberal promise of autonomy a central goal", dissolving many traditional restraints in the name of individual freedom[15]. The paradox, Deneen contends, is that liberalism "failed because it succeeded": by liberating individuals from all unchosen obligations (to family, faith, place, etc.), it has left them isolated and society fragmented[16].

In works like *Why Liberalism Failed* (2018), Deneen argues that this triumph of unchecked individualism has produced pathologies – a loss of community, declining social trust, cultural relativism – that liberalism cannot remedy[17]. Postliberals hold that true freedom is sustainable only when bound by a shared moral order and strong communal institutions, which liberal modernity has weakened.

Another key figure is Harvard jurist Adrian Vermeule, who explicitly challenges liberalism's ideal of a neutral, procedurally constrained state. Vermeule criticizes the prevailing legal ethos (for example, originalism in constitutional interpretation) as "morally sterile" and insufficient to uphold the common good[18]. Instead, he calls for "common-good constitutionalism", an approach premised on "substantive moral principles that conduce to the common good" which judges and officials should actively read into law[19]. In Vermeule's view, the central aim of government and law is to "promote good rule", not merely to safeguard open-ended individual liberties[20]. Thus, "constraints on power are good only derivatively, insofar as they contribute to the common good", and the state should unapologetically "legislate morality" in areas like public morals, markets, and culture[21]. This vision flatly rejects the secular-liberal notion of state neutrality: postliberals argue that every regime rests on some vision of the good, and a purportedly "neutral" liberal state in fact imposes its own individualistic, relativistic values[22]. By reviving natural law principles and an assertive use of public authority, Vermeule seeks to restore an explicit moral framework in American law and governance[23] in lieu of what they see as liberalism's empty proceduralism[24].

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[14] Patrick J. Deneen, *Why Liberalism Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018), 37-38.

[15] Ibid., 24.

[16] Ibid., 3.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Adrian Vermeule, *Common Good Constitutionalism: Recovering the Classical Legal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2022), 21.

[19] Ibid., 38.

[20] Ibid., 30-31.

[21] Ibid., 32.

[22] Free Expression Podcast, "A Postliberal Future? (Patrick Deneen interview by Gerry Baker)", *Wall Street Journal Opinion.* August 3, 2023, min. 39:07, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP8AGVOYR04.

Though still heterogeneous, this U.S. postliberal circle generally shares several theoretical commitments. Specifically, they are skeptical of Enlightenment liberalism and see it as a civilizational dead-end and they draw deeply on religious (often Catholic) thought and traditionalist conservative ideas to imagine a reordered society[25]. Thinkers and commentators such as Deneen, Vermeule, Sohrab Ahmari, R.R. Reno, and others have rallied around the notion that America's cultural disarray – from family breakdown to nihilistic consumerism – stems from liberal ideology's triumph. Their writings in outlets like *First Things*, *The American Mind*, and *Postliberal Order* argue that only a deliberate re-anchoring of politics in shared moral truths and community norms can regenerate the republic[26]. Consequently, postliberals do not shy away from using state power to enforce normative ideals. According to McManus, this movement envisions "a new conservative elite that will use the state to implement socially revanchist policies in the name of the 'common good'"[27]. In practice, that means endorsing a stronger role for government in guiding culture (on issues like family, education, and public decency) and in tempering market forces to protect local communities – positions that break sharply with the libertarian and secular tendencies of prior conservative orthodoxy[28]. Importantly, we can note that what began as an intellectual critique is now being channeled into institutional and political action.

Think tanks and journals have become conduits for postliberal ideas on the right. Notably, the Claremont Institute has in recent years given a platform to postliberal arguments, reflecting this ideological shift. The Claremont Institute's publications have featured figures like Deneen and Vermeule and grappled with calls for American "regime change" away from liberalism[29]. The Institute's house journal even acknowledged that Reaganite "fusionism" no longer suffices, and that new, more radical conservative doctrines are ascendant[30]. In tandem, other organizations (e.g. the Heritage Foundation's post-2016 initiatives) and networks like the National Conservatism conferences have amplified themes of national common-good conservatism and civilizational renewal.

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[23] William H. Pryor and Conor Casey, "Originalism Is Dead. Long Live Originalism", *Judicature* 107, no. 2 (2023): 61-67, https://judicature.duke.edu/articles/originalism-is-dead-long-live-originalism/.

[24] Jeffrey A. Pojanowski and Kevin C. Walsh, "Recovering Classical Legal Constitutionalism: A Critique of Professor Vermeule's New Theory", *Notre Dame Law Review* 98, no. 1 (2022): 403–432, https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/ndlr/vol98/iss1/7/.

[25] McManus, "National Conservatives, Postliberals and the Nietzschean Right".

[26] Patrick J. Deneen, "Revitalizing the American Republic", *Postliberal Order*, November 25, 2024, https://www.postliberalorder.com/p/revitalizing-the-virtues-of-the-american.

[27] McManus, "National Conservatives, Postliberals and the Nietzschean".

[28] The American Postliberal, "What Is Postliberalism?", June 1, 2023, https://www.theamericanpostliberal.com/p/what-is-postliberalism.

[29] Michael Anton, "Modernity and Its Discontents", *Claremont Review of Books*, Summer 2023, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/modernity-and-its-discontents/.

In sum, postliberalism has evolved from a fringe theoretical position into a visible force in American conservatism – one that seeks not just to critique liberal individualism and secularism, but to supplant them with an overtly moral, community-centric vision of public life. This emerging postliberal right provides the context for understanding the Claremont Institute's newfound role in championing a boldly illiberal conservatism oriented to first principles, the common good, and the reassertion of America's cultural soul.

III. The Conservative Infrastructure: Historical Continuities

The Claremont Institute's evolution is best understood against the broader history of conservative institution-building. Movement conservatives have long invested in an intellectual infrastructure to challenge what they viewed as liberal hegemony in politics and culture. A turning point came in 1955, when William F. Buckley Jr. founded *National Review* as a journal of opinion to "change the nation's political and intellectual climate – which, at present, is preponderantly leftist"[31]. Buckley's magazine provided a forum that fused traditionalists, free-market libertarians, and anti-communists, while pointedly excluding fringe groups like the John Birch Society to discipline the conservative mind[32]. *National Review* and its cadre of writers (from Russell Kirk to James Burnham) helped make conservatism intellectually respectable and politically salient in the postwar era. It also pioneered a model: using media and ideas to mobilize a movement. According to Alvin S. Felzenberg, by the 1970s and 1980s, the United States had developed a unique ecosystem of conservative magazines, columnists, foundations, and think tanks – an "infrastructure" of ideas unmatched in other democracies[33].

Alongside conservative media grew an array of policy think tanks explicitly designed to counter liberal institutions. The American Enterprise

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[30] Charles R. Kesler, "National Conservatism and Its Discontents", *Claremont Review of Books,* Spring 2024, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/national-conservatism-and-its-discontents/.

[31] National Review Institute, "The Legacy: *National Review*", January 1, 2025, https://www.nationalreview.com/2025/01/the-legacy-national-review/.

[32] Jeffrey Hart, "Buckley at the Beginning", *The New Criterion*, November 2005, https://newcriterion.com/article/buckley-at-the-beginning/.

[33] Alvin S. Felzenberg, "Buckley's Battle with the Birchers Was No Myth", *National Review*, April 23, 2023, https://www.nationalreview.com/2023/04/buckleys-battle-with-the-birchers-was-no-myth/.

Institute (AEI) had existed since the 1940s, but, in time, it will be joined by new organizations like the Heritage Foundation (founded in 1973) and the Cato Institute (1977), among others. These organizations provided the research, policy blueprints, and personnel that Republican politicians could draw on as their effectiveness lay in coordinating scholarship, messaging, and policymaking into a coherent force. A notable example was Heritage's 1980 "Mandate for Leadership", a 1,000-page governing handbook released just after Ronald Reagan's election. This document offered the incoming administration a detailed conservative policy agenda and management guide[34]. Reagan reportedly distributed the "Mandate for Leadership" to his Cabinet and appointed several of its contributors to key posts in his administration[35].

This episode established a template for conservative governance: outsider ideas were incubated in think tanks, amplified through aligned media, and then translated into policy when the political moment arose. Throughout the late 20th century, the conservative infrastructure continued to expand. Think tanks and advocacy groups published white papers, books, and talking points on everything from tax policy to national defense. Right-leaning foundations (such as Scaife, Bradley, and Olin) funded these institutions, recognizing that influencing the "war of ideas" was a prerequisite to political victory[36]. Magazines like *National Review* (and later *The Weekly Standard* and others) provided platforms to shape conservative messaging and critique liberal narratives. Meanwhile, advocacy groups and legal foundations (like the Federalist Society, founded 1982) trained cadres of lawyers and experts committed to conservative principles. By the time of Newt Gingrich's "Republican Revolution" in 1994, and George W. Bush's presidency in the 2000s, there was a well-established network funneling ideas from think tank white papers to Republican legislative agendas to executive branch positions. Conservative intellectual infrastructure had by then fully matured into a "self-aware movement" industry of journals, media outlets, research institutes, and training programs[37].

The Claremont Institute initially followed this model in a modest way. In its early decades, Claremont was one node among many in the conservative network – known mainly for its Claremont Review of Books (founded in 2000) and the fellowships that educated young conservatives in American political thought. Its mission aligned with the traditional fusionism of the right, marrying reverence for the Founding and natural rights theory (a Straussian influence) with contemporary policy arguments about limited government and moral virtue. In essence, the Claremont Institute aimed to "teach the principles of the American Founding to the future thinkers and statesmen of America", as its mission stated[38]. This position was consistent with the conservative establishment's effort to cultivate intellectuals who could populate academia, media, and government with right-of-center ideas. In practice, the Claremont Institute ran seminars on statesmanship, published scholarly essays on Lincoln and the Constitution, and hosted summer fellowships for students and young professionals (the Lincoln Fellowship, Publius Fellowship, etc.). Through the 1980s and 1990s, its profile was scholarly and niche – influential in certain academic and legal circles, but hardly a driver of mass political narratives.

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[34] Kim Phillips-Fein, "The Mandate for Leadership, Then and Now", *The Nation*, June 4, 2024, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/the-conservative-promise/.
[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Hart, "Buckley at the Beginning".

The Claremont Institute's recent rise represents a new adaptation of the conservative infrastructure model to a post-2016 environment marked by populism, culture wars, and institutional distrust. Just as earlier, conservatives built institutions to challenge the mid-century New Deal liberal consensus, for the contemporary period, the Claremont Institute and the other fellow think tanks have retooled institutional conservatism to confront what they saw as a dominant "progressive regime". The difference is that where past think tanks focused on tax rates or Cold War strategy, Claremont's focus is now directed at more existential questions of regime legitimacy, national identity, and the viability of liberal democracy itself. Today, the Claremont Institute stands next to the *National Review*, the Heritage Foundation, and other conservative groups, but it has repurposed their model for an era when many on the right believe the entire liberal order must be confronted head-on. As we will see in the next section, Claremont's story is one of an institution leveraging the traditional toolkit of think tank influence (ideas, cadres, and strategic alliances) to mainstream an agenda that even many conservatives until recently considered fringe.

IV. The Claremont Institute: From Straussian Roots to Populist Vanguard

For most of its history, the Claremont Institute was a relatively conventional think tank rooted in West Coast Straussian political theory. Although the Institute has not consistently occupied center stage in national politics, since its establishment in 1979 it has functioned as the more politically engaged wing of the Straussian milieu. Compared to most American think tanks, it has been less focused on detailed policy work, yet it has operated in a more explicitly political register than other conservative institutions in higher education. Its intellectual backbone can be traced to Harry Jaffa and his students, who championed a reading of the American Founding and Lincoln informed by natural law and classical political philosophy. Claremont's educational programs and publications stressed reverence for the Constitution, the Declaration of Independence's principles, and the need to cultivate "moral virtue" and civic education in citizens and leaders[39].

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[38] Claremont Institute, "Mission Overview", https://www.claremont.org/mission-overview/.

In practical terms, this meant Claremont scholars often criticized progressive legal trends and championed a return to what they saw as the Founders' intent. The Institute's flagship *Claremont Review of Books* (CRB) published rigorous essays on statesmanship, citizenship, and the threats of moral relativism. In keeping with mainstream conservative thought, the Claremont Institute warned that modern liberal culture was eroding the virtues necessary for a free society, and it urged a recommitment to America's founding ideals.

The direction of the Institute took a decisive turn in 2016. Michael Anton's "The Flight 93 Election" essay, published on the eve of the election, signaled Claremont's break with the cautious conservatism of the past. Writing under a pseudonym (Publius Decius Mus), Anton argued that the election of Hillary Clinton would mean the death of America as we know it – comparing it to the hijacked Flight 93 where passengers had to storm the cockpit or perish[40]. He asked conservatives to charge into the political unknown by backing Donald Trump, despite Trump's deviations from orthodox conservatism. The essay's vivid language and high stakes framing ("a Hillary presidency is Russian Roulette with a semi-auto", Anton wrote) electrified the right-wing conversation. It "went viral and received widespread coverage across the political spectrum", with enthusiastic endorsements from populist outlets[41]. On the evening of September 17th, 2016, Rush Limbaugh, the right-wing radio personality who averaged fifteen million listeners a week spent most of his show reading the essay from the pages of the *Claremont Review of Books*[42].

Establishment conservatives were critical – *National Review* ran rebuttals – but the essay unquestionably shaped the narrative of 2016 on the right. Steve Bannon, Donald Trump's campaign CEO, reportedly circulated it, and Trump himself echoed the piece "us-vs-them", "last-chance" tone in speeches. In effect, the Claremont Institute, via Anton, provided intellectual justification for Trumpian populism, cloaking it in the gravest possible terms of national survival. Emboldened by Trump's surprise victory, the Claremont Institute eagerly aligned itself with the new political reality.

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[39] Thomas Merrill, "The Claremont Institute, Harry Jaffa, and the Temptation of Theory", *The Bulwark,* November 15, 2021, https://www.thebulwark.com/p/the-claremont-institute-harry-jaffa-and-the-temptation-of-theory.

[40] Michael Anton (Publius Decius Mus), "The Flight 93 Election", *Claremont Review of Books*, September 5, 2016, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-flight-93-election/.

[41] Jennifer Schuessler, "'Charge the Cockpit or You Die': Behind an Incendiary Case for Trump", *New York Times*, February 20, 2017, https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/20/arts/charge-the-cockpit-or-you-die-behind-an-incendiary-case-for-trump.html.

[42] The Rush Limbaugh Show, "My Analysis of a Response to the Flight 93 Election Piece", September 9, 2016, https://www.rushlimbaugh.com/daily/2016/09/09/my_analysis_of_a_response_to_the_flight_93_election_piece/.

The decision would prove to be inspired: Anton was brought into the Trump White House as a National Security Council official in 2017[43], and the former president of the Claremont Institute Michael Pack, a filmmaker who had worked on films with Steve Bannon, was nominated to lead the Broadcasting Board of Governors (he would leave his position in a corruption scandal within a year of his appointment[44]). According to reporting by Rosie Gray, Anton's hiring was influenced by Bannon, who was a huge admirer of Anton's intellectual vision, naming him "one of the most significant intellects in this nationalist movement"[45]. In the second Trump administration, over thirty alumni of the Claremont fellowship programs, including Anton, had been hired as members of the staff[46].

Moreover, on the financial side, the annual contributions to the Claremont Institute have more than doubled, from five million dollars in 2015 to almost 12 million dollars in 2024[47]. Since 2004, Claremont's board chair, New York investor Thomas Klingenstein, has been its most important benefactor, donating at least twenty-two million dollars to the Institute, with his average annual donation rising from roughly three hundred thousand dollars before 2015 to more than two million dollars thereafter and nearly three million in 2021[48].

Klingenstein's philanthropy has also made him one of the Republican Party's biggest individual donors, and in his own essays and videos he now describes American politics as a "cold civil war" between those who want to preserve the American way of life and those who seek to destroy it, insisting that "in a war you must play to win[49]". His money has funded media projects and political action committees that echo Claremont's alarmist frame – warning about a "woke regime" and calling for a total freeze on immigration – and has supported initiatives like *Action Idaho*, led by Claremont fellow Scott Yenor, which explicitly aimed to convert anti-Critical Race Theory and anti-lockdown mobilization into a durable radical movement[50]. In this sense, Claremont's post-2016 turn is not only ideological but also organizational and financial: a megadonor who shares its civil-war rhetoric has decisively reinforced the Institute's new trajectory.

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[43] CNBC, "Trump's National Security Spokesman Michael Anton Is Resigning", April 8, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/04/08/trumps-national-security-spokesman-michael-anton-is-resigning.html.

[44] Sarah Ellison, "How Trump's Obsessions with Media and Loyalty Coalesced in a Battle for Voice of America", *The Washington Post,* June 19, 2020, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/media/how-trumps-obsessions-with-media-and-loyalty-coalesced-in-a-battle-for-voice-of-america/2020/06/19/f57dcfe0-b1b1-11ea-8758-bfd1d045525a_story.html.

[45] Rosie Gray, "Michael Anton, West Wing Straussian", *The Atlantic*, March 24, 2017, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2017/03/does-trumps-resident-intellectual-speak-for-his-boss/520683/.

[46] The Claremont Institute, "Annual Report – the Claremont Institute", 2024, 11, https://www.claremont.org/annual-report/.

[47] ProPublica., "Claremont Inst for the Study of Statesmanship & Polit Philosophy – Nonprofit Explorer," *Nonprofit Explorer Project*, n.d., https://projects.propublica.org/nonprofits/organizations/953443202.

[48] Jason Wilson, "The Far-right Megadonor Pouring Over $10m Into the US Election to Defeat 'The Woke Regime'", *The Guardian*, October 22, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/oct/22/thomas-klingenstein-megadonor-pro-trump-pac.

[49] Ibid.

Meanwhile, the Institute doubled down on the themes Anton had identified. The Claremont Institute's leadership and donors grew comfortable with a more radicalized vision of conservatism, one that openly challenged not just left-liberal policies but the legitimacy of the "liberal order" itself.

In 2018, Claremont launched *The American Mind,* a web magazine aimed at younger audiences and the broader culture war. The content of *The American Mind* is often critical and unsparing, declaring that America is in the grip of a tyrannical "woke" elite and that a counter-revolution is needed to restore the nation's soul. The Claremont Institute also began sponsoring or affiliating with figures from the newly assertive populist right – individuals who would have been far outside the old conservative consensus. The most notable example was Jack Posobiec, an internet activist known for peddling the Pizzagate child-trafficking conspiracy. In 2019, Claremont awarded Posobiec a Lincoln Fellowship. The decision caused controversy even on the right, with long-time conservative columnist, Mona Charen, lambasting Claremont for "beclowning itself with this embrace of the smarmy underside of American politics"[51]. Yet the Institute's leadership stood by the choice, reflecting a conscious strategy to forge a new coalition of postliberal, nationalist, and populist forces. This episode illustrates a key finding: Claremont's institutional identity shifted from gatekeeping conservative respectability to courting fringe influencers, a move that broadened its network but also exposed it to criticism for eroding intellectual standards.

At the same time, the Claremont Institute's rhetoric grew more openly hostile to America's prevailing political norms. No longer content to argue for policy tweaks or judicial originalism, Claremont authors began speaking in terms of regime collapse and restoration. Senior fellows like Michael Anton started entertaining ideas that had previously been relegated to speculative fiction – notably the concept of "Caesarism". In Anton's 2020 book *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return,* he mused that the breakdown of the republic might necessitate a "Red Caesar" – a reference to an authoritarian figure who could wield unchecked power to save "the American people" from an irredeemably corrupt system[52]. By 2022-2023, talk of a "Red Caesar" had percolated through Claremont's network to the point that it gained national media attention. Experts warned that these calls for a "Red Caesar" – essentially a right-wing strongman – represent a "profound threat to American democracy" given Claremont's influence on GOP circles[53]. Claremont fellows argued that such measures might be justified by an allegedly dire situation: one Claremont-associated academic claimed that "transgenderism, anti-white racism, censorship, cronyism…are now the policies of an entire cosmopolitan class" ruling America, and that "the US republic…is effectively at an end"[54]. In this conspiratorial view, an authoritarian backlash is not only tempting but perhaps necessary to "restore the strength" of the nation[55].

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Mona Charen, "A Once Honorable Conservative Think Tank Sells Out for Trump", *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 12, 2019, https://chicago.suntimes.com/2019/7/11/20691030/claremont-institute-jack-posobiec-alex-jones-conservative-think-tank-mona-charen-sun-times-columnist.

The Claremont Institute's post-2016 output also frames politics in stark, quasi-revolutionary terms. Institute writers frequently describe America as being in the throes of regime decay or even a pre-civil war crisis. The U.S. government led by the Democratic Party is referred to not as legitimate constitutional authority but as "the regime" – a hostile force subverting true American values. In 2021, Claremont senior fellow Glenn Ellmers authored an essay declaring "Most Americans today are not worthy of the name. […] Millions of people who live in this country are not Americans in any meaningful sense of the term"[56]. He argued that a great counterrevolution must "[o]verturn the existing post-American order" and that those aligned with progressive politics are effectively enemies of the American way of life[57]. Such rhetoric blatantly rejects the premise of a pluralistic society and popular sovereignty – painting political opposition as treasonous or foreign. It is a departure from earlier conservative rhetoric that, however heated, still operated within the boundaries of loyal opposition and constitutional continuity.

In terms of concrete initiatives, the Claremont Institute has veered into even more unsettling territory. One example is the *Society for American Civic Renewal* (SACR), an opaque, men-only fraternal organization founded by former Claremont fellow Charles Haywood. In 2020, Claremont served as SACR's fiscal sponsor and recorded a twenty-six-thousand-dollar grant to the group, even as

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[52] Michael Anton, *The Stakes: America at the Point of No Return* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, 2020), 176- 245.

[53] Jason Wilson, "Red Caesar: The Authoritarian Future Some Republicans Want", *The Guardian*, October 1, 2023, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/01/red-caesar-authoritarianism-republicans-extreme-right.

[54] Kevin Slack, "The Constitution, Citizenship, and the New Right", *The American Mind*, June 15, 2023, https://americanmind.org/features/the-constitution-citizenship-and-the-new-right/.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Glenn Ellmers, ""Conservatism" Is No Longer Enough", *The American Mind*, March 24, 2021, https://americanmind.org/salvo/why-the-claremont-institute-is-not-conservative-and-you-shouldnt-be-either.

[57] Ibid.

SACR's internal mission statement, later revealed by investigative journalists[58] and extremism researchers[59], promoted an explicitly anti-democratic project. SACR describes itself as a Christian "brotherhood of faith and solidarity" whose members will "form the backbone of a renewed American regime" and must "understand the nature of authority and its legitimate forceful exercise"[60]. Its membership criteria center on traditionalist Christian sexual ethics and patriarchal head-of-household leadership, and expert analyses compare SACR's gender-exclusive, cell-based structure to groups like the Proud Boys or Patriot Front.

The group's ideological texts, authored by Haywood under his "foundationalist" banner, call for a post-liberal order governed by a non-democratic regime of "unlimited means", explicitly welcome the rise of a Caesar as the "fastest, cleanest" route to political renewal, and treat "extreme violence" as a likely instrument of that transformation. Claremont's president, Ryan Williams, has acknowledged sitting on SACR's founding board, and Scott Yenor, the Claremont fellow mentioned earlier, leads its Boise chapter. By incubating and legitimating SACR, the Institute has moved beyond abstract theorizing into direct support for a Christian-nationalist, accelerationist project that dispenses with democratic procedures in favor of hierarchical rule by a self-selected elite.

In summary, from 2016 onward the Claremont Institute has transformed from a defender of the Founding to something of a counterrevolutionary headquarters. Journalist Matt McManus described the Institute's journey in the following way: "the Claremont Institute, which evolved from a nebbishy coven of West Coast Straussians pursuing 'classical virtues' into a bastion of writers toying with authoritarianism"[61]. Claremont's Straussian roots are still evident in its philosophical language and references to antiquity (even the idea of a "Caesar" is drawn from Roman analogy), but its current advocacy for populist nationalism and illiberal governance is something that Strauss or Jaffa likely never envisioned. This evolution mirrors broader transformations on the American right: as the conservative base and leadership have radicalized in the age of Trump, institutions like Claremont have both fueled and legitimized that radicalization. The Claremont Institute has given scholarly imprimatur to ideas once confined to obscure blogs or fringe authoritarians. By channeling grievance and theory into a coherent (if extreme) narrative of regime crisis and national rebirth, Claremont has become the intellectual engine of a newly emboldened illiberal right. The next question is how these ideas move from think-piece and seminar rooms into the to become government policy – which is where Claremont's institutional leverage comes to the fore.

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[58] Jason Wilson, "Claremont Institute Launches New Group with Ties to Christian Nationalism and Religious Autocracy", *The Guardian*, March 11, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2024/mar/11/claremont-institute-society-for-american-civic-renewal-links.

[59] Beth Daviess, "'Secure a Future for Christian Families:' the Gender Ideology and Accelerationism of the Society for American Civic Renewal", *Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey*, May 13, 2024, https://www.middlebury.edu/institute/ctec-publications-0/secure-future-christian-families-gender-ideology-and-accelerationism-society.

[60] Ibid.

[61] Matt McManus, "Understanding the New Vanguard of the Right", *The Forge*, March 22, 2024, https://forgeorganizing.org/article/understanding-new-vanguard-right.

V. Institutional Leverage and Political Penetration

Presently, the influence of the Claremont Institute extends well beyond provocative essays. Through strategic placement of personnel, collaborations with other organizations, and media amplification, the Claremont Institute has embedded its ideas in Republican politics. One key avenue of influence is via personnel – training and inserting individuals into positions of power. Michael Anton's trajectory is a case in point. After writing "The Flight 93 Election", Anton was selected to serve in the first Trump administration as spokesman for the National Security Council in 2017 and, has also, served in the second Trump Administration as Director for Policy Planning in the Department of State until September 2025[62]. John Eastman, another Claremont senior fellow (and former law school dean), became an informal advisor to President Trump, notably authoring memos in late 2020 outlining a specious legal strategy for Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the election results[63]. Eastman's role on January 6, 2021 – when he spoke at the rally that preceded the Capitol attack and urged Pence to reject certified electors – made clear that a Claremont figure had moved to the center of an attempt to subvert a democratic election[64]. While Eastman's actions were disavowed by some at Claremont, the fact remains that the Institute had elevated a figure who played a pivotal role in a real-world challenge to constitutional norms.

Claremont alumni and fellows have also permeated Congressional staff and conservative political circles across the country. In the U.S. Senate, some of the young staffers guiding emergent "New Right" politicians come from Claremont's training programs. For example, Wells King, a policy advisor to former Senator of Ohio, now Vice President J.D. Vance, previously held a fellowship at the Claremont Institute[65]. King is one of Vice President's advisors tasked with translating Vance's populist worldview into legislative proposals, and his Claremont background indicates the Institute's ideological approval on Vance's policy views. Similarly, staffers connected to Claremont have worked with Senators Josh Hawley and Mike Lee, and with policy groups aligned with Florida Governor Ron DeSantis.

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[62] U.S. Department of State, "Michael Anton – Director Office of Policy Planning, January 20, 2025 - September 15, 2025", https://www.state.gov/biographies/michael-anton.

[63] Charlie Hatcher, "Rebuttal: CMC Should Not Renounce the Claremont Institute", *The Claremont Independent*, March 21, 2023, https://www.claremontindependent.com/post/rebuttal-cmc-should-not-renounce-the-claremont-institute.

[64] Julie Kohler, "The New New Social Conservatives", *Democracy: A Journal of Ideas*, no. 67 (Winter 2023), https://democracyjournal.org/magazine/67/the-new-new-social-conservatives.

These links are reinforced by a wider ecosystem of firms and projects clustered around Claremont's milieu. An investigation into the Trump–Vance ticket showed that J.D. Vance's Senate press secretary, Parker Magid, previously worked for Beck & Stone, a far-right consultancy firm that boasts of conducting "clandestine actions" for clients on the "dissident right", including secret societies and think tanks close to SACR and to the Claremont network[66]. Beck & Stone's co-founder Andrew Beck has publicly stated that he designed SACR's brand and that he is himself a member, with reporting tracing how personnel overlapped between Beck & Stone, SACR, the explicitly right-wing venture-capital firm New Founding, and prominent Claremont figures such as Ryan Williams and Michael Anton[67]. Taken together with the presence of Claremont alumni like Wells King in Vance's inner circle, this suggests a dense network of aligned donors, media entrepreneurs, fraternities, and policy advisers through which Claremont's postliberal agenda transfers into the staffing and strategic thinking of a prospective Republican administration.

Claremont's network, often overlapping with those of aligned organizations like the Heritage Foundation and the Federalist Society, functions as a recruitment pool that selects sympathetic thinkers into government roles. A 2024 profile of Vance's inner circle noted that unlike Trump, Vance is "deeply plugged into the New Right intellectual circles" and relies on a core group of writers and analysts for advice[68]. Many of these figures from think tanks and publications have Claremont ties, showing how the Institute's ideas flow into policy through cadre selection.

In 2021, the Claremont Institute took a further step to cement its policy influence by opening a Washington, D.C. branch: the Center for the American Way of Life, headed by Arthur Milikh (a former Heritage Foundation scholar). This outpost serves as both a policy shop and a talent recruitment hub in the nation's capital. It produces reports and manifestos aimed at lawmakers and regulators, often with a culture-war focus. For instance, the Center's website prominently lists "countering radical feminism" as one of its goals[69]. One article in *The American Mind* (cross-promoted by the Center) advocates a political program to "invite women into their natural vocations", by which it means encouraging marriage and motherhood over careers[70]. Another emblematic text is Scott Yenor's "Family Policy for a Great Country", published by the Center as a written version of his National Conservatism speech and later cross-published in *American Reformer*, which lays out a detailed programme for rolling back no-fault divorce, restricting contraception and pornography, and re-establishing legal support for a patriarchal family order[71]. Yenor simultaneously serves as Director of State Coalitions at the Center for the American Way of Life and holds a leadership position at Heritage's B. Kenneth Simon Center, making him a bridge between Claremont's intellectual production and allied efforts to convert these prescriptions into model legislation at the state level.

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[65] Ian Ward, "We Mapped JD Vance's Inner Circle", *Politico*, August 9, 2024, https://www.politico.com/interactives/2024/jd-vance-inner-circle-guide.

[66] Jason Wilson, "Revealed: Top Vance Aide Worked for Far-right Consultancy With Extremist Links", *The Guardian*, August 28, 2024, https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/aug/28/jd-vance-far-right-aide.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Ibid.

These ideas are far to the right of even previous social conservative orthodoxy, but Claremont's D.C. branch inserts them into white papers and legislative language that can be used by lawmakers on Capitol Hill. Beyond policy development, the Center for the American Way of Life also identifies and trains personnel for government service. By hosting roundtables, closed-door briefings, and fellowship programs in Washington, the Claremont Institute is cultivating a cadre of committed postliberal conservatives ready to step into governmental roles or staff positions under the right political circumstances.

A further illustration of Claremont's role in policymaking comes from its legal arm, the Center for Constitutional Jurisprudence (CCJ). After President Trump issued Executive Order 14160, "Protecting the Meaning and Value of American Citizenship", on January 20, 2025, a measure designed to narrow birthright citizenship for the children of non-citizen parents, CCJ intervened directly in the ensuing litigation. According to the Institute's own press release, CCJ, led by John Eastman, submitted an amicus curiae brief urging the Supreme Court to uphold the order and to adopt a restrictive reading of the Fourteenth Amendment's Citizenship Clause, explicitly framing this as a defence of Trump's effort to "protect the meaning and value of American citizenship[72]". The Supreme Court docket entries and the text of CCJ's brief confirm that the Center, described there as a "public interest law arm of the Claremont Institute", formally supported the executive order in the birthright cases. This episode shows t that the Claremont Institute is not simply an opinion-shaping institution but a direct participant in litigation over a flagship Trump policy, seeking to translate its long-standing critique of birthright citizenship into enforceable constitutional doctrine.

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[69] Scott Yenor, "Family Policy for a Great Country", *The Claremont Institute – Center for the American Way of Life*, October 13, 2022, https://dc.claremont.org/family-policy-for-a-great-country.

[70] Helen Roy, "Womanly Virtue", *The American Mind*, October 20, 2022, https://americanmind.org/features/florida-versus-davos/womanly-virtue.

[71] Yenor, "Family Policy for a Great Country".

[72] The Claremont Institute, "The Claremont Institute Files Amicus Brief Urging Supreme Court to Uphold Trump's Executive Order on Birthright Citizenship", April 30, 2025, https://www.claremont.org/the-claremont-institute-files-amicus-brief-on-birthright-citizenship.

Claremont's integration into broader conservative planning is perhaps best illustrated by its role in Project 2025. This is a coalition effort led by the Heritage Foundation to prepare a governing blueprint and personnel lists for the current Republican administration. The Heritage Foundation announced that Project 2025 has assembled "100 different groups under a single banner" to systematically prepare for a conservative takeover of the federal bureaucracy[73]. The Claremont Institute is one of these official coalition partners[74]. In practical terms, Claremont scholars have contributed to the Project 2025 policy agenda through the "Mandate for Leadership" tome published in 2024 – and helped identify potential appointees (especially those opposed to the "administrative state")[75]. The Heritage coalition explicitly aimed to avoid the personnel pitfalls of Trump's first term by having ideologically vetted loyalists ready to populate the government on Day One of the administration[76].

The Claremont Institute's involvement in this effort underscores how its once-fringe ideas are now incorporated into the long-term planning of establishment conservatism. Within the coalition assembled under Project 2025, one of the central architects of the policy guide and of the wider strategy to "remake" the administrative state is Russell Vought, director of the Office of Management and Budget in the Trump Administration and former head of The Center for Renewing America. In 2022 Vought published a programmatic essay, "Renewing American Purpose", in Claremont's online journal *The American Mind*, in which he described the United States as a "post-constitutional" regime ruled by hostile bureaucracies and argued that conservatives must remove accumulated legal precedents to reassert aggressive presidential control over the bureaucracy[77]. Subsequent reporting on Project 2025 and Vought's confirmation hearings have treated the essay published in the Claremont journal as a manifesto for his project of constitutional change, noting that he has drafted hundreds of executive orders and detailed plans for a future Trump Administration on precisely the lines outlined there[78]. Claremont thus appears both as a formal institutional partner in Project 2025 and as the platform where a key architect of the initiative set out the intellectual rationale for the sweeping restructuring of executive power envisioned in that blueprint.

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[73] The Heritage Foundation, "Project 2025 Reaches 100 Coalition Partners, Continues to Grow in Preparation for Next President", February 20, 2024, https://www.heritage.org/press/project-2025-reaches-100-coalition-partners-continues-grow-preparation-next-president.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Russell Vought, "Renewing American Purpose", *The American Mind*, September 29, 2022, https://americanmind.org/salvo/renewing-american-purpose/.

[78] McKay Coppins, "The Visionary of Trump 2.0", *The Atlantic*, May 16, 2025, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2025/05/russell-vought-trump-doge/682821/.

Positions that Claremont has championed – for example, aggressively curtailing the civil service protections of federal employees, or using presidential power to punish "woke" corporations – are reflected in the political decisions announced by the Trump Administration, indicating consensus between Claremont and current political leadership. The *once-radical* has become, if not orthodox, at least an accepted part of the conversation on the right. Notably, the 2025 agenda is more extreme than Reagan's 1980 agenda, yet the Heritage Foundation brought together "more than 350 conservative thinkers" (including Claremont's team) to lend it credibility[79]. In short, the Claremont Institute's partnership with Heritage in Project 2025 symbolizes its institutional normalization: the outsider of 2016 is helping write the playbook for the Republican Party's next administration.

Beyond formal policy influence, the Claremont Institute has amplified its reach through a well-targeted media strategy as its fellows are omnipresent in right-wing media ecosystems. Claremont figures frequently appear on *Fox News* and talk radio, and on influential podcasts and YouTube shows. For example, the Institute's thinkers (including Anton, Claremont President Ryan Williams, and others) became regular guests on *Fox News*, using that platform to disseminate terms like "regime" and to highlight themes of American decline. The Institute's own media outlets frame political debates in hyperbolic terms that then seep into mainstream conservative rhetoric. It has become common to hear Republican politicians and pundits speak of the United States being on the brink of collapse or claim that a "Great Reset" or left-wing tyranny is imminent – language that mirrors Claremont publications. *The American Mind*, in particular, has specialized in coining catchphrases and narratives that get traction on social media. Terms like "the regime" (to delegitimize the previous administration and institutional elite), or "Cold Civil War" (to describe domestic ideological conflict), or "Red Caesar" have entered the vocabulary of the MAGA right largely due to the Claremont Institute's propagation. By pushing these narratives, Claremont shapes not only policy proposals but the very language of conservative politics.

The repeated framing of the state of the Republic as one of national catastrophe and rebirth – a constant cycle of "American carnage" followed by the promise of restoration – has taken hold in Republican discourse. It serves to justify extreme measures: if the country is indeed in a late-stage collapse (culturally or politically), then extraordinary actions (even undemocratic ones) can be sold as necessary rescue efforts. The impact of this rhetorical shift is evident. When Florida's Governor Ron DeSantis railed against the "floundering orthodoxy" of the ruling class or when Senator Hawley decries an alliance of "woke capitalists and leftists" regulating Americans[80], they are echoing ideas refined in Claremont forums. In one concrete example, the panic over "Critical Race Theory" (CRT) in schools – which dominated headlines and elections in 2021-2022 – had direct Claremont involvement. The Claremont Institute played an instrumental role in stoking the anti-CRT movement by working closely with activist Christopher Rufo (of the Manhattan Institute) and advising politicians like Ron DeSantis on crafting anti-CRT and "anti-woke" legislation[81]. Claremont research fellows collaborated in the background to provide the pseudo-intellectual backbone for these culture war offensives, helping turn an obscure academic term into a rallying cry for parents and lawmakers. The result: numerous states (Florida, Virginia, etc.) adopted laws or directives echoing Claremont's narrative of American heritage under siege by radical leftist indoctrination[82]. By such means, the Institute has demonstrated a capacity to translate ideas into concrete political outcomes. It is one thing to publish an essay about progressive elites "waging war on the American way of life" – which Claremont has done[83] – but quite another to see state governors and school boards acting on that premise, banning curricula, and firing administrators. That is precisely the kind of real-world influence the Claremont Institute has achieved in recent years.

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[79] Phillips-Fein, "The Mandate for Leadership".

In summary, the Claremont Institute has leveraged every tool of institutional influence to propagate its postliberal vision. It has seeded personnel into government and advisory roles, ensuring that its ideas have advocates in positions of authority. It has formed alliances with larger conservative coalitions (like Project 2025) to ensure its agenda is adopted by the current Republican administration. It has amplified its messaging through media – both its own outlets and sympathetic external ones – to shift the Overton window of acceptable conservative discourse. Through these strategies, the Claremont Institute exerts an outsized influence on the trajectory of the American right. What was once a small think tank devoted to abstract philosophical debates is now, as *The New York Times* has described it, a nerve center of conservative politics[84]. Its ascent demonstrates how an institution, by coordinating ideas, people, and propaganda, can steer the direction of an entire political movement. But this success also raises unsettling implications, which we turn to next: namely, what does it mean for American democracy and for the conservative movement when the ideological anchor of the right is steering it in an openly anti-democratic direction.

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[80] Sam Adler-Bell, "Welcome to the Claremont Institute, where pro-Trumpers are waging a war on corporate America over 'wokeness'", *Business Insider*, July 19, 2021, https://www.businessinsider.com/conservatives-capitalists-divorce-trump-woke-capital-going-to-get-ugly-2021-7.

[81] Phillip M. Bailey, Chelsey Cox, and Aleszu Bajak, "How Critical Race Theory Went from Conservative Battle Cry to Mainstream Powder Keg", *USA Today*, November 15, 2021, https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/2021/11/12/critical-race-theory-outrage-built-multi-year-conservative-effort/6337814001/.

[82] Kohler, "The New New Social Conservatives".

[83] Arthur Milikh, "A New Conservatism Must Emerge", *RealClearPolicy*, February 16, 2021, https://www.realclearpolicy.com/articles/2021/02/16/opening_statement_for_the_center_for_the_american_way_of_life_660266.html.

VI. The Future of Conservative Thought

Claremont's rapid rise and transformation have provoked an intense debate across the political spectrum. Liberal democrats see the Institute's new direction as a dangerous inclination towards authoritarianism – effectively an incubator for anti-democratic ideology. More surprisingly, perhaps, many traditional conservatives are alarmed as well, accusing Claremont of betraying the values it once championed. The clash over Claremont mirrors the broader reckoning on the American right in the age of Trump: whether the conservative movement will double down on illiberal, populist nationalism or rediscover a commitment to liberal democratic principles.

Mainstream media outlets frequently highlight Claremont's role in eroding democratic norms. For example, in the wake of January 6, 2021, observers noted that a Claremont senior fellow, John Eastman, had been "closely involved" in the attempt to overturn a legitimate election – providing a legal memo and encouragement for disregarding voters' will[85]. That opened many eyes to what Claremont had become. Mark Joseph Stern labeled Claremont "a racist fever swamp with deep connections to the conspiratorial alt-right", citing the Institute's fellowship for Jack Posobiec and a Claremont-published essay by Eastman that questioned Kamala Harris's eligibility for the vice presidency (a thinly veiled birther conspiracy)[86]. Likewise, *The New Republic* ran a feature calling Claremont "The Anti-Democracy Think Tank", going in depth about its promotion of ideas like "Red Caesarism" and arguing that

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[84] Elisabeth Zerofsky, "How the Claremont Institute Became a Nerve Center of the American Right", *The New York Times Magazine*, August 3, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/03/magazine/claremont-institute-conservative.html.

[85] Laura K. Field, "John Eastman: The Dems Made Me Do It", *The Bulwark*, August 10, 2023, https://www.thebulwark.com/p/john-eastman-the-dems-made-me-do.

[86] Mark Joseph Stern, "The White Supremacist "Scholars" Pushing the Kamala Harris Birther Lie", *Slate*, August 14, 2020, https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2020/08/kamala-harris-birther-birthright-citizenship-claremont.html.

Claremont provides an intellectual sheen to what are essentially authoritarian, anti-egalitarian impulses[87].

Prominent liberal scholars have pointed out that the Claremont Institute's agenda – from undermining voting rights to inciting mistrust in elections – aligns disturbingly with global autocratic trends. When Claremont's *American Mind* website published essays entertaining the breakup of the United States or suggesting military rule in urban areas plagued by disorder[88] critics warned that such talk edges into advocacy of violence. Mona Charen's 2019 column, titled "A once honorable conservative think tank sells out for Trump", captures the sentiment of many old-guard conservatives. She wrote that Claremont "stands out for beclowning itself with this embrace of the smarmy underside of American politics", lamenting that those supposedly devoted to the Founders' thought had "jettisoned their devotion to truth and virtue"[89]. Laura K. Field pointed to Claremont's fellowship of online provocateurs and its indulgence of conspiracy theories as signs of intellectual collapse[90].

To traditional conservatives, the Claremont Institute's postliberal turn undermines core principles the institution once upheld: rule of law, limited government, constitutionalism, and the dignity of the individual. For instance, conservative legal scholars criticized Claremont for Eastman's election-subversion scheme, noting that it violated the peaceful transfer of power which is a bedrock American norm. Some past senior fellows of the Claremont Institue's have quietly distanced themselves or expressed concern. *The Claremont Review of Books* printed a "searing critical analysis" of Eastman's actions in 2021 by a Claremont-affiliated professor[91] – suggesting internal unease with how far things had gone. And yet, Claremont's leadership for the most part has not reversed course; if anything, it has leaned harder into its new identity, dismissing detractors as stuck in an outdated, defeatist mind-set. A number of Claremont's positions mark a profound departure from earlier conservative ideals, raising concerns about democratic backsliding. Meanwhile, the Institute's embrace of conspiracy theories has been blatant since through fellows like Posobiec, Claremont gave platform to wild claims (Pizzagate, Seth Rich murder conspiracies, etc.) that not only lack evidence but corrode public trust[92], or promoted authors with neo-Nazi views, such as the Claremont senior fellow writing under the pseudonym "Raw Egg Nationalist"[93].

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[87] Katherine Stewart, "The Claremont Institute: The Anti-Democracy Think Tank", *The New Republic*, August 10, 2023, https://newrepublic.com/article/174656/claremont-institute-think-tank-trump.

[88] Ellmers, ""Conservatism" Is No Longer Enough".

[89] Charen, "A Once Honorable Conservative Think Tank".

[90] Laura K. Field, "The Decay at the Claremont Institute Continues", *The Bulwark*, April 21, 2022, https://www.thebulwark.com/p/the-decay-at-the-claremont-institute-continues.

[91] Joseph Bessette, "A Critique of the Eastman Memos", *Claremont Review of Books*, Fall 2021, https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/critique-eastman-memos.

[92] Field, "What the Hell Happened?".

Furthermore, Claremont's normalization of violence-tinged rhetoric sets it apart from traditional conservative discourse. The repeated references to secession, civil war, or a coming "regime clash" create a rationale for violent conflict. Glenn Ellmers' statement that millions of Americans loyal to the current president are "not Americans" effectively writes off a majority of the electorate as illegitimate[94] and explicitly justifies a "counter-revolutionary" goal of overturning the existing order[95]. The logical implication – that political differences can no longer be resolved through elections or debate, but only through force or dictatorial imposition – is the language of extremists, not of think-tank intellectuals in a democracy. As Kohler notes, such talk from Claremont exemplifies how "social conservatism and illiberalism have become inextricably intertwine", fueling a moment "rife for escalating political violence."[96] When those sentiments are coming from an organization providing staff and ideas to top Republicans, the risk of democratic backsliding is clear and present. Despite these troubling signs, the Claremont Institute's success cannot be denied, highlighting the potency of ideological infrastructure in shaping political movements. The Institute has ensured that postliberal critiques of liberal democracy did not remain confined to academic seminars but instead became actionable in the political realm.

The Institute's cohesive mix of publications, fellowships, and alliances has allowed it to set an intellectual trend – the revulsion with liberalism shared by thinkers like Deneen and Vermeule – and operationalize it. By institutionalizing postliberal thought, the Claremont Institute gave it staying power and practical import, reflected in legislative proposals, executive orders drafted, and even in school board controversies. It is a case study in how ideas need organization behind them to change the world. Without an entity like the Claremont Institute, many postliberal ideas might have withered as mere ivory-tower speculation or online chatter. With Claremont, those ideas had a vehicle to spill over into the halls of power. Whether this right-wing illiberal turn represents a lasting realignment or a passing phase remains to be seen. Some argue that what we are witnessing is a genuine transformation of the American right – a permanent break with the fusionist, democratic conservative tradition. Certainly, the recent cohort of Republican politicians and their base show signs of long-term acceptance of Claremont's themes (skepticism of elections, glorification of strongman tactics, viewing opponents as enemies of the state). If figures like Donald Trump, J.D. Vance, or a "Red Caesar" to be named later, continue to dominate, then Claremont's vision could define conservatism for a generation or more.

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[93] Field, "The Decay at the Claremont Institute Continues".
[94] Ellmers, ""Conservatism" Is No Longer Enough".
[95] Ibid.
[96] Kohler, "The New New Social Conservatives".

On the other hand, history offers examples of ideological trends that had a brief life. Some observers note that "post-liberalism" could expire akin to earlier intellectual movements that never fully caught on. In the 1990s, communitarianism was briefly in vogue; in the 2010s, "reformicon" conservatives tried to soften the edges of the Republican Party – neither substantially reoriented the right[97]. It is possible that Claremont's influence will wane if its prescriptions lead to electoral defeats or public revulsion. It is conceivable that after the Trump era, the Republican Party could seek a new equilibrium, and institutions like Claremont might return to more moderate stances or find themselves marginalized. However, even a "passing radicalization" can inflict lasting damage on democratic norms. Every time a norm is broken – a peaceful transition cast in doubt, a political opponent branded a traitor – it becomes harder to return to the previous baseline.

The Claremont Institute's role in normalizing such norm-breaking means that even if the Institute's appeal fades, the ideas it has unleashed may persist in the political mainstream. There is now a cohort of younger conservatives, some trained by Claremont, who genuinely believe that the liberal order is illegitimate and must be replaced. They are unlikely to simply recant those beliefs, more likely, they will continue to promote them in different forums. In that sense, the Claremont Institute has seeded a movement whose momentum may carry forward independently. The future of conservative thought will likely be a contest between the Claremont-influenced vision and whatever opposition can be mounted by more traditionalist or centrist conservatives. The stakes of that contest are high: one path points toward a breakdown of the two-party democratic compact, the other toward a possible re-normalization of liberal-democratic norms within the right.

In sum, the Claremont Institute's ascent has had both empowering and troubling effects. It exemplifies the strength of a well-crafted intellectual infrastructure to reshape a major political movement – a success of institution-building that others (left and right) might learn from, but it also showcases how that strength can be directed toward ends that many Americans find deeply troubling: conspiracism, authoritarian temptation, and disdain for pluralistic democracy. The Claremont Institute's success forces one to grapple with how resilient the democratic culture is when confronted by determined, well-funded actors intent on undermining it from within. The answer to this question will help determine whether the current illiberal wave in American conservatism is a historical aberration or the new normal.

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[97] Jamelle Bouie, "Mitt Romney Is Inventing Policies for a Fantasy G.O.P.", *The New York Times*, July 13, 2022, https://www.nytimes.com/2022/07/13/opinion/abortion-romney-child-tax-credit.html.

VII. Conclusion

The story of the Claremont Institute over the past decade illustrates how ideas, when paired with institutional strategy, can travel from the fringes to the center of political power. Claremont's shift from Straussian constitutionalism to populist nationalism (and even authoritarian tendencies) reflects the broader transformation underway within American conservatism. As a case study, the Claremont Institute demonstrates the importance – and the peril – of a well-developed intellectual infrastructure in politics. It shows how a relatively small organization, by strategically cultivating talent and producing seemingly compelling narratives, can legitimize radical ideologies and guide the trajectory of a major party. In Claremont's case, radical theories that liberal democracy has "failed" or that an "aligned regime" must take its place published in white papers and fellowship programs became something that sounds like a serious governing philosophy, rather than what they once would have been labeled – extremism.

In light of this, the Claremont Institute's efforts have helped provide "the missing argument" for a new form of conservatism[98], and that argument has resonated with many on the right. The Institute has been an intellectual anchor for a political realignment framed in terms of the American right's turn towards nationalism, illiberalism, and a Manichaean view of domestic politics. In doing so, Claremont's rise also raises urgent questions about the resilience of liberal democracy in the United States. Democratic systems assume a basic commitment from major parties and institutions to play by constitutional rules and accept pluralism. What happens when a significant portion of one side's intellectual output – embodied by the Claremont Institute – concludes that those rules and norms are a hindrance to be bypassed rather than a legacy to conserve? The fact that calls for a "Red Caesar" or for abandoning longstanding liberties (like freedom of speech and religion, which some Claremont-aligned writers argue should be curtailed for the common good[99]) are coming from well-connected thinkers and not just anonymous fringe commentators is a sign of democratic distress. Democratic decline and the erosion of norms often come from within, when actors who have gained influence through democratic means start using that influence to undermine the system. Claremont's ascent within the Republican Party, combined with its illiberal agenda, fits this pattern well.

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[98] Zerofsky, "How the Claremont Institute Became a Nerve Center".

[99] Zack Beauchamp, "The Intellectual Right's War on America's Institutions", *Vox*, November 19, 2021, https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2021/11/19/22787269/conservatives-america-chris-rufo-patrick-deneen.

The future of the American right – and by extension of American democracy – may hinge on how this tension is resolved. Will the postliberal, anti-democratic strain represented by the Claremont Institute become the Republican Party's dominant creed, or will it be a temporary episode in the long history of conservative politics? It is conceivable that a series of electoral losses or public repudiations could force a course correction, leading to the marginalization of the Institute's most extreme voices. Conversely, another victory in 2028 by a team sympathetic to Claremont's worldview could further entrench those ideas in policy, making the break with liberal democracy effectively permanent. Even within the right, there is a contest for ascendancy between the Claremont Institute and more traditional conservatives. That contest is not just intellectual but moral: it asks whether conservatism's aim is to preserve the principles of 1776, or to overthrow the alleged corruption of "the regime" by any means necessary. Ultimately, the Claremont Institute's journey from a niche academic outfit to a hub of the "New Right" is a cautionary tale. It highlights both the power of ideas and the responsibility that comes with nurturing them. Claremont has shown that determined ideologues with institutional backing can alter the trajectory of politics – but the direction now bends toward confrontation, exclusion, and possibly authoritarianism.

Based on our analysis, several claims about the Claremont Institute's influence can be made. It is well documented that Claremont has provided personnel to Republican administrations and agencies, that its legal arm has directly intervened in litigation over keystone policies such as Trump's attempt to restrict birthright citizenship, that its fellows and alumni are embedded in Senate and executive-branch offices, and that it is an official partner and intellectual contributor to coalition projects like Project 2025. These links show, at a minimum, that the Claremont Institute has helped supply the language, rationales and human capital for recent conservative efforts to expand executive power and to reshape family and citizenship policy. In contrast, other causal claims – for instance, that Claremont was the primary driver behind particular statutory provisions or specific executive orders – remain more speculative. In those areas the Institute is best understood as one influential node within a wider conservative ecosystem that also includes organizations such as the Heritage Foundation, the Federalist Society, and the Manhattan Institute, as well as the broader right wing media environment. The article therefore treats the Claremont Institute as a central but not exclusive actor of the New Right's illiberal turn.

In closing, the rise of the Claremont Institute signals that the battle of ideas in America is very much alive, and its outcomes are consequential. Whether this heralds a new era in which American conservatism is fundamentally illiberal or proves to be a transient phase that provokes a recommitment to democratic norms, will shape the American political landscape in the years ahead. The only certainty is that ideas – and the institutions that champion them – matter greatly. Claremont's influence is a testament to this, and a reminder that the defense of liberal democracy requires an equally robust and adaptable infrastructure to counter the illiberal appeals of its determined opponents.

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GREAT POWERS' ENCOUNTER IN AFRICAN CONFLICTS: BRITISH INTELLIGENCE ON THE SOVIET UNION INVOLVEMENT DURING THE NIGERIAN CIVIL WAR (1967-1970)

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Abstract: This paper discusses the British intelligence on the Soviet Union's involvement in the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). The study adopts a historical narrative approach for data analysis while drawing from the official archival documents on the conflict obtained from the British National Archives, located in Kew, London and secondary sources such as books, journals, newspapers and internet sources for data collection. The study indicates that the delayed acquisition of defensive military equipment by the federal government from Britain paved the way for the Soviet Union penetration in the conflict. Consequently, Nigerian-Soviet relations were conditioned by the exigencies of the civil war. While the Soviet Union and Britain had the common objective of supporting the Federal Military Government (FMG), Britain saw the Soviets as a threat to their influence with the FMG. The ideological differences between the two countries prompted Britain to thwart the Soviet efforts in the conflict which involved the use of intelligence gathering systems often in alliance with other western powers. Britain found it expedient to lead intelligence gathering efforts on the Soviets as they offloaded their military consignment and provided diplomatic support to Nigeria. The Nigerian authorities felt that they had no alternative but to accommodate the Soviets because the struggle to maintain the unity of Nigeria overrode other considerations in the war. For Britain, the Soviet Union involvement in the civil war was considered to be very risky, unlike the FMG which did not focus on the likely negative implications because they needed external assistance to achieve military victory in the conflict.

Keywords: Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970), Nigerian Federal Military Government, British Intelligence, Soviet Union, Cold War rivalry

Rezumat: Acest articol analizează informațiile serviciilor secrete britanice privind implicarea Uniunii Sovietice în războiul civil din Nigeria (1967-1970). Studiul adoptă o

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abordare narativă istorică pentru analiza datelor, bazându-se pe documente oficiale de arhivă despre conflict obținute de la Arhivele Naționale Britanice, având sediul în Kew, Londra precum şi surse secundare, cum ar fi cărți, reviste, ziare şi surse de internet pentru colectarea datelor. Studiul indică faptul că achiziționarea întârziată de echipament militar defensiv de către guvernul federal nigerian de la Marea Britanie a deschis calea pentru pătrunderea Uniunii Sovietice în conflict. În aceste condiții, relațiile nigeriano-sovietice au fost condiționate de exigențele războiului civil. În timp ce Uniunea Sovietică şi Marea Britanie aveau ca obiectiv comun sprijinirea Guvernului Militar Federal (GMF), Marea Britanie i-a văzut pe sovietici ca pe o amenințare la adresa influenței lor asupra guvernului nigerian. Diferențele ideologice dintre cele două țări au determinat Marea Britanie să contracareze eforturile sovietice în conflict, care au implicat utilizarea sistemelor de colectare a informațiilor, adesea în alianță cu alte puteri occidentale. Marea Britanie a considerat oportun să-şi îndrepte atenția asupra sovieticilor, pe măsură ce aceştia descărcau transporturile militare şi acordau sprijin diplomatic Nigeriei. Autorităile nigeriene au considerat că nu aveau altă alternativă decât să-i acomodeze pe sovietici, deoarece lupta pentru menținerea unității Nigeriei era mai importantă decât alte considerente legate de război. Pentru Marea Britanie, implicarea Uniunii Sovietice în războiul civil a fost considerată foarte riscantă, spre deosebire de guvernul nigerian, care nu s-a preocupat de posibilele implicații negative ale asocierii cu Uniuniea Sovietică, considerând că pentru obținerea victoriei militară în conflict era nevoie de asistența externă.

Cuvinte cheie: războiul civil din Nigeria (1967-1970), guvernul militar federal nigerian, serviciile de informații britanice, Uniunea Sovietică, rivalitatea din Războiul Rece

I. Introduction

In warfare, military confrontation is not enough to achieve victory. Intelligence operations are required to ascertain the extent of preparedness by various factions involved in conflict. Intelligence gathering is a necessary exercise embarked upon by different groups participating in a war in pursuit of obtaining information about the enemy's military strength and capabilities, the type of military equipment and strategies deployed in conflict[1]. Quintessentially, intelligence gathering is about reducing uncertainty, providing early warning and informing policy decisions. The forms of intelligence gathering activities have evolved over recent decades and reflect not only the type of threat being faced, but also political and public perception. In this sense, the Cold War effectively became a spy war between US and Soviet intelligence agencies and those of their allies, leading to the use of extreme measures and covert action in the pursuit of their goals[2].

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[1] Dragan Manojlović, Saša Mijalković and Božidar Banović, "Intelligence Operations: Conception and Structure", *Vojno delo,* 63, no. 4 (2011): 184-195 https://hdl.handle.net/21.15107/rcub_jakov_384.

[2] Siobhan Martin, "Spying in a Transparent World: Ethics and Intelligence in the 21st Century", *Geneva Papers*, Research Series 19/16, Geneva Centre for Security Policy, 11,

Armed conflict has been a recurring reality in African countries[3]. These conflicts threaten the peace and stability of the African continent since the 1960s[4]. The Nigerian Civil War was a notable example of such fighting which also involved a high degree of foreign involvement[5], therefore internationalizing the conflict since a civil war could no longer be an internal affair when third parties intervened in the dispute. Indeed, this was case of Great Britain's and the Soviet Union's involvement in the civil war[6]. The origin of the civil war can be traced to wide ranging factors spanning from colonialism to the military *coup d'état* of January 15, 1966 and the counter *coup* of July 29, 1966[7].

Amid the Cold War polarization[8], there was no conflict that occurred where the great powers did not find themselves taking sides be it in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa. In the last region, the views of some African leaders were divided between those that considered that African nations should not be involved in the quarrels between the superpowers, while others advocated for maximum cooperation with the foreign powers[9]. After all, the interests of African countries were tied to the interests of their foreign allies. Those African countries aligned with the West saw their intelligence services trained and supported by western countries and their intelligence collection priories reflecting the Western interests. Meanwhile, African countries aligned with the Soviet bloc found their intelligence tied to the fortune of the Soviet Union[10]. As a result, African nations were supported by either of these countries in ensuring efficient intelligence gathering in times of conflicts like the Nigerian

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https://www.gcsp.ch/sites/default/files/2024-12/GP%2019%20-%20S.%20MARTIN%20-%20Intelligence_web.pdf.

[3] Rafael Grasa and Oscar Mateos, *Peace, Conflict and Security in Africa. New Challenges and New Perspectives* (Barcelona: International Catalan Institute, 2010), 2-3.

[4] Raymond Gilpin, "Understanding the Nature and Origins of Violent Conflict in Africa", in *Minding the Gap: African Conflict Management in a Time of Change*, ed. Pamela Aall and Chester A. Crocker (Waterloo, Canada: CIGI Publications, 2016), 21-32.

[5] John J. Stremlau, *The International Politics of the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1977), xi.

[6] Joseph Olukayode Akinbi, "Supra-National Organizations and Conflict Resolution during the Nigeria Civil War: A Historical Review", *AFRREV IJAH: An International Journal of Arts and Humanities* 1 no 4 (2014): 291-306.

[7] Adewunmi James Falode, "The Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970: A Revolution?", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 5, no. 3 (2011): 120-124, https://www.internationalscholarsjournals.com/articles/the-nigerian-civil-war-19671970-a-revolution.pdf.

[8] Alan Cassels, *Ideology and International Relations in the Modern World* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 232.

[9] Martin Meredith, *The State of Africa: A History of Fifty Years of Independence* (New York: The Free Press, 2005), 204.

[10] Sandy Africa and Johnny Kwadjo, "Introduction", in *Changing Intelligence Dynamics in Africa*, ed. Sandy Africa and Johnny Kwadjo (Birmingham: GFN-SSR Publications, 2009), 1-14, https://gsdrc.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Changing-Intelligence-Dynamics-in-Africa.pdf.

Civil War which brought the superpowers together, providing assistance in the area of military and intelligence gathering to Nigeria and Biafra.

During the Nigerian civil war, the Soviet Union and Great Britain had competed with each other while, siding and supplying the Federal Military Government of Nigeria with weapons, military aircrafts, naval vessels, and military expertise. At the same time, several Western states, namely Portugal and France, along with South Africa provided clandestine military assistance to the separatist Republic of Biafra[11]. Richard W. Bean et al. have studied the encrypted messages sent from Lisbon to Biafra via telex showing the Portuguese deep involvement in the conflict[12]. The war between Nigeria and Biafra became so widely internationalized that its solution depended to a large degree on London, Moscow and Paris. This was notable since, at the outset of the war in July 1967, external diplomatic and military intervention in the fighting was largely absent[13].

This study investigates the British intelligence gathering efforts during the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). It specifically focuses on the United Kingdom's intelligence gathering in relation to the Soviet Union's military activities in the civil war. Additionally, personal accounts of military operations and other facets of the war exist from those that participated in the conflict exist[14]. Since the intelligence historiography of the armed conflict has received scant scholarly attention, this study, drawing from the pool of recently released official documents on the military reports of the conflict, seeks to contribute to the historiography of the war by looking at the British role in the intelligence operations covering the fighting and the Soviet Union actions. The study adopts historical and statistical research methodology, employing both primary and secondary sources for data collection. Primary sources comprise of archival documents obtained from the British National Archives, located in Kew, London, the National Archives United States of America, the International Committee of Red Cross archives in Geneva, United Nations digital archives, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) digital historical collections.

This paper argues that the diametrically opposed attitudes of these foreign powers served as a breeding ground for the rigid British intelligence assessment of the Soviet Union's activities in the war. Britain's purpose was to look for tangible evidence needed to protest against Soviets involvement in the war while at the same time justifying British actions and policies in the conflict which sought to ensure the indivisibility of the Nigerian state in a manner that British interests would be retained and enhanced in the post-war period. Britain was uncomfortable with the involvement of the Soviet Union in the war fearing that it increased the risks of losing their influence with the Federal Military Government of Nigeria. Because of these concerns, it became paramount to engage in intelligence operations that uncovered the Soviet Union's true intentions and motives which, Britain argued, did not serve the interests of Nigeria.

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[11] Al J Venter, *Biafra's War 1967-1970: A Tribal Conflict in Nigeria That Left a Million Dead* (West Midlands: Helion and Company Limited, 2018), 1.

[12] Richard W. Bean, George Lasry, and Frode Weierud, "Eavesdropping on the Biafra-Lisbon Link: Breaking Historical Ciphers from the Biafran War", *Cryptologia* 46, no 1 (2020): 1-66 https://doi.org/10.1080/01611194.2020.1762261.

[13] Okwudiba Nnoli, "The Nigeria-Biafra Conflict: A Political Analysis", in *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: An African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict,* ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: The Third Press Joseph Okpaku Publishing Co., Inc., 1972), 129-130.

[14] Godwin Alabi-Isama, *The Tragedy of Victory: On-the-Spot Account of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the Atlantic Theatre* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited Nigeria, 2013), 1-10.

The first section of the study looks at the background of British intelligence in the Nigerian Civil War while the second section interrogates the aims and purpose of the British intelligence in relation to the conflict. The third section discusses the British intelligence on Soviet Union activities in the war while fourth section analyses the Soviet military activities in the conflict.

II. British Intelligence in the Nigerian Civil War: A Background Analysis

Intelligence gathering remains a significant factor in the execution of war. National governments invest in intelligence with the aim of meeting their wartime information needs. Thus, the quality and consistency of intelligence operations reflect a military's strength[15]. The British intelligence operation on postcolonial Nigeria began during the internal political crises of the 1960s[16] that riddled the nation up to the period of the military coup and counter coup of 1966[17]. Both coups attracted the attention of the British officialdom when it was discovered that foreign powers could take advantage of the Nigeria's problems and meddle in the country's domestic affairs[18].

While the Nigerian government had no knowledge of actual foreign intervention in Nigeria's internal situation, the British government was certain that foreign powers would take the opportunity created by the Nigerian internal quagmire to exploit the country's differences and aggravate tensions[19]. Since the signing of the Anglo-Nigerian Defense Pact in 1960, Britain had never lost the desire to assist Nigeria in actualizing its security and military obligations, by providing assistance in establishing an air force and other defense agencies. In short, Britain did not abandon its defense and security ties with Nigeria[20]. Consequently, given the complexity of Nigeria's postcolonial political crisis, the question of how to strengthen British intelligence architecture in the country became a security imperative among British officials[21].

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[15] Emmanuel Kwabla Kpeglah, "The Role of Human Intelligence (HUMINT) in Counter-Terrorism: A Case of Boko Haram", Master's thesis, International Development Studies and International Relations, Noragric Norway, 2018, 10, https://nmbu.brage.unit.no/nmbu-xmlui/bitstream/handle/11250/2566123/grand%20final%20bh%202081.pdf?sequence=1&#38;isAllowed=y.

[16] A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, *Crisis and Conflict in Nigeria: A Documentary Sourcebook 1966-1970 Volume II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 1-10.

[17] The Government of Eastern Nigeria, "Nigerian Crisis 1966", Ministry of Information, Eastern Nigeria, 1966, 1-9.

[18] Kunle Amuwo, "The Historical Roots of the Nigerian Civil War", in *Perspectives on the Nigerian Civil War*, ed. Siyan Oyeweso (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992), 1-17.

On May 30, 1967, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukw made the declaration of the Republic of Biafra[22]. According to Arthur A. Nwankwo, "the Biafra secession was welcomed by most Eastern Nigerians. They believed that their security lay only in the sovereign state of Biafra…"[23]. However, the Nigerian government and its allies like the United Kingdom opposed with such postulation, in favor of supporting the thesis of the indivisibility of one Nigeria. Ade Adefuye reveals that, President Gowon interpreted Biafra as a challenge to Nigeria's national integrity and sovereignty which he sworn to defend by force. A police action which later developed into a full-scale war was launched on July 6, 1967[24]. As a result, Britain had to act urgently to strategically position its intelligence radar on Nigeria, for not doing so would risk losing vital interests in the country and open the frontiers to the influx of external forces and meddling in Nigeria's internal affairs[25].

Although Britain could not stop the penetration of other powers into Nigeria, it could opt to obfuscate them to avoid losing its presence in country entirely. At this time, Nigeria was already a target of great power competition between United States of America and the Soviet Union. This period of global tension presented unique challenges for newly independent nations, such as

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[19] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on the Conversation between the British High Commissioner Francis Cumming-Bruce and Major-General Yakubu Gowon Held on October, 1st, 1966 from Lagos to Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 1471, October, 2nd, 1966", Prime Minister's Official Papers 13/1041, TNA.

[20] Akali Omeni, "The Cold War and Air Force Politics in Independent Nigeria (1960–1962)", *Journal of African Military History* 1, no. 41 (2023): 1-10, https://doi.org/10.1163/24680966-bja10015.

[21] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Secret: The British Prime Minister's Personal Minute on the Nigerian Situation sent to Commonwealth Secretary", Despatch No. M, 5A/66, October 1966, PREM 13/1041, TNA.

[22] Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa, *Britain's Injurious Peace Games in the Nigerian Civil War* (London: Academica Press, 2018), 38-39.

[23] Arthur Nwankwo, *Nigeria: The Challenge of Biafra (Third Edition)* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1980), 42.

[24] Ade Adefuye, *Culture and Foreign Policy: The Nigerian Experience* (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs Publications, 1992), 55.

[25] Stremlau, "The International Politics", 62-64.

Nigeria, as they sought to navigate the complexities of the bipolar world[26]. As the Cold War turned global and the parameters of the conflict shifted away from an East-West struggle to a North-South dynamic, American and British officials found themselves meddling in the affairs of this African country with the motive of sustaining Western-type democracy and development and nipping the communist ideas that were fast growing in Nigeria[27].

British intelligence operations began to develop during the civil war when the Federal and Biafran troops commenced military confrontations on July 6, 1967. The first salvo of the war was shot at Garkem by the Federal forces in the Northern sector of the Nigerian Civil War. The entire operation was under the control of 1 Division under the command of Lt. Colonel Mohammed Shuwa. 1 Division launched Operation Unicord which was designed to crush Biafran forces defending Ogoja and Nsukka to ease the capture of Enugu which was the capital of Biafra[28]. While the Federal military had envisaged and planned for a short conflict, indeed its strategy was that the conflict could be reduced to a police action, they had underestimated the strength and determination to succeed of the opposition. Federal Nigeria had no long-term strategy for subduing the recalcitrant state, whereas Biafra's objective was to achieve permanent sovereignty[29]. According to A.O. Oykanmi, throughout the Nigerian Civil War, a comprehensive set of strategies of war on land, sea and air would be adopted[30].

Following the commencement of military operations between Nigeria and Biafra, the Security, Defense and Military Operation Desk Section at the British High Commission in Lagos headed by Colonel Robert E. Bob Scott established an intelligence gathering program known as the Acquisition of Daily Situation Reports (ADSR). This was evidenced in a telex the British High Commissioner in Lagos, Sir David Hunt, sent to London on July 22, 1967: "…

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[26] Michael Godwin Okoliko, "Assessing Nigeria's Position in Global Affairs: A Study of its Non-Aligned Foreign Policy Posture During the Cold War", *International Journal of Innovative Inventions in Social Science and Humanities* 2, no. 05 (2025): 28-37.

[27] Brian McNeil, "Frontiers of Need: Humanitarianism and the American Involvement in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970", Ph.D. Diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2014, 18, https://repositories.lib.utexas.edu/server/api/core/bitstreams/b7277f6b-4246-48f6-a224-f83cbdda95ce/content.

[28] Nathaniel John Odoh et al., "The Nigerian Civil War: Historicising the Battle for Onitsha 1967-1970", *Icheke Journal of the Faculty of Humanities* 19, no.1 (2021): 1-13, https://ichekejournal.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/15.-The-Nigerian-Civil-War-Historicising-the-Battle-for-Onitsha-1967-1970.pdf.

[29] Norbert Götz, "Towards Expressive Humanitarianism: The Formative Experience of Biafra", in *An Era of Value Change: The Long 1970s in Europe*, ed. Fiammetta Balestracci, Christina von Hodenberg, and Isabel Richter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024), 207-232.

[30] A.O. Oyekanmi, "The Relevance of Nigerian Civil War 1967 to 1970 on Strategic Theory", International Academic Multidiscipline Research Conference, Switzerland, March 2021, 196-207, http://www.ijbts-journal.com/images/main_1366796758/2021%200101%20Oyekanmi%20A_O.pdf.

We are not confusing you by sending to you too frequent or too detailed reports on the military situation here. We are trying to keep our Daily Situation Reports (DSR) as brief as possible. The information they contain is for the most part straight from the horse's mouth"[31]. Scott, the British Defence Adviser for Military Operations Nigeria, was in charge of the ADSR because of his close contacts with the upper military hierarchy of both sides of the conflict and a well-established line of communication with the British Military Adviser at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Major-General J.M. McNeill[32].

It was not that Nigeria was unable to conduct intelligence exercises during the civil war, in fact, the Field Security Section (FSS) of the Royal Nigerian Army which was established on November 1, 1962 was expected to meet the intelligence and security needs of the Nigerian military. However, the problems encountered during the civil war made it apparent that the FSS was inadequate to meet the intelligence requirements of the Nigerian Armed Forces[33]. Hence, the desire of the Nigerian military government to have a professional and independent intelligence assessment of the Biafran army led Britain to institute an intelligence gathering program during the civil war.

At a meeting with a British official at the High Commission in Lagos, M. J. Newington, the Nigerian Commissioner for Information and Labor, Anthony Enahoro, revealed that the Permanent Secretary Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs and later Nigeria's Permanent Representative at the United Nations, Simon Ogbu, had asked him whether he knew any methods of obtaining an independent assessment of the military capabilities of the Biafran forces. Ogbu had thought of asking the British High Commissioner, Sir David Hunt, but decided that perhaps it would be better to make an informal inquiry first[34].

Newington thought that the High Commissioner would not take kindly such an approach and that there was nothing in writing about any request to them for intelligence on Biafran armed forces. Enahoro assured him that only he and Ogbu knew of this approach, though he assumed that Ogbu had acted under President Gowon's instructions. When Newington declared that it was extraordinary that the federal government lacked accurate intelligence on Biafra's armed forces, Enahoro said that the staff at the Army Headquarters was incompetent to the extent that their assessment could not be trusted[35]. On whether British officials had good intelligence on the Biafran army, Newington told Enahoro that he personally believed that Biafran soldiers were strong enough to confront anyone that would mount an invasion against their territory[36]. Although, the intelligence available to British officials on Nigeria was the best available to anyone in Africa, they faced great difficulties gathering the information given the complexities of the conflict and the widening political landscape of the country[37].

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[31] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Daily Situation Reports of the Nigerian Civil War from G.D. Anderson in the British High Commission to P.H. Moberly in the West and General African Department of Commonwealth Office", July 22, 1967, FCO 38/284, TNA.

[32] Ibid.

[33] Nigerian Army Education Corps and School, *History of the Nigerian Army, 1863-1992* (Lagos: Nigerian Army Headquarters, 1992), 179.

[34] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Note of Record of Conversation between the Nigerian Commissioner for Labour and Information and M.J. Newington, May 30, 1967, File No. TX 10/14/6C1066/West and General African Dept., Title: Nigeria, Defence War and Belligerency, Eastern Region, Armed Forces and Arms Supplies June 3rd, 1967-December 31st, 1969", FCO 38/289, TNA.

On July 7, 1967 a telex link was established between Lagos and London for effective and smooth running of the British intelligence program. As the British High Commissioner Sir David Hunt argued, "the rapport between London and Lagos had been splendid hitherto and would no doubt continue to be so; you can't imagine how encouraged we have been by such imaginative and understanding support"[38]. During the civil war, the British intelligence operation was very effective given the collaboration received from the British High Commission Office Annexes in Enugu, Benin, Ibadan, and Kaduna. Consequently, a Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was set up to contribute to the assessment of the war development. The JIC intelligence gathering system complimented the efforts of the Federal War Cabinet (FWC) established by the Nigerian Head of State Major-General Yakubu Gowon and the military officers at the battle front[39].

The Federal Government had envisaged that the Biafra declaration would be regarded as a treason act by their western allies and that they would form an alliance to downgrade it. However, Britain did not know the actual party to support in the beginning of the civil war[40]. It took strong intelligence assessments to be able to recognize the need to support the federal government which it believed had the strongest arguments and were capable of winning the conflict. Thus, intelligence analysis of the conflict was very important in the formulation of the British foreign policy during the civil war.

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[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid.

[37] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Note for the Record of a Meeting between the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary Dennis Healey, Paymaster General Burke Trend and other British Officials Held on October 12, 1966 at 10:00 a:m at No. 10 Downing Street London", PREM 13/1041, TNA.

[38] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "From the British High Commissioner in Lagos David Hunt to Foreign Office", FCO 38/283, TNA.

[39] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Joint Intelligence Committee (A) Assessment of the Nigerian Military Situation and Changing War Conditions Reference JIC (A)(69) (N)(38)J 207/2/by B.T.W. Stewart Secretary Joint Intelligence Committees 26 March 1969", PREM 13/2818, TNA.

[40] Michael Ediagbonya, "A Critical Assessment of Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics and Nigeria Relations during the Period of Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970", *Polit Journal: Scientific Journal of Politics* 2, no. 4 (2022): 245-255, https://doi.org/10.33258/polit.v2i4.792.

The British Prime Minister Harold Wilson and the British Ministers needed firsthand information on the military situation in Biafra and the Nigerian side of the war to use it as a guide when answering questions about the civil war in the House of Parliament. According to the British Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, Maurice Foley, "it was useful for the Prime Minister and British Ministers, and Foreign Office to be as up-to-date as possible on the military situation when he had to answer questions about Nigeria"[41]. Throughout the civil war, the British government was subjected to intense attacks both inside and outside Parliament, for its arms supply policy and general support for federal Nigeria. The most vigorous opposition came from sections of the British mass media as well as pressure groups organized in support of Biafra[42].

Chinua Achebe argues that Harold Wilson's government found itself in a public relations nightmare at home and abroad. The civil war news had consistently appeared in the major newspapers in Great Britain and stirred outrage from the British people. Things were so tense that there were series of protests among various British associations like the dockworkers that refused to load ships with British arms heading to Nigeria, protesting that they were being used to kill Biafran women and children[43]. Amid all these domestic activities that negatively impacted the British government, it was critically necessary for the United Kingdom authorities to arm themselves with reliable information gathered through intelligence to counter the accusations leveled against it during the conflict.

The objectives of British intelligence program were to ascertain which side would win the war and discern how to deal with the influx of foreign forces such as the Soviet Union, France, Portugal, or Czechoslovakia that posed potential threats to the implementation of British policy in the fighting. The most important aim was to acquire information required to formulate military recommendations for the Federal Military Government of Nigeria on ways to hasten the end of the conflict. According to E.G. Willan, "nevertheless, the fact remains that we are of course already in a reasonably good position to feed in military advice, both operational and technical, in a discreet way through Bob

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[41] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Record of Meeting between the Nigerian Commissioner for External Affairs Okoi Arikpo and the British Parliamentary Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office Maurice Foley at Marlborough House on Tuesday May 6, 1968", FCO 65/333, TNA.

[42] Oladapo Olusola Fafowora, *Pressure Groups and Foreign Policy: A Comparative Study of British Attitudes and Policy towards Secessionist Moves in the Congo (1960-1963) and in Nigeria (1966-1969)* (Lagos: Heinemann Educational Books Nigeria Ltd, 1990), 108.

[43] Chinua Achebe, *There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 100-101.

Scott's contacts and have indeed done so on many occasions. This had been on a completely informal basis, but need be no less effective of that"[44].

British intelligence operations in the war detected that Biafra had no possibility of winning the war despite being supported by foreign countries like France and could at best hope for a negotiated settlement. This was made possible following the support received by the federal military from external powers like the Soviet Union that aligned with the one Nigeria policy advanced by the Federal Military Government in Lagos. Through its intelligence operations, Britain was already alarmed by the activities of the Soviet Union which was providing political and diplomatic support to Nigeria. The Soviets appeared ready to mirror British efforts of assisting the federal authorities in the civil war. This is why it became necessary for Britain to rollback the Soviet excesses on both military and diplomatic frontlines of the conflict.

III. Soviet Union on the British Intelligence Radar

Britain began to monitor the Soviet Union's participation in the Nigerian Civil War when the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, learnt, on July 1, 1967, in a letter from Major-General Yakubu Gowon, of the federal government's intention to purchase military equipment from other sources should Britain refuse to do so[45]. Gowon had made the statement in the wake of the Cold War politics between the great powers of the Eastern and Western divides even though Nigeria had adopted the principle of nonalignment[46].

As mentioned earlier, during the Cold War, Africa including Nigeria was a particularly active spot for the competition between the Soviet Union, the United States, and Britain among other foreign powers. The period of decolonization and the emergence of competing independence movements and of political competition provided opportunities for external powers to apply various means of influence including supporting local actors in conflicts. The ideological underpinning of the Cold War provided the motivation for the two rival powers to seize those ample opportunities.

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[44] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Sending British Military Mission to Nigeria from E.G. Willan in the British High Commission Lagos to John Wilson Head of West African Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office, July 26, 1969", FCO 65/334, TNA.

[45] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Text of Gowon's Personal Message to the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson on Nigerian Request for Military Equipment from the British High Commissioner in Lagos to Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 1340, July 1, 1967 File No. TX 10/11/Part A/6C1066/ West and General Africa Dept./Title: Nigeria, Arms and Legal Importation General Policy January 1st, 1967 - December 31st, 1968", FCO 38/265, TNA.

[46] Joseph Olukayode, "Historicizing British and Russian Intervention during the Nigerian Civil War, 1967-1970", *International Affairs and Global Strategy* 34 (2015): 1-6, https://www.iiste.org/Journals/index.php/IAGS/article/download/23888/24459.

Despite being Nigeria's traditional arms supplier[47] between 1966 and early 1967 the United Kingdom was reluctant to supply the Nigerian Government with arms to quell the internal crisis that affected the nation. Consequently, Gowon sought for military assistance elsewhere. On June 14, 1967, the British High Commissioner in Lagos, Sir David Hunt, wrote to London that "continued refusal to provide arms for Nigeria had been regarded within the power circle in Lagos as an unfriendly act and signs of deterioration in British relations with Nigerian army, navy and the air force"[48]. This attitude appeared to have cleared the way for the acquisition of arms from the Communist blocs mainly Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union. Nigeria needed Russia's diplomatic and military support in its war efforts to defeat the secessionists since "the indecisiveness of the West made Soviet Union to give both diplomatic and military support to the Federal Government"[49].

Gowon had sidelined the idea of pursuing a collaboration with Russia to execute the war during a discussion with the British Defense Adviser, R.E. Scott[50]. Through the British intelligence sources it was discovered that a secret discussion on arms supplies between the Nigerian government and Soviet officials was held in Moscow in June 1967[51]. The four-man delegation included Chief Anthony Enahoro, the Commissioner for the Ministries of Information and Labor and Finance Minister, Obafemi Awolowo[52]. During the colonial period, Britain had been in control of Nigeria, but the Soviet Union, that was, at this point, considering giving their support to Nigeria, also saw it as an opportunity and avenue to penetrate the country for the purpose of establishing their economic interests[53].

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[47] Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson and Michael Joseph Ltd, 1971), 555.

[48] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Arms for Nigeria from the British High Commissioner in Lagos to Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 1164, June 14, 1967", FCO 38/265, TNA.

[49] Olusegun Emmanuel Ofundeji, "Causes and Impact of the Nigerian Civil War: Revisited", *Jalingo Historical Review* 8, no. 1 and 2 (2025): 104-108, https://jhrhds.org.ng/causes-and-impact-of-the-nigerian-civil-war-revisited/.

[50] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minutes on the British High Commissioner's Comment on Nigerian Request for Military Equipment from Lagos to Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 1341", FCO 38/265, TNA.

[51] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Possible Arms Deal with Czechoslovakia Annex A from Commonwealth Office to Lagos, July 11, 1967", FCO 38/265, TNA.

[52] Maxim Matusevich, "Strange Bedfellows: An Unlikely Alliance Between the Soviet Union and Nigeria During the Biafran War", in *Postcolonial Conflict and the Question of Genocide: The Nigeria-Biafra War, 1967-1970*, ed. A. Dirk Moses and Lasse Heerten (New York and Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 202-203.

As a result, a Soviet Union policy in Nigeria would provide active support to the federal government in its war against Biafra with the belief that the war would deepen the Soviet penetration of Nigeria[54]. The Nigerian authorities felt that they had no alternative but to accommodate the Soviets because the struggle to maintain Nigerian unity overrode all other considerations in their view[55]. The Soviet Union intervention was largely motivated by the long-term promotion of Marxist ideology and the Russian revolutionary ideals which were viewed as a means of establishing the Soviet presence in Africa and globally by offering an alternative to the US and the Western influence. After all, Africa was a region where Moscow sought to undermine the Western international world order and the influence of the United States and its Western allies while portraying itself as a pragmatic, fair, and responsible strategic partner and power broker[56].

Meanwhile, the civil war opened new lines of bilateral relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union[57]. Chinua Achebe found that the Soviets had the intention of expanding their bilateral trade relations with Nigeria to include military and economic assistance. They signed a contract with the Nigerian government to build one of the largest steel mills in Africa, at a cost of $120 million – an astonishing sum at that time. That steel investment would later become the Ajaokuta Steel Mill[58].

On Thursday, November 21, 1968 the Soviet government delegation and the representatives of the Nigerian Federal Military Government signed the agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation between the Soviet Union and the Federal Republic of Nigeria[59]. The agreement was signed on behalf of the Federal Military Government by the Federal Commissioner for Economic Development Yahaya Gusau and on behalf of the Soviet government by A.I. Alikhanov Deputy Chairman of the State Committee of the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union's External Economic Relations. Signing of the agreement reaffirmed the unequivocal stand of the Government of the Soviet Union in the Nigeria's struggle to preserve its unity and territorial integrity[60]. The Air Communication Agreement was also signed between Nigeria and Soviet Union during the civil war to boost the airpower capacity of the country[61].

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[53] Ebele Udeoji and Ugo P. Onumonu, "Rethinking Political Leadership and Neo-colonialism in Africa: Interrogating Nigerian Civil War and Global Politics", *FUWukari Journal of Politics & Development* 4, no. 1 (2020): 187.

[54] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Intelligence Assessment of Russian Attitude in the Nigerian Civil War: A Paper for NATO Expert Working Group on the Soviet Socialist Republic and Eastern Europe Agenda Section IV (6) Nigeria 1969", File No. JWN 3/303/1/Part C/West African Dept./Nigeria: Political Affair, External, Bilateral Relations, Russian Attitude towards the Nigerian Civil War, January 1st, 1968-December 31st, 1969, FCO 65/255/1, TNA.

[55] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Russian Influence in Nigeria John Wilson to E.G. Willan in the British High Commission in Lagos, November 18, 1968", File No. JWN 3/303/1/5A368/Part A/Nigeria, Political Affairs, External, Russian Attitude towards the Nigerian Civil War January 1st, 1968-December 31st, 1969, FCO 65/253/1, TNA.

[56] Marta Kepe et al., *Great-Power Competition and Conflict in Africa* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2023), 6-7.

[57] Said Adejumobi, "The Impact of the Civil War on the Nigerian State", in *Perspective on the Nigerian Civil War*, ed. Siyan Oyweso (Lagos: OAP Publications, 1992), 233.

[58] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 104.

Because the economic worldview of Nigeria was restricted to the West[62], Western diplomats in Nigeria were disquieted about the signing of the pact between Nigeria and the Soviet Union. Effort made to delay signing the pact proved futile[63]. A CIA's reaction to the event revealed that: "the Soviets have increased their diplomatic presence in Nigeria since the civil war and signed a Nigerian-Soviet Union economic assistance agreement. As the military stalemate forces Gowon even further towards non-alignment, the Soviet position would be enhanced while the United Stated States and United Kingdom lose ground"[64]. A British official, E.G. Willan, asserted that there was little doubt that the Soviet policy of giving unqualified support to the Federal government had enabled them to improve their positions in Nigeria to some extent at the expense of Britain. This did not mean that Nigeria was in danger of becoming communist or even that there was a substantial or influential body of opinion which sympathized with Soviet policies or that wanted closer Nigeria-Soviet relations. The Nigerian government saw their relationship with the Soviets as purely opportunistic and that by letting the Soviets get a foot in the country, they did so with their eyes open[65]. M.R.H. Jenkins noted that "we accept that the

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[59] Federal Government of Nigeria, "Signing of Nigerian-Soviet Agreement on Economic and Technical Cooperation", Press Release from Novosty Press Agency Nigeria Branch, 1968, 1-4. See also: Federal Ministry of Information, "Soviet Economic Delegation Arrived Tomorrow", No. F. 2017, November 3, 1968.

[60] Oluchukwu Ignatus Onianwa, *Speeches on the Nigerian Civil War: A Historical Documentation Biafran and Federal Perspectives Volume I* (London: Academica Press, 2019), 417.

[61] Kasoro Kelvin Ovefla and Abraham E. Orhero, "Nigeria-Russian Economic Relations in the Post-Cold War Era: Current Dynamics and Future Prospects", *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law* no. 28 (2023): 382-392, https://doi.org/10.47743/jopafl-2023-28-29

[62] L.E. Okogwu and Aja Akpuru-Aja, *Nigerian Diplomacy and the Conflicts of Laws: An Insight into the Practice of Nigeria's Foreign Policy* (Abakaliki: Willy Rose and Appleseed Publishing Company, 2004), 97.

[63] Fredrick Forsyth, *The Making of an African Legend: The Biafran Story* (London: Penguin Books Ltd, 1969), 187.

[64] Central Intelligence Agency, "Notes for the President's Daily Brief Document No. CIA-RDP79T007000250001-2", Central Intelligence Agency Historical Archives and Digital Collections, April 29, 1969.

[65] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Soviet Assistance to Nigeria November 23, 1968", FCO 65/253, TNA.

Soviet Union wanted to spread its influence in Nigeria and if possible at our expense. Nonetheless, we think that it is in the Soviet interest to bring the war to an end. The Soviets do not want to have to go on supplying large quantities of arms to the Federal government forever. Nor if by any chance the Western countries did impose an embargo would the Soviets want to find themselves in the position of being the only supplier of arms"[66]. This showed that western officials never underestimated the Soviet support for Nigeria, as it was something that they took very seriously and widely thought of within the context of the war.

An intelligence report intercepted by the British Embassy in Moscow on May 29, 1968 revealed that there was no indication in Moscow over the weakening Soviet support for the federal government. In other words, as Chinua Achebe observes, "the United Kingdom intelligence service warned that the Soviet Union penetration to Nigeria was growing massively for the Soviets saw it as a chance to increase their influence in the whole of West Africa"[67]. The Soviet interests were, therefore, best served by providing continued support of the federal government and they were not ready to risk their relations with them by exerting pressure for a ceasefire[68]. Again, the Soviets were ready to give direct military assistance to struggling African states in order to create opportunities for the perpetuation of economic and military imperialism in Africa, and especially in Nigeria[69]. The rationale for conducting intelligence covert actions was that the Soviet Union was seen as an expansionist power with designs on global domination, and Washington assumed the right to intervene with whatever measures were necessary to contain the threat and protect American strategic, political, or economic interests whenever and wherever they were deemed to be in jeopardy. The Cold War was, moreover, as much about perceptions as reality. In this context, it was imperative for the British government and the United States to not only secure and retain the upper hand against the Soviet Union, but also to be seen to actively do so and in many instances covert action provided the most appropriate means for the achievement of this goal[70].

The Nigerian government was pleased with the immense contributions of the Soviet Union towards the effective execution of the civil war even though some officials of the government tended to be skeptical about the Soviet intentions in the conflict.

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[66] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Nigeria-Soviet Union Relations from M.R. H. Jenkins to P.D. McEntee in the West African Department, January 16, 1969", FCO 65/253, TNA.

[67] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 100.

[68] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "From British Embassy in Moscow to Foreign Office Telegram No. 865, May 29, 1968", FCO 38/213, TNA.

[69] ***, "Letter from Biafra: Russia Digs In", *Biafra Newsletter*, January 17, 1969.

[70] James Callanan, *Covert Action in The Cold War US Policy, Intelligence and CIA Operations* (London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2010), 2.

IV. Intelligence on Soviet Military Activities during the Civil War

Military aid was an important instrument of the Soviet Union foreign policy. From the 1950s, the Soviet Union began to use economic and military programs as a means of expanding its influence in the underdeveloped countries of the free world particularly in Asia and Africa[71]. Moscow viewed its military aid program as the best means of gaining influence in Africa. The Soviet leaders perceived the large demand in Africa for weapons and military training services as being due to the inability of Western countries to fulfil their political and military obligations in these countries[72]. The Soviet Union's ability and willingness to deliver large quantities of arms rapidly to African or Asian countries on favorable terms had established its place in the arms market around the globe. As Deputy Under-Secretary for Economic Affairs Douglas C. Dillon remarked while reporting to the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations: "the USSR is now the second greatest industrial power in the world"[73].

The arrival of the Soviet Military Attaché, M.V. Medvedev, to Nigeria on November 15, 1968 was an extension of the Soviet Union military and defense aid program in Africa and elsewhere. When the Soviet Attaché arrived in Lagos, it was assumed that he would pay a visit to the intelligence and security services of other foreign countries such as the British Senior Service Attaché and Defense Adviser in Lagos R. E. Scott and the Security Desk at the US Embassy in Lagos. But such a visit never took place. With Medvedev's arrival there were now three foreign powers' Secret Service Attachés in Lagos that of United Kingdom, USA and Soviet Union[74]. While British officials in Lagos had anticipated positive outcomes with the arrival of Soviet Military Attaché in the context of strengthening the Anglo-Soviet support for the advancement of the federal government's war cause, London expressed misgivings over the coming of Medvedev to Nigeria, thus, showcasing the diametrical positions of the two great powers in the conflict. On November 15, 1968, the British Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, maintained that: "Although we obviously cannot object to the exchange of normal diplomatic courtesy calls with the Soviet Military Attaché, we would have serious misgivings about the establishment of closer relations not so much from the general point of view of Anglo-Soviet relations as from the particular circumstances of Nigeria"[75].

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[71] Central Intelligence Agency, "Special Report: Soviet Military Aid. Document No. CIA-RDP7900927A004300040003-0", Central Intelligence Agency Office of Research and Reports, 1963.

[72] Central Intelligence Agency, "USSR: Commercial Relations with the Third World and Some Consequences for Western Business. A Submission to the President's Task Force on International Private Enterprise Subcommittee on Trade and Foreign Economic Assistance", Document No. CIA-RDP08S01350R000200480001-3, December 1, 1983.

[73] Central Intelligence Agency, "The Sino-Soviet Bloc Economic Offensive: Hazards for the Underdeveloped Countries", Document No. CIA-RDP7801634R000100060017-7, 1958.

[74] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Priority Secret: Arrival of Russian Military Attaché to Nigeria from Lagos to Foreign Office Telegram No. 2000 November 13, 1968", FCO 65/253, TNA.

The identification of the Soviet Union's military activities through the supply of arms and military aircraft to Nigeria was a key aspect of the British intelligence operations. The Soviet Union military contribution to Nigeria's war efforts consisted largely of very expensive arm transfers[76]. A British intelligence report on the external influence in the civil war, released on August 8, 1967 revealed the Federal Military Government of Nigeria's determination to obtain arms particularly jet aircrafts and armored cars from the Soviet Union. On August 3, 1967, there was delivery of six Czech jet trainers to Nigeria.[77] The Nigerian government imported from the Soviet Union a squadron of twelve reconditioned MIG-17 fighters and another twenty-nine trainers[78] as well as Ilyushin bombers for the Federal Air Force[79]. In March 1968, a consignment of 28 Ilyushin bomber fighters was delivered to the federal force aircraft park[80]. All these transfers show us that Nigeria had turned to the Soviet Union for the supply of military aircraft to maintain dominance in the air war[81]. Additionally, the Soviet Union supplied Nigeria with T-34 battle tanks, antiaircraft guns, AK-47 rifles, machine guns, grenades, mines and bombs[82]. The decision to purchase Soviet equipment was not taken lightly. Federal leaders also did not want to unduly alarm Western interests, despite their irritation with the United States and Britain[83].

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[75] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Russian Military Attaché from the British Foreign Secretary to Lagos Telegram No. 1822 November 15, 1968", FCO 65/253, TNA.

[76] Current News from and About Biafra, "UK Increases Arms to Nigeria", no. 59, November 26, 1969.

[77] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Secret: Report on Nigerian Military Situation and the Assessment Before the War by British Defence Intelligence Staff August 8, 1967 File No. S/R/1993/ Title: Intelligence General Commonwealth Countries Nigeria March 20, 1967-December 31, 1969", Ministry of Defence Papers 31/27, TNA.

[78] Stremlau, "The International Politics", 79.

[79] Raph Uwechue, *Reflections on the Nigerian Civil War: Facing the Future* (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1971), 9.

[80] Markpress News Feature Services, "Soviet Steps Up Supply of Military Aircraft to Nigeria", Biafra Overseas Press Division, Gen no. 28, March 22, 1968.

[81] Al J. Venter, "Book Reviews Cold War 1945: 1991 Biafra Genocide, Nigeria: Bloodletting and Mass Starvation, 1967 – 1970", *Scientia Militaria – South African Journal of Military Studies* 47, no. 1 (2019): 137, https://doi.org/10.5787/47-1-1272.

[82] Achebe, *There Was a Country*, 154.

A report published in *Daily Telegraph* by Bruce Loudon from Lisbon, on August 6, 1968 revealed that the Soviets had a Radar Tracking System (RTS) which according to Colonel Wichmann, the controller of the Joint Church Aid, made it easier for them to track relief planes and possibly shoot them down. The radar was based on a Russian warship stationed between the Island of Sao Tome and the coast closed to Biafra. The warship relayed information to Nigeria's air force command as more Russian arms made their way to Lagos for delivery to the Nigerian troops on the war front[84].

At the end of October 1968, a Soviet cargo ship unloaded a large number of Russian vehicles at the Apapa docks in Lagos. Brigadier Hassan Kastina, the Chief of Staff of the Federal Army, said that they were destined for the Northern and Southern sectors of the war front. Meanwhile, the Soviets had by the end of October 1968 began to deliver, for the first time, infantry arms and ammunition in Antonov transport planes flying between Anaba in Algeria and Kano in Northern Nigeria. This increase was regarded as Moscow's response to a Nigerian request for more arms following the report of French arms supply to Biafra[85]. In this sense, it is notable that the Soviet military personnel had worked very closely with the Nigerian army units. The First-Lieutenant commanding A Company 32nd Battalion of the 14 Brigade of the 3rd Nigerian Federal Marine Commando Division, Buraimoh Araenia, revealed that "the Russian officers had considerable military authority to order the Nigerian company commanders and other officers what to do and when to do it. The Russians did not wish to delegate their work nor rely on Nigerians. The military operations were observed not only by Soviet military experts but by engineers and technicians"[86].

While the Soviet military assistance was limited to sales of equipment and provision of technical assistance, it enabled the enlargement of the Soviet diplomatic and commercial missions in Lagos[87]. This is relevant since some of the Soviet military equipment supplied to the Nigerian armed forces was destroyed by the Biafran army on several occasions on the battlefield. As John De St. Jorre notes, "In late May 1969 lightning raids on Benin and Enugu airfields spearheaded by Count von Rosen, destroyed on ground several Russian built aircraft of the Nigerian air force”[88]. The Soviet Union posed as the most important friend of Nigeria, having furnished the country with considerable military material which put them in good standing with the federal government. The Nigerian leaders had found the British government to be too slow in fulfilling their military commitments while, at the same time, the United States refused to grant the country the expected military demands[89].

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[83] Suzanne Cronje, *The World and Nigeria: The Diplomatic History of the Biafran War, 1967-1970* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), 268.

[84] Current News from and About Biafra, "Soviet Radar and the Nigerians", no. 19, June 20, 1969.

[85] Cronje, *The World and Nigeria*, 268.

[86] Markpress News Feature Services, "Russians Turn Nigerian-Biafra Conflict into a War Game", Biafra Overseas Press Division, Gen No. 279, August 23, 1968. See also: Biafra Newsletter, "Soviet Made Nigerian Plane Raids US Companies", October 27, 1967.

[87] Directorate of Central Intelligence and United States Intelligence Board, "Prospects for Postwar Nigeria", National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) No. 64.2-70, November 2, 1970.

Britain was concerned that the involvement of the Soviet Union in the war increased the risks of losing its influence with the Federal Military Government. In the British Parliamentary debates on the Nigerian situation in the House of Commons London held on Tuesday August 27, 1968, the British Secretary of State for Commonwealth Affairs, George Thomson, while justifying the British policy in the conflict, said that it was an argument that Britain should not be in the company of the Soviet Union in supplying arms when that country had adopted an oppressive attitude towards smaller nations, as illustrated by the Soviet Union’s actions in Czechoslovakia. As noted, the Russians had already secured a political foothold in Nigeria by supplying it with military aircraft and bombs. If British arms were cutoff, Russia would be only too willing to fill the gap and replace the influence which Britain would lose in Nigeria[90].

Within the foregoing period, federal officials in Lagos had issued a series of warnings that if London did not grant the Nigerian Armed Forces’ request for military assistance they would not hesitate to reach out to the Soviet Union or to a third party. On June 17, 1968, the Commander of the Nigerian Navy, Admiral Wey and the Commander of the Nigerian Air Force, Shittu Alao, had separately told the British Defense Adviser R.E. Scott that the Soviet Union Embassy in Lagos had consistently and actively approached them and other senior members of Gowon’s government. Alao admitted that the Soviets had frequently approached him and were prepared to meet all his requests. Alao also confirmed that the Soviet Freighter Nikolai Nekrasov delivered a large consignment of bombs for the Nigerian Air Force on June 14, 1968. According to Admiral Wey, “Soviet Ambassador had recently pressed for him to be formally appointed Military Attaché, but Gowon again refused. As a result, if

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[88] John De St. Jorre, *The Nigerian Civil War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1972), 334.
[89] Central Intelligence Agency, “The Presidential Daily Brief on Nigeria”, Document No. CIA-RDP79T00936700190001-3, January 24, 1969.
[90] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), “Extracts from British Parliamentary Debates on the Nigerian Situation in the House of Commons London Tuesday August 27, 1968”, FCO 38/288, TNA.

UK stopped arms supplies to Nigeria, the Soviet Union would immediately step in"[91].

CIA's National Intelligence Estimate report on Nigeria dated November 2, 1970, confirmed the Soviets' deep meddling into Nigeria's military establishment and of the entire Gowon government during the war. According to the report, "the Soviets wanted to become sole suppliers of military aid to Nigeria having persuaded some officials in the Nigerian Ministry of Defense and some army officers of the wisdom of such a scheme. Gowon and the top leadership in the armed forces were comfortable to the idea because they saw the Soviets as an alternative in meeting their military needs that could not be met through traditional Western sources"[92].

E.G. Willan, a lead British expert and intelligence officer warned that Nigerian officials had resisted Soviet overtures to train personnel of the Nigerian Navy and Air Force in Russia. Should any of the Nigerian services allow personnel to be sent to Russia for training it would have indicated greater Soviet influence in the services. The arrival of the Soviet Military Attaché had been followed by a request for a deputy which would give the Russians greater opportunities to tour military establishments in Nigeria[93]. C.L. Booth maintained that it was not desirable to leave the federal government entirely in the hands of the Russians. As long as the Nigerian government retained confidence in the British Government, the Russians might have an uphill battle to establish a position of real influence among the British trained officers who supported the federal government; but if the British position of trust in Lagos was undermined by a total cut-off of British arms deliveries, this would make things easy for the Russians to gain a foothold in Nigeria[94].

Meanwhile, during this time, the Soviet presence increased in Nigeria by a large percentage. A relevant example was the visit of four Soviet Naval vessels to Lagos on March 5-9, 1969. A Soviet Naval Squadron comprising two Missile Destroyers, one 'F' Class Submarine and one fleet oiler arrived in Lagos. A Squadron led by flagship Commodore Vlazwkir Platonov, Boiky Hull No. 976 which was a Krupny class guided missile destroyer, had also arrived. This was followed by the Neuloviny Kotlin Sam class guided missile destroyer Hull No.

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[91] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Soviet Arms Supplies from the British High Commissioner in Lagos Sir David Hunt to Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 845, June 17, 1968", PREM 13/2257, TNA.

[92] Directorate of Central Intelligence and United States Intelligence Board. "Prospects for Postwar Nigeria", National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) No. 64.2-70, November 2, 1970.

[93] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Secret: Soviet Aims and Activities in Nigeria: Comments on JIC Paper (68) 70 (Final)", FCO 65/254, TNA.

[94] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Arms Supply for Nigeria from C.L. Booth Foreign Office London to J. E. Killick British Embassy Washington DC August 31, 1967", FCO 38/267, TNA.

952[95]. The Soviet Naval visit was accompanied by celebrations, complete with concerts and a football match which the Nigerians won or were possibly allowed to win. The Squadron Commander Captain A.A. Platonov, the Soviet Ambassador to Nigeria, A.I. Romanov, and Soviet Naval officers were present with this occasion[96]. Gowon proposed a toast to the friends of the Nigerian people and friendly relations between Nigeria and the Soviet Union[97].

Despite the events noted above, the Soviet Union's relationship with the Nigerian government was not always cordial as Lagos had on several occasions became suspicious and distrusted the Soviet actions during the conflict. This act of distrust manifested itself in several ways. For instance, Gowon was reportedly incensed at the behavior of Soviet Ambassador Romanov during the Soviet naval visit to Lagos on March 5-9, 1969. In an attempt to regain custody of a Soviet seaman who had jumped ship in Lagos harbor, Romanov apparently told the Nigerian police that Gowon himself had ordered the immediate release of the would-be defector. At a staff meeting held on March 10, 1969, Gowon denounced Romanov's actions. The naval visit also occasioned a personal dispute between Romanov and Admiral Joseph Way, the Nigerian Navy Commander, who had succeeded in postponing the visit several times and then in limiting it to fewer days than the Soviets wanted. Wey also publicly called Romanov a dishonest man and accused him of saying malicious things about him. Despite the great importance of the Soviet military aid given to the federal government, Nigerians tried to protect themselves from Soviet meddling. Lagos had consistently attempted to limit the size of the Soviet Embassy and to control Soviet front organizations[98].

In all the British intelligence operations and diplomatic contacts with the Soviets over Nigeria they professed continued support to the federal government until they won the war and would further continue to do so even if others were to withdraw their support. E.G. Donohoe argued that the Soviet Union did not seem to be interested in a quick end to the war, though equally they could probably not afford to see the Federal Military Government lose. Deliveries of war equipment appeared designed to force the Nigerians to keep coming back for further requests. Despite this, senior members of the federal government remained reluctant to be too closely committed to the Soviet

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[95] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), “Confidential: Minute on Soviet Naval Visit to Lagos from the British High Commissioner in Lagos David Hunt to Foreign and Commonwealth Office Telegram No. 466, March 5, 1969”, FCO 65/254, TNA.

[96] BBC, “Lagos: Gowon Reception for Soviet Naval Squadron”, B45/(MF), Monday 1540/6.3.CMH/BMON/Testing 1530.

[97] Reuters/BBC, “Reception 2 Toast to Friendly Relations”, Monday 1541/6.3 CMH.

[98] United States Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, “Research Memorandum: USSR-Nigeria: Bilateral Tensions Increase as War Drags On. From Thomas L. Hughes to the Secretary of State Document No. RSE-24/PA/HO Department of State/E.O. 12958 as amended”, April 2, 1969, https://2001-2009.state.gov/documents/organization/54599.pdf

Union[99]. The federal government tended to take a pragmatic view of their relations with the Soviet Union and were aware of the dangers this relation could pose but believed they had the ability to handle them. Britain doubted the confidence of the Nigerian government in tackling the Soviets and the more they inform them of the risks the better.

In all these, the intelligence outlook on the Soviet Union during the civil war produced by the United States and Britain, was that Moscow's position in Nigeria might become increasingly controversial given international considerations, such as its relationship with Paris, its image in the face of rising humanitarian sympathy for Biafra's plight, and a growing African sentiment for a compromised peace settlement. To ease their position, Soviet policymakers could look with more sympathy than they had before on a compromise settlement which would allow Moscow to retain most of its gains in Federal Nigeria, while recouping its prestige in eastern Nigeria. Indeed, Biafra was an area to which the Soviets devoted most of their attention before the war started, and there was evidence that they had been in intermittent contact with Biafran representatives since the outbreak of hostilities. Soviet press and propaganda organs had consistently referred to Biafrans and their leaders, such as Colonel Ojukwu as misguided but not malevolent. There was other fragmentary evidence that Moscow did not lock itself too tightly into support of the federal side. A March 17, 1969 article in the *London Financial Times* quoted reliable sources to the effect that high-ranking Biafran officials had been approached by Soviet representatives who suggested that Moscow could use its influence in Lagos to win a political settlement acceptable to Biafra's leadership. It was possible that the *Financial Times* story was no more than a Biafran attempt to drive a wedge between Moscow and Lagos but it might have contained a germ of truth. From the foregoing revelations, it was believed that Moscow's view of its interests in Nigeria in general and its relationship with Lagos in particular, were important factors in assessing the possibility that the Soviets might be interested in a compromise solution to the Nigerian Civil War[100].

Meanwhile, on the other side, containment was the motive behind the British intelligence program monitoring the Soviet Union during the civil war. Britain in collaboration with its allies was bent on containing the excesses of the Soviet Union in terms of military buildup and of wielding too much economic influence across Africa mainly in Nigeria and other parts of the globe. According to the United States diplomat, Henry Kissinger, "the greatest problems was how to manage the Soviets as they emerged as global instead of regional superpower"[101]. Thus, evidence gathered from the British intelligence operations during the conflict was used to create negative perceptions of the Soviet Union in Nigeria, reminding the federal government of the danger Russia posed to the national security architecture of Nigeria.

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[99] The National Archives (Kew Garden, London), "Confidential: Minute on Soviet Influence in Nigeria from E.G. Donohoe in the British High Commission Lagos to P.D. McEntee in the West African Department Foreign and Commonwealth Office London, August 9, 1969", FCO 65/255/1, TNA.

[100] United States Department of State Director of Intelligence and Research, "Research Memorandum: USSR-Nigeria: Bilateral Tensions Increase as War Drags".

V. Conclusion

The Nigerian conflict showed that Africa had remained the theatre for great power competition given that influence and strategic engagement would yield political, economic and commercial benefits. Since Africa has numerous untapped natural resources, conflicts like the Nigerian Civil War offered a great opportunity for the great powers to flex their diplomatic muscle in a manner that would protect their respective spheres of influence in order safeguard vital interests. In fact, Russia's military presence on the continent dominated by far diplomatic activities, informational presence, and even economic influence. Russia's military-technical cooperation was aimed at maintaining and expanding Russia's arms export market, ensuring the presence of Russian military experts and trainers, gaining experience in counterterrorism operations, improving the access of Russian forces to locations that could have strategic and operational meaning, establishing support bases for Russian forces, improving the system of deployment for the armed forces, and thus supporting Russia's image as a great power.

Ideological reasons had given way to economic and geopolitical interests particularly since maintaining good relations with African leaders would maintain Russia's role as an influential power and support their economic interests[102]. Thus, British intelligence directed against the Soviet Union purposely looked for tangible evidence needed to protest the Soviet Union involvement in the war while at the same time justifying Britain's actions, portrayed as having undertaken the right policy approach in the conflict. Britain was uncomfortable with the prospect that the involvement of the Soviet Union in the war increased the risks of losing its influence with the federal government. The number one sign pointing to this situation was the attitude of the Nigerian government repeatedly warning British officials that if London did not grant Lagos the request for military assistance they would not hesitate to reach out to the Soviet Union. British intelligence in this context was meant to prove that the Soviet ambition was to expand their influence in Africa and not to protect the territorial integrity of Nigeria which had been the main policy of the Federal Military Government in the war.

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[101] Walter Lafeber, *America, Russia, and the Cold War, 1945-1984* (New York: Alfred A. Knof, 1985), 239.

[102] Kepe et al., *Great-Power Competition*, 20.

Having gathered enough evidence to prove their suspicions about Soviet grand designs despite their consistent denials, Britain next questioned how to deal with the growing Soviet incursions in the war. The proposition arrived at was that any intelligence action should revolve around how to protect British interests in the country and that this fundamental interest would be best served by the preservation of Nigerian unity. It was concluded that Nigeria must remain as one indivisible nation so that the country would serve as a source of influence and protector of Western values in West Africa against communist ideals championed by Soviet Union.

The Soviet Union had strategic ambitions in the whole of Africa, but they found the Nigerian conflict to be an opportunity to execute their long-term plans of expanding military and economic cooperation in that region. These bilateral relations were envisaged to give the Soviets an unhindered foothold in Nigeria. Any legitimate political ambition and growth of Russian influence was bound to be inimical to the British interests in the country. Notably, after the conflict, the Russians tried to consolidate and extend their influence in Nigeria, but Britain had more experience with Nigeria's political landscape than the Russians and its influence was deeply rooted. As such, it became British policy to consistently review the Soviet threats as they materialized and be prepares to counter them when required from that point onwards.

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THE CENTRAL AFRICAN CRISIS AND THE PROBLEM OF CROSS-BORDER INSECURITY: THE CASE OF HOSTAGE-TAKING ON THE BORDERS OF ADAMAWA AND EASTERN CAMEROON

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Abstract: The Central African Republic is known to be one of the most unstable states in Central Africa. Indeed, this country very quickly fell into a recurring cycle of violence linked to the race for power, not only through poorly controlled democratic processes, but also through the action of omnipresent warlords. The most notable case is the 2013 crisis which forced more than 250,000 people to take refuge in Cameroon according to UNHCR figures. It should also be noted that this quasi-genocidal war is the basis for the proliferation of firearms and multifaceted armed gangs, known as "road blockers". However, these different militias that failed to rise to power or those allied with fallen regimes, are becoming real threats for the populations, undermining all international principles regarding the integrity of borders. The question that concerns us is how the Central African crisis could turn into a real cause of insecurity for the neighboring country of Cameroon? How does this phenomenon manifest? What are its consequences and what control measures should be adopted? Several sources help us analyze this question. These are interviews, written documents and images that help us gain a better understanding of this issue. It is important to proceed with a multidisciplinary approach in order to collect divergent opinions on the phenomenon of cross-border organized crime. The various accounts collected made it possible to observe that the phenomenon of hostage-taking in Adamawa and Eastern Cameron is fueled by the socio-political crisis in the Central African Republic. This has enormous socio-economic and geopolitical consequences in Cameroon and the Central African sub-region.

Keywords: low intensity conflic, insecurity, cross-border crime, hostage taking, Cameron, Central African Republic

Rezumat: Republica Centrafricană (RCA) este cunoscută ca fiind una dintre cele mai instabile țări din Africa. Într-adevăr, această țară de aflā demult într-un ciclu recurent de violență legat de cursa pentru putere, procese democratice prost gestionate şi acțiunile omniprezenților lideri militari. Cel mai notabil caz este criza din 2013, care a forțat peste

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250.000 de persoane să caute refugiu în Camerun, conform cifrelor UNHCR. De asemenea, trebuie menționat că acest război cu tentă genocidală este la baza proliferării armelor și a bandelor armate, cunoscute sub numele de "*road blockers*". Cu toate acestea, aceste diverse miliții, fie dintre cele care au încercat să ajungă la putere și nu au reușit sau cele aliate cu regimurile decăzute, constituie adevăratele amenințări pentru populații, subminând toate principiile internaționale privind respectarea integrității frontierelor. Întrebarea care ne preocupă este cum s-ar putea transforma criza din Africa Centrală într-o cauză reală de insecuritate pentru țara vecină, Camerun? Cum se manifestă acest fenomen și care sunt consecințele sale și ce măsuri ar trebui adoptate pentru a-l combate? Pentru a analiza mai bine această întrebare vom consulta mai multe tipuri surse. Acestea sunt interviuri orale, documente scrise și imagini care ne pot oferi mai multe informații în vederea adoptării unei abordări multidisciplinare. Această abordare ne va ajuta să adunăm opinii variate cu privire la infracțiunile transfrontaliere majore identificate. Cercetarea noatră ne-a condus la concluzia că fenomenul luării de ostatici din Adamawa și estul Camerunului este alimentat de criza socio-politică din Republica Centrafricană care are consecințe socioe-conomice și geopolitice substanțiale pentru Camerun și subregiunea Africii Centrale.

Cuvinte cheie: conflict de joasă intensitate, insecuritate, criminalitate transfrontalieră, luare de ostatici, Camerun, Republica Centrafricană

I. Introduction

Wars have become regular in the Central African Republic since its independence in 1958 though the conflict that emerged in 2013 was the most catastrophic because it has involved confrontations with many armed groups, leading to a major humanitarian crisis not only in the country, but in the region as well [1]. Since this war started in the Central African Republic (CAR), one of its particularities as witnessed in the Adamawa and Eastern-Cameroon regions, was the hostage-taking phenomenon that has become recurrent and it is affecting entire populations[2]. Armed men coming from CAR, which shares 800 kilometers of border with Cameroon, have established themselves in villages of the Adamawa where livestock farming is highly practiced, or in the Eastern region of Cameroon, where there are minerals and forestry goods[3].

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[1] Jean-Arnold De Clermont, « Surmonter la crise en Centrafrique », *Etudes. Revue de Culture Contemporaine*, n° 4213 (février 2015): 7-17, https://doi.org/10.3917/etu.4213.0007.

[2] Bakary Yaya Alim and Marie Louidine Benoho Baboule, « La rémanence de l'insécurité transfrontalière aux marges territoriales du Cameroun et de la Centrafrique. Le Cameroun à l'épreuve de l'insécurité transfrontalière », in *Le Cameroun à l'épreuve de l'insécurité transfrontalière*, ed. Célestin Kaptchouang Tchejip and Frank Ebogo (Yaoundé: Monange 2023), https://shs.hal.science/halshs-04634211v1.

[3] CRTV, « Cameroun-RCA : les deux parties veulent concrétiser le tracer de leur frontière », 28 June 2024, https://crtv.cm/2024/06/28/cameroun-rca-les-deux-parties-veulent-concretiser-le-trace-de-leur-frontiere/.

The CAR crisis has had many repercussions on these two regions of Cameroon that are bordering the CAR. It must be said that these areas have become the place for cross-borders banditry, where armed groups take advantage of the lack of strong border control to commit crimes such as hostage-taking. Moreover, the hostage-taking phenomenon has had terrible socio-economic consequences on livestock owners, with people being forced to abandon their villages and lose their livelihood as a civilian recounted in one of the interviews conducted during this research[4].

The situation is aggravated by the political and economic instability in the region thus making the application of sustainable solutions difficult. To better understand this phenomenon, we have examined articles and books from multidisciplinary authors and have conducted a series of interviews conducted in various localities from Cameroon, in 2018 and 2024 with twenty people, which allowed us to collect data on the hostages-taking phenomenon, its consequences, the measures taken by the government to combat it, and the challenges related to it. Due to the sensitivity of the research, the names of the people interviewed have been withheld. They belonged to various age groups (youngest was 37 years old, oldest was 72 years old) and while the majority were men, several interviewees were women as well. From a professional perspective, those interviewed were split between members of the security apparatus (police officers, gendarmes, former army officers, members of the vigilance committees and Rapid Intervention Battalions) and regular civilians (farmers, businessmen, teachers, and other regular civilians). The references to the interviews will only cite the location and date.

II. The Main Causes of Hostage Taking in the Adamawa and East Regions

Frequent conflicts in the Central African Republic have facilitated the creation of armed groups and the presence of illegal guns in the Adamawa and Eastern regions of Cameroon. This section presents the reasons for the crises affecting CAR and the weapons trafficking mechanism in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon.

II.1. The Central African Socio-Political Crisis

The 2013 crisis in CAR is difficult to understand as it was caused by many factors consisting of a mixture of sociopolitical, economic, cultural and geopolitical causes. We would argue that the major reason underpinning the crisis is connected to governmental instability since the State's institutions are fragile, incapable of keeping order, and unable to provide the basic needs to the population. Additionally, the Government struggles to exert its authority on the whole country[5]. To this we can add the unsuccessful efforts to democratize the country which contributed to a rising wave of mass contestation[6]. As the democratization efforts sometimes failed, this outcome led to frequent cycles of violence and political instability.

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[4] Interview conducted in Martap, in June 2024.

On the sociocultural plan, we identify tribalism based on ethnical differences as another important cause. These differences were used by political and military actors to get support and justify the conflicts. Since the country's accession to independence, the various regimes of the CAR share a series of similarities: dynasty and clannism in the management of the country; poor governance; corruption; impunity; embezzlement of public funds; etc.[7] This situation became worse when André Kolingba[8] took power in the country in 1981. He managed the country with his family and clan, and between 1982 and 1987, there was even an amelioration of the socio-economic situation of the country. However, the subsequent successive change in regimes (Patassé, Bozizé, Samba Panza, Archange Touadera) aggravated the situation[9].

At the economic level, we can note that poverty has always been a major cause of the war in the Central-African Republic since the difficult socio-economic situation aliments the tensions and conflicts. These factors combined with the history of political instability and international interventions have only worsened the situation in the country. The Centrafrican disorder is also due to some neighboring African countries and French inference. More than 558 779 Centrafricans found refuge in the Est of Cameroon and had to live with Cameroonians[10]. Last, but not least, the omnipresence of some militia in the region covering CAR, the Adamawa and Est of Cameroon contribute significantly to the weakening of the security environment.

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[5] Jocelyn Coulon, Damien Larramendy and Marie-Joëlle Zahar, « Chapitre 7. L'incapacité de l'État à imposer son autorité », in *Consolidation de la paix et fragilité étatique*, ed. Jocelyn Coulon and Damien Larramendy (Montréal : Presses de l'Université de Montréal, 2015), 153.

[6] Patrice Gourdin, « Centrafrique, la géopolitique d'un pays oublié », *Diploweb. La Revue Géopolitique*, mai 2013, http://www.diploweb.com/patricegourdin,244.html.

[7] Ibid.

[8] André Kolingba was born on August 12th, 1936 at Bangui and died on February 7th, 2010 at Val de Grace Paris 5e hospital, was a general and Centrafrican political leader who led the CAR with an iron fist from 1981 to 1993. Authoritarian, he went down in 1993 after an electoral failure and a failed attempted coup. After trying many times, he was not able to regain power again.

[9] Justin-Junior Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun : dynamique de vie et enjeux sociopolitiques (1979-2019) », Thèse de doctorat d'histoire, Université de Ngaoundéré, 2022, 87.

[10] Justin-Junior Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Cameroun. Eruption social dans un pays d'accueil », *Revue Africaine de Migration et Environnement* 3, n° 2 (2019): 4.

II.2. The Proliferation of Armed Groups

The border areas between Chad, CAR, and Cameroon have become since the 1980s spaces of disorder and cross-border banditism which the states have struggled to keep under control[11]. Thus, the proliferation of armed gangs, rebels, traffickers, and highway bandits, often called “road blockers”, has led to an increase in hostage taking followed by demands for ransoms[12]. These groups exploit the porosity of the borders and cross-border coordination to conduct their criminal activities. Several armed groups are involved in the crisis in the Central African Republic and their presence coupled with the availability of small arms exacerbates the violence, as a police officer tasked with border control observed in an interview[13]. Notably, the phenomenon of hostage-taking generally targets the Fulani community, which overall has been most affected by the 2013 Central African crisis.

Among these armed groups, we can mention the *Séléka* group which means “coalition” in Sango which is a coalition of Muslim-dominated armed groups that overthrew President François Bozizé in 2013[14]. Besides them, there are also the anti-*Balaka*, formed of Christian militias in reaction to the *Seleka*. The anti-*Balaka*, means “anti-machetes” in Sango[15] and they started, initially, as a village self-defense group whose primary goal was to fight the “road blockers”. With the proliferation of abuses committed by members of the *Séléka*, many peasants from Ouham, supported by soldiers from the regular Central African Army (FACA) close to Bozizé, fought against the *Séléka* group in Bossangoa region (Bozizé stronghold), where the ransoms for members their community were the most frequent. This initial fight of the *Balaka* resulted in dozens of deaths within both camps. The group was financed by several people, notably François Bozizé, Francis Bozizé (the son of President Bozizé), and Partice Edouard Nagaïssona (self-proclaimed general coordinator of the Anti-balakas)[16].

Alongside these two major militias, there are others such as: The Popular Front for the Renaissance of the Central African Republic (PFCAR) – a group from the *Séléka*; the Patriotic Movement for the Central African Republic (PMCAR) – another group from the *Séléka*; the group (3R) “*Retour, Réclamation, Réhabilitation*” – an active armed group in the CAR North-West; the Unity for

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[11] Issa Saïbou, « La prise d’otages aux confins du Cameroun, de la Centrafrique et du Tchad: une nouvelle modalité du banditisme transfrontalier », *Polis: Revue Camerounaise de Science Politique* 13, n° 1-2 (2005): 122.

[12] Ibid., 5.

[13] Interview conducted in Garoua-Boulaï in March 2018.

[14] Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun », 15.

[15] Gourdin, « Centrafrique, la géopolitique d’un pays oublié ».

[16] Faouzi Kilembe, « Assurer la sécurité en Centrafrique, mission impossible ? », *Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Cameroun / Afrique Centrale*, Octobre 2014, 15, https://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/kamerun/11287.pdf.

Peace in the Central African Republic (UPCAR) – an active armed group in CAR's Centre and East; the Coalition of Patriots for Change (CPC) – a coalition formed by some of these groups in 2020[17]. These groups' motivations differ from one another, ranging from restoring order and protecting their communities to taking control of the economic resources and defying the government.

III. The Main Victims of Hostage-Taking and Ransom Incidents

This section identifies the main victims of the kidnappings in the Adamawa and Eastern regions of Cameroon, and presents the process of hostage taking. From the communities in this part of the country, the Fulani's are the most targeted by hostage-takers for financial reasons. Also, it should be noted that the kidnappers carry out well-planned strategies in committing their crimes.

III.1. The Fulani and Mbororo Communities: The Kidnappers' Prefered Victims

The bloodiest attacks are targeted at the communities of transhumant breeders[18]. The Fulanis and Mbororo communities are particularly targeted by hostage-takers in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon. The kidnappers often attack the Fulani herdsmen, who are perceived to have economic resources, including livestock, thus making them vulnerable to ransom demands. This situation has led many Fulani inhabitants to flee their villages in order to escape violence and insecurity, which, in turn, further aggravated the desertification of rural areas. The following remarks by a livestock owner illustrate this point:

> "The hostage takers are interested in us due to our assets. They have information on us, about our cattle and our various movements in the region. Among us, many people are accomplices. You will see that they do not attack the Mbororo or the Fulani that are poor. They target the wealthy families of breeders or traders, knowing that the ransom will be easily paid to them in case of the abduction of a family member"[19].

The Fulani communities are specifically targeted by hostage takers in Adamaoua and eastern Cameroon for several reasons. Economically, the Fulani are traditionally livestock owners, thus they are considered relatively prosperous. According to one of the interviewees, the kidnappers hope to obtain ransoms in exchange for the release of hostages, knowing that Fulani families can sell cattle to pay[20]. Similarly, it must be said that the mobility and isolation of Fulani livestock owners and herders makes the task easy for the hostage takers since these Fulani herdsmen often lead a nomadic or semi-nomadic life, moving with their herds in isolated rural areas. This makes them more vulnerable to attacks since they are often far from security centers and law enforcement.

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[17] Noungouï Djouldé, « Les réfugiés tchadiens et centrafricains au Nord-Cameroun », 95.

[18] Christian Seignobos, « Le phénomène Zarguina dans le Nord du Cameroun : Coupeurs de route et prises d'otages, la crise des sociétés pastorales mbororo », *Afrique contemporaine* 3 n° 239 (2011): 43.

[19] Interview conducted in Gado Badzéré, in March 2018.

Photo no. 1: The Governor of the Adamawa region Kildadi Taguiéké Boukar, comforting the "Mbororo" hostages freed by the BIR
Source: Esaie Meidogo Shakur, « Adamawa: Ten hostages freed », March 2024, https://www.cameroun-tribune.com.

In terms of security, the marginalization and poor protection of Fulani herdsmen is one of the main causes of the kidnappings. In other words, the rural areas where the Fulani live often lacks sufficient security which enables the kidnappings perpetrated by armed groups and bandits. It should be emphasized that the kidnappers have control of the land. They often come from the same regions or know the terrain well and can easily locate and target the Fulani camps.

At the social level, there is a stereotype that the Fulani possess significant financial resources, thus making them perfect targets for the hostage takers. Combined, these factors explain why Fulani communities are particularly vulnerable to abductions in these regions.

III.2. Hostage-taking Practices

In this section we will analyze the modus operandi of the kidnappers. Hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon is a recurrent problem and the frequency of the attacks is constant, with serious consequences on the local populations. For example, some manifestations of this phenomenon cover the period between July and December 2015, during which the Adamawa region recorded 76 cases of hostage taking and 27 armed attacks.

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[20] Interview conducted in Mandjou, in August 2024.

In another incident, in January 2018, seven people were abducted in the locality of Madjele, Ngan-Ha district. Generally, the kidnappers often use assault rifles and operate mainly at night, terrorizing the villages. They usually leave phone numbers so that the families can negotiate the release of the hostages. Plunged into uncertainty, given the security impasse and the lack of solutions to this phenomenon, the inhabitants sometimes accuse the administrative authorities and certain economic operators of complicity with the criminals, as noted by a livestock farmer in an interview[21].

In terms of a systemic impact, it should also be mentioned that the fear of being kidnapped leads the inhabitants to flee their villages and settle in the city, thus depopulating the rural areas. Looking at these points, it is obvious that economic activities are perturbed by the kidnappings and often ruin the families who have to pay ransoms. This is the case of one of the farmers and operators in the city of Tuboro, who claims to have been bankrupt by the hostage takers. The following statements from a livestock farmer and businessman illustrate this point of view:

> “My family and I had been victims of kidnappings on a regular basis. In 201[x], I was kidnapped and my family had to collect a large amount of money to get me released. A year later, it was [another relative] who was kidnapped and I had to pay a huge amount for his release. In 202[x], it was [yet another relative] who was kidnapped despite the intervention of law enforcement in the liberation process, [they were] killed by his captors. I was forced to leave the outskirts to continue to carry elsewhere, so I settled in Ngaoundéré where I carry out unprofitable activities to provide for my family”[22].

These examples demonstrate the gravity of the problem and the need for continuous measures to protect local populations and restore security. As we have seen, hostage taking has many consequences, thus pushing the administrative authorities to adopt multifaceted resilience measures.

IV. The Socioeconomic Consequences and Resilience Measures of Local Populations Against the Hostage Taking Phenomenon

In addition to the loss of human lives, the phenomenon of hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon has caused and continues to cause enormous socio-economic damage and this aspect will be addressed in the following section.

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[21] Interview conducted in Ngaoundéré, in August 2024.

[22] Interview conducted in Ngaoundéré, in August 2024 (different person).

IV.1. The socioeconomic consequences related to hostage taking

Hostage-taking in the Adamawa and East of Cameroon is a serious problem with significant socio-economic consequences. According to the Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA), between 2015 and 2019, more than 300 Mbororo and nomadic Peul were abducted and sometimes killed by kidnappers from the Central African Republic[23]. The majority have regained their freedom after payments of more than 2 billion CFA francs were sent for the ransoms. However, there are also numerous losses of human life since kidnappings can end tragically, with the hostages killed if ransoms are not paid.

For fear of being murdered, thousands of herders and their families sold off their cattle to pay for their freedom or settle elsewhere. Others abandoned them in the wild. As a result, "The Djarguina" (Kidnappers in Fulfuldé) reduced the cattle herd. The consequences are countless", as pointed out by Ahmadou Roufaye, secretary general of the Adamawa, MBOSCUDA[24]. To put things in perspective, in 2018, 150 people were abducted in the Adamawa. The most affected departments were the Vina, Faro and Déo, and Mbéré, but the Vina department was the most affected with 92 cases[25].

The economic consequences of this phenomenon are significant. To this end, we observe the degradation of the livestock farming sector. In other words, farmers are often targeted, which severely disrupts the local livestock-based economy. In this context, as mentioned before due the fear of kidnappings, there is an inadvertent effect that leads to the desertification of rural areas.

From a security perspective, the instability increased due to absent or inadequate security measures to address the presence of armed groups and put a stop to the frequent kidnappings. According to a retired army officer interviewed, civilians are often targeted in clashes between armed groups, resulting in loss of life and serious injury[26]. Moreover, many people are forced to flee their homes to escape the violence, creating waves of internally displaced people and refugees. Conflicts perturb economic activities, worsening poverty and food insecurity. In these places, people do not have access to basic services as the pervasive state of insecurity makes it difficult to access health care, education and other essential services – an aspect highlighted in the account of a civilian[27].

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[23] Jules Kouagheu, « Au Cameroun, les kidnappings d'éleveurs sèment la désolation dans l'Adamaoua », *Le Monde Afrique*, 7th March 2021, https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2021/03/07/au-cameroun-les-kidnappings-d-eleveurs-sement-la-desolation-dans-l-adamaoua_6072248_3212.html.

[24] Ibid.

[25] Ibid.,5.

[26] Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024.

[27] Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

To this must, we must add the psychological trauma and the impact of systemic violations of human rights since armed groups are often responsible for serious human rights violations, including abductions, rapes and summary executions. Violence and insecurity have lasting effects on the mental health of civilians, especially children. All these factors outlined create an extremely difficult environment for local populations, who must constantly navigate between dangers and uncertainties if they want to survive.

In response to these developments, the response of security forces like the Rapid Intervention Battalions (RIB) has been to intensify their efforts to recover weapons and releasing hostages, but still given how critical the situation is, it requires additional comprehensive and sustainable solutions to protect local populations.

IV.2. The Local Authorities' Resilience Strategies

Several economic development initiatives have been implemented to reinforce the control of local populations and reduce their vulnerability to kidnappings in the Adamaoua and East regions of Cameroon, with many economic inclusion programs being developed to sustain the communities in the affected regions and improve the livelihoods of local populations. An official of the social security services interviewed argues that these programs include money transfers, vocational training and microfinance initiatives to help families diversify their sources of income and to strengthen their economic resilience[28]. Similarly, the head of the Resilience and Welfare Office also points out that, in addition, these community development projects aim at strengthening the defense capacities of the populations. Community projects are launched to develop local infrastructure, like roads, schools, and health centers[29]. Through them, the policymakers intend to create economic opportunities and better life conditions.

The agriculture and livestock farming sectors development projects have been affected by the abductions. According to a local farmer interviewed, initiatives set up to support farmers and herders, like improved seeds distribution systems, agricultural equipment and veterinary services aim to increase productivity and reduce the economic dependence of local populations[30]. In terms of education, training and education programs are offered to improve the skills of youths and adults, thus enabling them to access better-paid jobs and reduce their economic vulnerability.

Para-public partnerships are also encouraged. Partnerships between governments, non-governmental organizations and private organisms are established to finance and implement economic development projects. In the view of a teacher interviewed, these partnerships aim to maximize the impact of initiatives and ensure their sustainability[31], demonstrating the importance of a multidimensional approach to reduce poverty and vulnerability in face of kidnappings by strengthening the economic capacities of local populations.

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[28] Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

[29] Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

[30] Interview conducted in Tuboro, in August 2024 (different person).

V. The Various Implemented Actions to Fight Against Hostage-Taking and Prevention Measures

As a response to the widespread phenomenon of hostage taking in the Adamawa and East regions, the government has conducted several security operations which were sometimes successful.

V.1. Successful Action Conducted by Synchronized Efforts of the Security Forces and Local Populations Against Hostage-Takers

There are several successful examples resulting from the coordination between security forces and community groups in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon. For example, the Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB) conducted several operations to free hostages like in March 2024, when ten hostages were released in Adamawa. Regarding the reduction of abductions, due to close collaboration between vigilance committees and security forces, a police officer interviewed noted that the number of abductions has become to decrease in some areas with joint patrols and checkpoints deterring criminals and improving security[32]. In fact, ten hostages that were held held captives for a month, were freed on 7th March 2024 by the Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB), an elitist Cameroonian security force, that conducted a military operation in the region, as reported by the press outlet *Cameroon Tribune.*

According to this media, these victims were kidnapped in the Mbé and Nganha, sub-divisions of Adamawa and Touboro in the North[33]. The kidnappers asked for a large amount of ransom in exchange of the hostages. The rescue operation was conducted around 11.A.M by the RIB 5th commandant, Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Kounaka's soldiers, in collaboration with the vigilance committee. Many abductors were neutralized and an important stockpile of guns, bullets, along with talisman and torches were taken, according to media reports[34].

In the same manner, joint operations have led to the release of several other hostages. For instance, in 2020, an operation of the security forces and vigilance committees led to the release of several abducted livestock farmers in Adamawa. Joint efforts also led to the seizure of weapons and ammunition, reducing the armed groups' attacks. In 2021, a joint operation recovered a large stockpile of weapons in the East region.

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[31] Interview conducted in Tuboro, in August 2024 (different person).

[32] Interview conducted in Meiganga, in August 2024 (different person).

[33] Shakur, « Adamaoua : Dix otages libérés ».

[34] Ibid.

Photo no. 2: Guns from kidnappers taken by the *BIR* in the Adamawa
Source: Esaie Meidogo Shakur, « Adamawa : Ten hostage freed », March 2024, https://www.cameroun-tribune.com.

Another approach, as explained by a Sergent of the Rapid Intervention Battalion in an interview, has been to promote awareness initiatives and community development projects that have strengthened trust between the local populations and security forces[35], and encouraged a massive participation of the population that improved the quality of cooperation.

To reduce the growing criminality, coordination actions have been set up. A gendarme argued that this coordination has contributed to an overall reduction of crimes in certain areas. Moreover, the surveillance and vigilance efforts have started to deter criminal activities and improved the daily security of residents[36]. These successful actions show the necessity of collaborating between various local stakeholders, highlighting how coordinating efforts improve security and stability in the region.

V.2. Local Visions to Prevent Abductions in the Adamwa and East Regions

Despite the efforts made by the local authorities to repress the phenomenon of hostage-taking that prevails in these parts of the country, this issue still continues to take place and to mutate according to evolving ways of committing crimes[37]. To prevent new kidnappings in the Adamawa and East regions of Cameroon, several measures have been implemented, and we will briefly present them. First, strengthening security: this involves the deployment of security forces in areas where kidnappings are recurrent. Rapid Intervention Battalion (RIB) and other security units have been deployed to patrol high risk areas and checkpoints were established along the main roads to monitor suspicious movements.

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[35] From interview conducted in Bertoua, in September 2024.

[36] From interview conducted in Bertoua, in September 2024 (different person).

[37] Saïbou Issa, « La répression du grand banditisme au Cameroun : entre pragmatisme et éthique ». *Recherches Africaine*, n°3, 2004, p. 7.

Secondly, regarding the collaboration at the regional level, cross-border cooperation has been established in recent times. The Cameroonian authorities collaborate with their Central African counterparts to monitor and control the activities of cross-border armed groups and the respective security services of the two countries exchange information to anticipate and prevent kidnappings.

Thirdly, awareness campaigns and training for villagers are conducted to inform local communities of the dangers and the measures needed to protect themselves and prevent kidnappings. As a result, farmers receive training in safety techniques and measures to use in case of threats, including the way they should react when dealing with members of criminal groups. The members of the community sometimes participate in patrols together with the security forces to reinforce the security of vulnerable areas. It should be noted that according to a member of the gendarmerie interviewed, the communities play an important role in sharing information with the authorities, like providing information on armed groups' movements and their criminal activities[38]. Many of activities outlined are designed to reinforce the coordination between security forces and community groups in Adamawa and East.

These combined actions aim at creating a safe environment for the local populations and to reduce the number of kidnapping incidents. The local population plays an important role in terms of fostering social security, mostly in the regions affected by this crisis like the Adamawa and the East of Cameroon. Notably, according to one interviewee, the local populations are becoming involved through vigilance comittees which sometimes work together with the local security forces since these comittees are formed to watch and alert others in case suspects are seen[39].

Training programs were organized for vigilance committees and security forces to ameliorate their competencies in terms of security and crisis management. An agent from the security forces remarked that these training programs permit to have a better comprehension of the issue and improve cooperation[40]. Frequent meetings are held among the security forces and committees to share information, discuss the challenges encountered, and plan common actions. The meetings also allow a better communication and coordination between the various groups involved in addressing the security issues impacting the region.

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[38] Interview conducted in Tuboro, in August 2024 (different person).

[39] Interview conducted in Mbarang in September 2024.

[40] Interview conducted in Batouri in August 2024.

The security forces give material support to the vigilance committees, equipping them with communication equipment, automobiles and other relevant tools. They help these committes to efficiently conduct their activities. Meannwhile, awareness campaigns are organized to encourage cooperation and to reinforce the trust between the communities and the security forces. A member of the police in Garoua-Boulaï stressed the importance of these campaigns needed to assure everyone's security[41] and ameliorate the conditions in the regions affected.

VI. Conclusion

In summary, despite the efforts to improve the coordination efforts between the various actors impacted by the crisis, there continue to be difficulties in regards to the communication and collaboration between the members involved in the efforts to stabilize the region. These difficulties can lead to a tardive response to incidents and ineffectiveness in general. Lack of trust between the local communities and security forces also has an impact on the cooperation efforts. The political and economic instability in the region, especially as concerns the Cental-African Republic, continues to create new opportunities for armed groups and criminals. In this sense, a comprehensive set of measure to address the issue must be implemented in the Central African regions in order to better manage this phenomenon.

Poverty, unemployment and the lack of economic opportunities in the affected regions contribute to the rising tensions, thus making the local populations vulnerable to the recruitment efforts pursued by the armed groups. In conclusion, in light of the various challenges identified, the necessity to consolidate the competences of the security forces and vigilance committee remains a constant. Addressing the root causes of the phenomenon is paramount in order to arrive at a sustainable and lasting peace for the communities in the regions analyzed.

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[41] Interview conducted in Garoua-Boulaï, in March 2018 (different person).

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Annex

Interview set based on data collected by the author in various localities from Cameroon.

Nº	Place of Interview	Date of Interview
1	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
2	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
3	Martap, Cameroon	June 2024
4	Garoua-Boulaï, Cameroon	March 2018
5	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
6	Bertoua, Cameroon	September 2024
7	Gado Badzéré, Cameroon	March 2018
8	Batouri, Cameroon	August 2024
9	Garoua-Boulaï,	March 2018
10	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
11	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
12	Meiganga, Cameroon	August 2024
13	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024
14	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
15	Bertoua, Cameroon	September 2024
16	Tuboro, Cameroon	August 2024
17	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024
18	Mbarang, Cameroon	September 2024
19	Mandjou, Cameroon	August 2024
20	Ngaoundéré, Cameroon	August 2024

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THE 'ENEMY ELEMENTS' – THE LEGIONARIES THROUGH THE EYES OF THE COMMUNISTS. A CASE-STUDY: *SCÎNTEIA*

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Abstract: The totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century assigned a central role to the written press, transforming it into a decisive instrument for achieving political objectives. In the case of the communist dictatorship in Romania, the dissemination of propaganda, essential for reshaping society and instilling the doctrine, was conducted through publications controlled by the Romanian Communist Party. The party's main press organ, *Scînteia*, operated illegally during the interwar period, only to be suspended under the National Legionary State and the subsequent military dictatorship. The newspaper reemerged in the public sphere after the events of August 23, 1944, and continued to be published without interruption until the fall of communism in 1989. This study focuses on a less explored dimension: the image of the far right as constructed by the communist regime in the pages of *Scînteia*. The Legionary Movement was regarded by the communist regime as one of its principal enemies, while the struggle against fascism served as a key source of the regime's legitimacy. Articles and speeches on this topic abound, particularly during the first two decades of the dictatorship, though references to legionarism became more sporadic toward the regime's end. The study examines three key aspects: the drawn representations of the Legionary enemies, both in terms of the movement's leaders and of ordinary foot soldiers; the accusations leveled against former members; and press coverage of the major trials brought against the Legionaries.

Keywords: Legionary Movement, communist Romania, Scînteia, legionary representation, propaganda

Rezumat: Totalitarismele secolului XX au atribuit presei scrise un rol central, devenind un instrument decisiv pentru atingerea obiectivelor politice. În cazul dictaturii comuniste din România, diseminarea propagandei, vitală pentru transformarea societății și inocularea doctrinei, s-a realizat prin intermediul publicațiilor aflate sub egida Partidului Comunist. Organul principal de presă care a servit intereselor partidului, *Scînteia*, a funcționat ilegal în perioada interbelică, fiindu-i suspendată activitatea în perioada Statului Național Legionar și pe durata dictaturii militare. Ziarul a revenit apoi în spațiul public după Actul de la 23 august 1944 și a fost distribuit fără întrerupere

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până la căderea comunismului, în 1989. Studiul de față are la bază analiza unui aspect mai puţin abordat, şi anume imaginea extremei drepte construite de regimul comunist în ziarul *Scînteia*. Mişcarea Legionară a fost considerată de dictatura comunistă drept unul dintre cei mai importanţi duşmani, lupta împotriva fascismului devenind o sursă de legitimitate pentru regim. În primele două decenii ale dictaturii, regăsim în abundență articole şi discursuri pe această temă, intervențiile cu privire la legionarism devenind însă sporadice spre sfârşitul regimului. Studiul urmăreşte, în principal, următoarele trei elemente: portretele schițate inamicului, ale liderilor mişcării şi ale legionarilor de rând; acuzațiile aduse foştilor membri ai mişcării; precum şi relatarea în presă a principalelor procese intentate legionarilor.

Cuvinte cheie: Mişcarea Legionară, România comunistă, Scânteia, imaginea legionarului, propagandă

I. Introduction

Scînteia (Eng. trans.: *The Spark*), the newspaper that set the national political line throughout the communist regime in Romania between 1947 and 1989, published an article in May 1945, during the trial of the first fourteen journalists accused of war crimes[1]. The article reflected the Communists' indignation at the press's ability to negatively shape public opinion: "Propaganda can influence public opinion (…) Hence the great importance of informative material and of newspapers, in particular, which are within the reach of the broad public. Through unchecked statements, repeated in various forms day after day, to the point of saturation, a given theme of propaganda eventually comes to be accepted by public opinion as self-evident truth, gradually becoming a powerful idea capable of stirring passions and unleashing hatred"[2]. Ironically, although this description perfectly reflected their own practices, the Romanian Communists vehemently condemned the interwar press, in which "ordinary murderers and thieves were portrayed (…) as 'legendary figures', as 'heroes chosen by destiny,' or as 'direct emissaries' of Divinity"[3]. The far left operated in much the same way as its principal ideological adversary, the Legionaries – members of the far-right movement, *Legion of The Archangel Michael* – representing them as capable of “stirring passions and unleashing hatred”[4], a “discrediting profile (…) of political undesirables”[5].

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[1] The journalists were charged with the following crimes: collaborating with the former dictatorial regimes between 1938 and 1944; adopting anti-national and anti-democratic positions; and "contributing to the creation of a climate favorable to the subjugation of the country". Among those indicted, owners, editors, or contributors to far-right newspapers, were: Stelian Popescu, Pamfil Şeicaru, Ilie Rădulescu, Ilie Popescu-Prundeni, Alexandru Hodoş, Romulus Dianu, Nichifor Crainic, Romulus Seişan, Pantelimon Vizirescu, Aurel Cosma, Grigore Manoilescu, Gabriel Bălănescu, Vladimir Christi, and Sergiu Vladimir (Mihaela Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii: comunizarea presei din România (1944–1947): Monografie* (Bucureşti: Tritonic Books, 2021), 424-432.

[2] Scânteia, „Ziariştii fascişti vinovaţi de dezastrul ţării au fost trimişi în judecata Tribunalului Poporului – Actul de acuzare", May 30, 1945.

[3] Ibid.

It should be noted that until the reappearance of *Scînteia*[6] – whose activity had been suspended during the National Legionary State (September 1940 - January 1941) – the task of shaping such profiles and waging the fight against the fascist enemy was assumed by *România Liberă,* another newspaper aligned with the communist ideology at that time. Through numerous articles, communist journalists demanded the unmasking and purging of the Legionaries[7].

Scînteia, described by Mihaela Teodor as “the voice of the Communist Party and the self-proclaimed voice of the people”[8], returned to readers on September 21, 1944, when its first post-clandestine issue marked its reemergence from underground[9]. In the early years following its reappearance, *Scînteia* published articles aimed at justifying the necessity of the defascistization process as its journalistic discourse consistently returned to the crimes attributed to the Legionaries and their collaboration with Nazi Germany. At the same time, *Scînteia* underscored the Legionary Movement’s responsibility for Romania’s involvement in the war against the Soviet Union, which was depicted as a benevolent and generous ally of the Communists, allegedly the one who had shown “the path to salvation, independence, and dignity”[10]. As numerous historiographical sources indicate[11], for the Communists the primary concern was seizing and consolidating political power. In pursuit of this goal, the

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[4] Ibid.

[5] Angelo Mitchievici, „Realismul socialist şi critica decadenţei: biopolitici totalitare”, in *Intelectualii politici și politica intelectualilor*, ed. Daniel Citirigă, Georgiana Ţăranu, and Adrian-Alexandru Herţa (Târgovişte: Cetatea de Scaun, 2016), 165.

[6] In the foonotes and reference, the change of letters in the name of *Scînteia* from “â” to “î” marks the the ortographic change adopted after 1953.

[7] Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii*, 113.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România: Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc, 1948–1965* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001), 121.

[10] Scânteia, „Cum a lucrat comisia de la Alba-Iulia”, January 7, 1945.

[11] For details on communist efforts to consolidate power, see, for example: Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism pentru eternitate. O istorie politică a comunismului românesc* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2005); Gheorghe Onişoru, *Stalin și poporul rus…: democrație și dictatură în România contemporană. Stalinismul în România* (Bucureşti: Corint, 2021); Gheorghe Onişoru, *Stalin și poporul rus…; Democrație și dictatură în România contemporană. Premisele instaurării comunismului* (Bucureşti: Corint, 2021); Dennis Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist* (Bucureşti: Fundaţia Academia Civică, 2012); Dennis Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România: Gheorghiu-Dej și statul polițienesc*, 1948–1965 (Iaşi: Polirom, 2001); Virgiliu Ţârău, „Începutul sfârşitului. Arestări politice după alegerile din noiembrie 1946”, in *Regele, comuniștii și coroana,* coord. Alexandru Muraru and Andrei Muraru (Iaşi: Polirom, 2017), 132-159.

Legionaries served as a legitimizing instrument, cast as the absolute and perpetual enemy against whom the regime had to remain steadfast and vigilant.

Within this context, the article aims to trace the key characteristics attributed to former Legionaries by the communist regime through the press and to highlight how these portrayals of the enemy served as sources of legitimacy for the regime. By analyzing the depiction of Legionaries in *Scînteia*, the study contributes to a broader understanding of the strategies employed by the communist regime to shape public perception, control historical narratives, and suppress political opposition. To this end, at the methodological level, the research relies on the systematic identification of keywords in the newspaper collection available through the *Arcanum* digital library[12]. This approach allowed me to pinpoint the specific issues containing articles relevant to the portrayal of the Legionaries. Based on this material and considering the central themes of the newspaper articles, ranging from moral and physical depictions of the Legionaries to portrayals of their leaders and the trials involving former members, the research was able to identify the most recurrent narrative patterns. These, as the following analysis illustrates, can be mapped onto distinct facets of the personality constructed by the communist press in its effort to craft the figure of an ultimate enemy.

II. Historical Context: Romania Caught Between Political Extremes

Thierry Wolton's notion of the "fratricidal brothers"[13] – fascism and communism – aptly captures the simultaneous emergence of the two extremes on the Romanian political stage only a few years after the end of the First World War. In a European climate conducive to the rise of such movements, shaped by political instability and economic crisis, the Communist Party of Romania (*Partidul Comunist din România* – PCdR) drew support from the Soviet Union, while the Legionary Movement, by the late 1930s, received the backing of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Both began as marginal groups with limited political influence and few adherents, yet their trajectories soon diverged. Outlawed in April 1924, largely because of its anti-national orientation, the PCdR spent two decades in clandestinity[14], gradually forfeiting even its modest initial political capital. By contrast, the Legionary Movement proved far more adept at mobilizing popular discontent, enabling it to expand its base of support[15].

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[12] The entire archive of *Scînteia* (1944-1989) can be found in the Arcanum digital library at the following link: https://adt.arcanum.com/ro/collection/Scinteia/.

[13] Thierry Wolton, *Roșu-brun: Răul secolului* (Bucureşti: Fundaţia Academia Civică, 2001), 121.

[14] Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist*, 12.

[15] Onişoru, *Stalin și poporul rus...*, 38.

Within a few short years, it rose from the fringes of politics – winning only a single parliamentary seat in the 1931 elections, secured by its leader Corneliu Zelea Codreanu[16] – to becoming the third largest party by the 1937 general elections[17].

The dictatorial regime imposed by King Carol II in February 1938 nullified this success, outlawing all political organizations except *Frontul Renașterii Naționale* (Eng, trans.: National Renaissance Front), the state's single legal party. The outbreak of the Second World War, Carol II's abdication, and the establishment of the National Legionary State under General Ion Antonescu briefly secured the Legionary Movement a share of power, with its leaders occupying key government posts. Yet this ascendancy was short-lived. Mounting tensions between the Movement and Antonescu erupted in the so-called "Legionary Rebellion" of January 21-23, 1941, marked by violent demonstrations and acts of terror[18]. Following the confrontation, Antonescu dissolved the National Legionary State and relegated the Romanian far right to political marginality[19].

Although ideologically the far right and far left appeared to stand at opposite poles and seemed irreconcilable, according to Zigu Ornea, the two ultimately met, if unintended, "at a point leading toward totalitarianism"[20]. Ornea argues that in sharing "the same anti-democratic aspiration"[21], they employed similar methods in their opposition to democracy, capitalism, liberalism, and individualism[22]. Despite their mutual public denunciations, the parallels between Legionaries and Communists at times produced covert forms of complicity. During the interwar period, when the PCdR operated illegally, the far-right borrowed Marxist rhetoric, creating the Legionary Workers' Corps as a tool for attracting and representing the working class[23]. Later, during the establishment of the communist regime in Romania, Gheorghe Onişoru notes that party leaders Teohari Georgescu and Ana Pauker pursued a policy of openness toward former Legionaries, ostensibly offering them the opportunity to contribute to the "rebuilding of the country"[24]. This approach materialized in the so-called "Georgescu-Pătraşcu pact", an agreement between the Interior Minister Teohari Georgescu and the Legionary leader Nicolae Pătraşcu, which facilitated the entry of former members of the Legionary Movement into the Romanian Communist Party[25]. In practice, however, this policy was less concerned with "rebuilding the country" than with deploying former Legionaries as instruments of force in the struggle against the democratic opposition.

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[16] Zigu Ornea, *Anii treizeci: extrema dreaptă românească* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2025), 235.
[17] Ibid, 248.
[18] Ilarion Țiu, *Mișcarea Legionară după Corneliu Codreanu. Regimul Antonescu (ianuarie 1941 – august 1944)* (Bucureşti: Editura Vremea, 2007), 36.
[19] Ibid, 56.
[20] Ornea, *Anii treizeci*, 38.
[21] Ibid, 36.
[22] Wolton, *Roșu-brun*, 148.
[23] Armin Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail". Mișcarea socială și organizație politică: o contribuție la problema fascismului internațional* (Bucureşti: Humanitas, 2006), 270. See also Roland Clark, *Sfântă tinerețe legionară* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2024), 103-112.
[24] Onişoru, *Stalin și poporul rus*, 328.

Following the coup of August 23, 1944, the Communists sought by any means to place themselves at the forefront of political events even though at that time, they still constituted a minority at the national level. The consolidation of power, secured with Soviet backing, could not be achieved solely through control of the army, the judiciary, and the police[26]; it also required a second, crucial element: the creation of mass support, which the Communists entirely lacked. According to Dennis Deletant, to achieve this, it was necessary to "eradicate all vestiges of support for the monarchy and for 'Western' democracy"[27], while presenting themselves as the champions of what they called *real democracy*.

In this context, after reemerging on the political stage, during a period defined by a break with tradition and the consolidation of the regime[28], the Communists turned to party publications as a primary instrument for stigmatizing political opposition, compelled to secure both legitimacy and followers. The rhetoric advanced in the press set two worlds in stark opposition: on the one hand, the realm of workers and the proletariat; on the other, that of the "class enemy" and the "traitors"[29]. Thierry Wolton remarks that this confrontation was framed as an irreconcilable conflict in which the survival of one necessarily entailed the elimination of the other[30]. The Communists fully embraced this Manichean worldview, insisting that the state could follow only two paths as described in an article from *Scînteia* published in February 1945: "the first, which amounts to a return to the system of fascist dictatorship, to the enthronement of the old terror; or the second, which entails the determined eradication of fascist remnants and reactionary ballast, the creation of peaceful conditions that would allow Romania to join the family of democratic nations"[31]. For them, "no third path exists"[32].

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[25] Ibid, 335-336.

[26] Deletant, *România sub regimul comunist*, 55.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Emilia Șercan, *Cultul secretului: mecanismele cenzurii în presa comunistă* (Iași: Polirom, 2015), 69.

[29] Alexandra Codău, "The Hate Speech in the Communist Press", in *Analele Universității „Ovidius" din Constanța – Seria Științe Politice*, no. 5, 9.

[30] Wolton, *Roșu-brun*, 148.

[31] Scânteia, „Postul de radio Moscova despre situația deosebită a României. Care este calea pe care trebuie să meargă România", February 23, 1945.

[32] Ibid.

III. The Press as an Instrument in Constructing the Enemy

The pages of *Scînteia* became the ideal platform for constructing the public image of the far right. The press was tasked to conduct the "declared struggle of the party and the state against presumed enemies"[33], delivering to readers a steady stream of propagandistic articles that clearly reflected the party's ideology. The newspaper depicted the exponents of Romanian fascism, as "hostile elements," "traitors to the nation," and "war criminals," who, according to the communist narrative, threatened "the fundamental freedoms of the people, the values of national culture and human civilization, Romania's independence, and even the nation's very existence"[34]. With stakes defined in such existential terms, the Communists assumed the role of saviors, claiming responsibility for the defascistization of society and for removing members of the Legionary Movement from public and political life, in accordance with the provisions of the Armistice Convention, which they professed to implement in full[35].

To fulfil its ideological mission and justify its broader policy of repression, the Communist regime consistently invoked the figure of the Legionary as the symbolic embodiment of the fascist adversary. Accordingly, beginning in 1944, the year of *Scînteia*'s reemergence in the public sphere, and continuing until the very collapse of the regime in 1989, *Scînteia* regularly published articles focusing on the Legionaries. According to our research, during this period approximately 1,643 pages of the newspaper contained at least one reference to the term "Legionary". An examination of this quantitative dimension reveals a higher concentration of references during 1944-1948, accounting for 1,198 pages, or 72.92% of the total. This surge reflects the exceptional attention devoted to the Legionaries in the immediate postwar years, followed by a sharp and sustained decline in subsequent decades, distributed as follows: between 1949 and 1959, 271 pages contain mentions of the Legionaries (16.49%); during the 1960s, 68 pages (4.14%); in the 1970s, 75 pages (4.56%);

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[33] Ibid.

[34] Ștefan Voicu, „În preajma aniversării a 40 de ani de la marea demonstrație antifascistă de la 1 mai 1939", *Scînteia*, April 25, 1979.

[35] Article 15 of the convention stipulated that the Romanian government was required to immediately dissolve all pro-Hitler fascist organizations on Romanian territory, whether political, military, or paramilitary, as well as any other groups engaged in propaganda hostile to the United Nations and especially to the Soviet Union. It further prohibited the future existence of any such organizations (The Armistice Agreement with Rumania; September 12, 1944, art. 15, *Yale Law School – The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/rumania.asp).

and in the final decade of the regime, 1980-1989, only 31 pages refer to the Legionaries (1.89%).

The high concentration of references to Legionaries between 1944-1948 is closely tied to Romania's transition toward communism. Following August 23, 1944, under growing Soviet influence, the Communist Party sought to present itself as the definitive "antifascist" force, portraying Legionaries as the primary enemies of democracy. During this time, Legionaries remained politically active, attempting to oppose the Communists, organizing actions against them, and maintaining contact with movement leaders in exile[36]. For the Communists, they represented a real threat and a source of tension, and their systematic disparagement helped legitimize the regime and justify its repressive measures. In the ensuing decades, as the Communists consolidated power and most Legionaries were eliminated, imprisoned, or re-educated, the figure of the legionary gradually lost its central propagandistic role, surfacing only sporadically in the press. By the final years of the regime, references to Legionaries had largely disappeared, with the group no longer perceived as a threat but remembered as a closed, negative chapter in Romania's historical memory.

In addition to the term "legionary", several related expressions appear in the newspaper selection analyzed. The phrase "Legionary Movement" appeared in 361 pages, "Iron Guard" in 251, while the term "fascist" was featured in no fewer than 16,576 pages. From the multitude of articles devoted to the Romanian far right, the present study focuses on roughly 110 editions of the newspaper that included detailed and significant discussions on the "legionary" issue, allowing for the reconstruction of the propagandistic portrait of the Legionary. Based on the content analysis conducted, several recurring representations of the fascist enemy emerge: the Legionary as *saboteur*; the Legionary as *assassin*; the Legionary as *greedy and servile*; the Legionary as *mystic*; and the Legionary as a *toxic element*. These representations will be further examined in the following section.

IV. Portraits of the Legionaries in *Scînteia*

The Legionary, as a propagandistic prototype, was portrayed as multifaceted though consistently in negative terms, with different aspects highlighted in the press depending on the political context, the regime's adversaries, or broader societal concerns at a given moment. The Legionary was depicted by communist propaganda as the most abject figure in society, variously described as a *hooligan*, *thug*, *executioner, cannibal*, *bandit, monster*, *beast*, *wolf*, *hyena*, *wasp*, *viper*, or *snake*[37]. The Legionary emerged in multiple guises, his character being defined in relation to the working class, the historical parties, foreign powers, and even the Legionary Movement and its leaders. Within this repertoire, he was classified as *the assassin of the people*[38], *a saboteur and profiteer*[39], *spy* and *terrorist*[40], *traitor to the nation*[41], *strike-breaker*[42], *servant of capitalism*[43], *Hitlerite agent*, and later, even as an *American* one. Threats were portrayed as being omnipresent, and thus the Legionary himself became ubiquitous, signs of his infiltration being identified at the National Broadcasting Society, at the Stâlpeni exploitation center, in the Malaxa factories, the lumber mills, the church altar, the university lectern, in municipal offices, estate administrations, when not hidden abroad, he was portrayed as parachuting into the country by the intelligence services of capitalist states. The Legionary was also portrayed as a chameleonic figure: when circumstances demanded, he disguised himself as a National Peasant Party member[44] and later as someone who assumed the guise of a Communist to conceal his so-called "anti-national" activity[45].

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[36] Onişoru, *Stalin şi poporul rus*, 328-333.

[37] The Romanian term used is *năpârcă*, which designates a limbless lizard, but more powerfully,

IV.1. The Saboteur

An article published in February 1945, titled „La Stâlpeni, legionarii sabotează" (Eng. trans.: "At Stâlpeni, the Legionaries Commit Sabotages"), claimed that a forestry exploitation center was "an institution clogged with Legionaries"[46]. According to the writer, the Legionaries had assaulted communist supporters, assisted and sheltered Germans in leaving the country, and sabotaged production. The Legionary thus assumed the role of *saboteur* across various contexts, with the severity of his actions varying accordingly. In some accounts, he was portrayed as a principal obstacle to the very existence and development of the state, undermining democracy[47] and the reconstruction of the country[48].

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in its figurative usage, it evokes the image of a vile, duplicitous, and malicious individual.

[38] Scânteia, „Garda de Fier a înarmat pe tineri și i-a prefăcut în asasini ai poporului", October 24, 1944.

[39] Scânteia, „Să privim lucrurile în față", February 20, 1946.

[40] Scânteia, „Actul de acuzare în procesul unor spioni și teroriști parașutați de serviciul de spionaj american", October 10, 1953.

[41] Scânteia, „Domnul Maniu și Garda de Fier", November 4, 1944.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Scânteia, „Acuzații sunt mari capitaliști și slugile acestora; legionari epurați, ofițeri deblocați și lepădături ale societății", November 2, 1948.

[44] Scânteia, „Huliganii legionari manifestează pe străzile Bucureștiului", October 15, 1944.

[45] Scînteia, „Din dezbaterile la Plenara C.C. a P.M.R.: Cuvântul tovarășului Nicolae Ceaușescu", December 13, 1961.

[46] Scânteia, „La Stâlpeni, legionarii sabotează", February 4, 1945.

[47] Scânteia, „Cine răspunde că în pachetele și cutiile pe care le aruncă legionarii nu sunt instrucțiuni, informații și chiar arme?", October 24, 1944.

[48] Scânteia, „Un mișelesc atentat neizbutit împotriva tovarășului Miron Constantinescu", February 7, 1945.

The Legionaries were also accused of attempting to obstruct "the arrest of war criminals and the workings of the state apparatus; the conduct of the war effort and the fulfillment of the Armistice conditions in order to gain the Allies' trust". Additionally, they were also accused of interfering with "the country's economic recovery through the fight against speculation; the improvement of living standards and general education through the redistribution of land to peasants, the provision of wages adjusted for inflation, and the freezing of prices"[49]. Charged with thwarting the Comunists' recovery efforts, the Legionary was depicted as undermining industry and crop sowing[50], engaging in black-market operations[51], disrupting transportation (by preventing workers from manufacturing locomotives)[52], and obstructing the construction of the Danube–Black Sea Canal[53].

In so far as these accusations were concerned, some were less conventional, often offered as explanations for the hardships faced by ordinary citizens. Dumitru Mociorniță, an industrialist in the footwear and leather sector, was among those labeled as being a Legionary by the regime. A December 1944 article titled „Jefuitorii poporului. Dece n'au cetățenii ghete. Dece n'au țăranii opinci. Dece n'au soldații cisme şi bocanci" (Eng trans.: "Plunderers of the People: Why Citizens Lack Shoes, Why Peasants Lack Opinci[54], Why Soldiers Lack Boots"), blamed the shortages on Mociorniță: "Fourteen wagons of raw leather turned into gelatin by the plunderer Mociorniță, while ordinary citizens received long prison sentences for possessing a single piece of sole"[55].

A year later, in 1945, in an appeal aimed at eradicating illiteracy addressed to teachers in the capital, readers were informed that the Legionaries were also responsible for the lack of education in the country, particularly among women. Ignoring the historically subordinate status of women prior to the rise of the far right, fascism was identified as the principal cause of female illiteracy[56]. To punish such acts against the regime, reinforce political power, and justify the hunt for Legionaries, the 1948 Penal Code introduced, among other provisions, the notion of "counterrevolutionary sabotage"[57].

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[49] Scânteia, „Muncitorii din Valea Jiului cer guvern F.N.D.", February 17, 1945.

[50] Ştefan Voicu, „Se înlătură buruienile din calea României democratice", *Scânteia*, April 12, 1945.

[51] Ştefan Voicu, „Nici o cruțare!", *Scânteia*, May 11, 1947.

[52] Scânteia, „Nicio îndurare pentru trădătorii de țară şi duşmanii poporului muncitor!", October 31, 1948.

[53] Scânteia, „Actul de acuzare în procesul grupului de sabotori şi diversionişti dela Canalul Dunăre-Marea Neagră", August 30, 1952.

[54] *Opinci* – traditional Romanian peasant shoes made of leather, fastened with straps around the foot and ankle, commonly worn in rural areas until the mid-20th century.

[55] Scânteia, „Jefuitorii poporului. De ce n'au cetățenii ghete. De ce n'au țăranii opinci. De ce n'au soldații cisme şi bocanci", December 10, 1944.

[56] Scânteia, „Analfabetismul trebuie stârpit. Apel către învățătoarele din Capitală şi din țară", April 12, 1945.

[57] Deletant, *Teroarea comunistă în România*, 74.

IV.2. The Assassin

From the early stages of the movement, beginning with the shooting of the Iaşi prefect Constantin Manciu, and culminating in the assassinations of prominent political figures such as I.G. Duca, Armand Călinescu, Nicolae Iorga, and Virgil Madgearu, the Legionaries transformed political assassination into a tool of revenge to eliminate their opponents by resorting to terror and violence[58]. Consequently, in constructing the portrait of the Legionary, the *criminal* and *extremist* dimension could not be omitted from the pages of *Scînteia*. The Legionary is implicitly an assassin, as acts of sabotage and conspiracies were continuously accompanied by violence and loss of life, manifesting in what the press described as "the most savage chauvinism, anti-Semitism, and imperialism"[59].

Whereas the Fascist previously killed political figures, joined Nazi criminals in concentration camps, murdered women, children, and the families of peasants conscripted into the war, and persecuted communist workers, in the postwar period he continued assassinations aimed at destabilizing the communist regime. In 1955, following the Bern incident – which involved the occupation of the Romanian People's Republic Legation in Switzerland by a group of Romanian émigrés and the killing of Aurel Şețu[60] – the Legionaries would be intensely invoked in *Scînteia* articles. Just days after the incident, the poet Mihai Beniuc's front-page article, „O crimă ce nu va fi iertată" (Eng trans.: *"A Crime That Will Not Be Forgiven"*), presented a scathing portrait of the Legionary, whose behavior was described as outright animalistic. In Beniuc's view, the Legionary was part of the "flock of the bloodthirsty"[61], his hands stained with blood, and he sullied the land, desecrated life, and instilled hatred of fascism among the people wherever he set foot in the country[62].

The "ferocious miscreants", as Beniuc called the Legionaries, imposed their convictions through "knife, revolver, and axe"[63], weapons used, according to the article, to mutilate university professors, cut off rectors' ears, ambush and kill ministers, and slaughter communist fighters and laborers as if they were livestock[64]. Several days later, another article by the writer Geo Bogza placed the Legionaries entirely outside the human species: "hands of murderers, specimens with foreheads two fingers narrow and eyes blue or bloodshot, of a kind other than human"[65]. Here, the *mystical dimension* of the Legionary was also emphasized. He appeared as a sinister knight of death, a dark prince wielding the knife, a creature combining faith and murder, worshiping and killing in tandem: "The mystique of death was carried so far that it culminated in the absurd cry: 'Long live death!'"[66]. The *mystical* and the *murderous* Legionary were often conflated in other articles, particularly those published at the beginning of the communist regime. In another article from June 1946, titled „Strigoii Terorismului" (Eng. trans.: "Specters of Terrorism"), the Legionaries were depicted as bloodthirsty barbarians, barely human, as "'archangels' prostituting themselves for the marks thrown by Himmler"[67], their spirit described as "abject and wicked"[68], authors of "reckless social demagoguery, resorting to obscure mysticism, religious fanaticism, and racist diversion"[69].

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[58] Heinen, *Legiunea „Arhanghelul Mihail"*, 446.

[59] Scânteia, „Domnul Maniu şi Garda de Fier", November 4, 1944.

[60] Aurel Şețu was the driver at the Romanian Embassy in Bern, suspected of having been an officer in the *Securitate*, the secret police of the communist regime responsible for surveillance and repression of political opponents.

[61] Mihai Beniuc, „O crimă ce nu va fi iertată", *Scînteia*, February 22, 1955.

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

[64] Ibid.

IV.3. The Greedy and Servile

In contrast to the self-image projected by the far left – that of Communists portrayed as loyal, fully dedicated to the socialist cause and their Soviet ally, willing to sacrifice themselves for the regime and the nation's development – the Legionaries who engaged in sabotage and assassination were depicted as acting not out of ideological conviction, but out of greed and servility. Their loyalties were readily transferable, reducing them to mere instruments, mercenaries "ready to sell themselves to whoever pays more"[70].

Sorin Toma's article from October 1948, written when he was editor-in-chief of the newspaper *Scînteia*, described the Legionaries as driven by an insatiable appetite for money, who considered the homeland to be "nothing more than a commodity like any other"[71]. Thus, they could easily disguise themselves as members of the National Peasant Party when expedient, and later "shift effortlessly from the payroll of the Gestapo to that of American intelligence, which they served with the same zeal as hired agents"[72]. Legionary journalists, it was claimed, "lent their pen to whichever master paid best"[73], while their so-called "nationalism and patriotism" was said to amount to nothing more than lining their own pockets[74]. In this propagandistic construction, the Legionary became the embodiment of the foreign enemy within Romanian society: when the principal threat was Nazi Germany, he was cast as *Hitler's agent and servant*; when the emerging danger was the West, above all the United States, he was recast as an *Anglo-American agent and a traitor sold to capitalism*.

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[65] Geo Bogza, „Ei au pe mîini vechi pete de sânge", *Scînteia*, February 27, 1955.
[66] Ibid.
[67] Scânteia, „Strigoii Terorismului", June 26, 1946.
[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Scânteia, „Spionajul și teroarea – metode ale politicii cercurilor agresive", October 13, 1953.
[71] Sorin Toma, „Duşmanii poporului în fața judecății poporului", *Scânteia*, October 30, 1948.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Scânteia, „Ziariştii fascişti vinovați de dezastrul țării".
[74] Ibid.

IV.4. The Toxic Influence

The toxic nature of the Legionary, whose soul was said to be "flooded with poisonous hemlock"[75] and "corroded by hatred"[76], did not remain confined to himself but was imagined as spreading to all who encountered him, particularly corruptible youth. Journalists, described as the "vipers of Romanian writing"[77], were among those accused of tainting the soul of the Romanian people by poisoning public opinion and the collective conscience during the interwar years. One article published in April 1945 claimed that poisoning was not only spiritually and psychologically in nature, but that it had been used by the Legionaries as a practice to harm inmates in prison. At Doftana, where Communists had been incarcerated in the interwar period, the prison doctor – himself a Legionary – was alleged to have "poisoned the inmates, subjecting the sick to a destructive treatment"[78].

In the army, reactionary pamphlets were portrayed as disseminating "legionary poison in large doses", evoking the "dark period of fascist tyranny"[79]. From the lectern, transformed into a fascist platform, university professors, deans, and rectors were accused of corrupting and poisoning the student body[80]. Through exposure to fascist ideas, *Scînteia* described how "the generous youth, capable of total devotion, was diverted from its natural path and set upon a course entirely alien to its own character"[81], leaving Communists, in turn, to assume the mission of detoxifying the younger generation.

IV.5. The Leaders

If up to this point, the characterizations of the Legionaries bore a general character, we should note that the patterns identified were not limited to the rank-and-file Legionaries. After all, the initial impulse to repudiate them was, unsurprisingly, linked to the movement's leaders, whose messages mobilized members and shaped specific forms of behavior. Articles in *Scînteia* did not overlook Corneliu Zelea Codreanu and Horia Sima, the central figures of the Legionary Movement. Codreanu (known as "the Captain"), who had been the charismatic founder of the movement and who had acquired the public image of a martyr after his death, was assigned similar labels, described in turn as a

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[75] Scânteia, „Nu mai sunt fasciști în România?", April 21, 1947.
[76] Scânteia, „Lupii vor să curgă sânge", February 8, 1945.
[77] Scânteia, „Lașitatea și slugărnicia stăpânesc frazele ziariștilor antonescieni", June 2, 1945.
[78] Scânteia, „'Balaurul' Doftanei în fața Tribunalului Poporului", April 7, 1945.
[79] Scânteia, „Reacționarii din armată folosesc metodele antonesciene", February 18, 1945.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Scânteia, „Ziariștii fasciști vinovați de dezastrul țării".

"traitor", "partisan of imported totalitarianism", "gunman"[82], "assassin," "Hitler's ambassador," "criminal"[83], and "Gestapo agent"[84]. Silviu Brucan, a communist politician, found Zelea Codreanu to be responsible for "the vile conspiracy against the peoples of the world, of which the Romanian people too was a victim"[85].

In contrast to Codreanu, Horia Sima, who rose to the leadership of the movement after Codreanu's death and later continued to direct its activities from exile, would appear far more frequently in the newspaper's pages. While the former, already assassinated during King Carol II's dictatorship and transformed into a symbolic figure, no longer represented a direct threat to the Communists, Sima was perceived as a tangible danger, a fact reflected in recurring articles containing damning portrayals of him. He was depicted as a "ghoul" [86], "Legionary bandit"[87], "heinous criminal"[88], a Führer "who daily incites attacks over Radio Donau"[89] and "the greatest criminal in the history of the Romanian people, who sold Transylvania to the Germans and who now serves as the most despicable and vile tool of Hitler's Germany"[90].

IV.6. On Trial

The major trials in which Legionaries stood as protagonists offered journalists yet another opportunity to construct portraits of the far right, with entire pages of the daily newspaper filled with indictments, micro-biographies of Legionaries, witness testimonies, and sentences. The first trial against fascists was that of the medical students, covered in a dedicated column titled *"The Legionary Trial",* where the Communists voiced indignation and demanded punishment for the provocative students who allegedly "represented a criminal conception that had led the Romanian state into the disastrous situation inherited from Antonescu's war"[91].

Following the establishment of the People's Tribunal, another trial closely covered by *Scînteia* was that of the fascist journalists, accused of "collaboration with the 'dictatorial' political regimes of 1938–1944; 'anti-national attitudes and actions'; 'attacks on democracy'; and 'participation in creating a climate conducive to the enslavement of the country""[92]. The accused journalists were subjected to caricatural depictions, along the usual individual portraits provided by the articles published in *Scînteia*. Pamfil Șeicaru, owner of nationalist publication, *Curentul (Eng. trans.: The Current)*, was depicted as "one of the principal agents of Nazi-fascist propaganda in Romania"[93], held responsible for poisoning public opinion and for his support of imperialism. Nichifor Crainic, director of *Calendarul (Eng. trans.: The Calendar*) and *Gândirea (Eng. trans.: The Thinking), both nationalist publications,* was presented as a traitor and false prophet[94]. Stelian Popescu, proprietor of *Universul (Eng. trans.: The Universe), newspaper of right-wing orientation* – was described as "greedy, blackmailer, impostor, audacious"[95] and accused of fomenting racial hatred, promoting chauvinism, undermining democracy, glorifying fascism and Hitlerism, and supporting both the Legionary Movement and Antonescu's regime and war.

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[82] Scânteia, „Iuliu Maniu complice al lui Codreanu. Dovada legăturilor dintre cei doi trădători", *Scânteia*, June 8, 1945.

[83] Scânteia, „Iuliu Maniu – adevăratul conducător al Gărzii de Fier", Year I, no. 246, June 9, 1945.

[84] Scânteia, „Procesul conducătorilor fostului P.N.Ț. Actul de acuzare", November 2, 1947.

[85] Silviu Brucan, „Urmașii Muenchenezilor nu învață minte", *Scânteia*, February 19, 1948.

[86] Scânteia, „Un cuib de fasciști la 'Carpatina'", *Scânteia*, October 16, 1944.

[87] A. Vasiliu, „Stârpirea criminalilor de războiu în țările eliberate", *Scânteia*, May 18, 1945.

[88] V. Iliescu, „Nici o țară care se respectă nu poate tolera activitatea teroriștilor fasciști!", *Scînteia*, March 15, 1955.

[89] Scânteia, „Huliganii legionari manifestează pe străzile Bucureștiului".

[90] Scânteia, „Huliganii și-au schimbat cămășile", October 17, 1944.

[91] Scânteia, „Ancheta provocatorilor de la medicină trebuie lărgită", January 12, 1945.

Perhaps the most elaborate portrait, serialized across multiple issues, was that of Radu Gyr[96], presented to readers as "the Reptile – poet and ideologue"[97]. During the trial, Gyr was described in the article „Ziariştii trădători în fața judecății poporului" (Eng. trans.: "Traitorous Journalists Facing the Judgment of the People), as one who "writhes with feline gestures (...) striving desperately to appear as a lyricist (...) yet betrayed by his sinuous movements, by his elongated, smooth, reptilian head crawling among corpses and ruins, among the sufferings of hundreds of thousands blinded by his 'battle songs' and 'ballads' stained with blood"[98]. In the communist interpretation, Gyr's status as an intellectual compounded his guilt, his moral authority carrying "more weight than that of one hundred Legionary thugs"[99].

In a similar fashion, the key figures of another trial, arguably the most significant in the series of antifascist proceedings, the Trial of the Great National Betrayal[100], were depicted in meticulous detail. The accused held responsible for the "country's disaster"[101] were featured in multiple newspaper sections „Cum arată azi conducătorii „Cruciadei"" (Eng. trans.: "How the Leaders of the 'Crusade' Look Today"); „Chipurile lor!" (Eng. trans.: "Their Faces!"), which faithfully conveyed the courtroom atmosphere to readers while deriding the defendants. Radu Lecca, Commissar for Jewish Affairs under the Antonescu regime, was described as seemingly preoccupied, "with an Apache-like face and the gaze of a frightened dog"[102]; Traian Brăileanu, Minister of Education in Antonescu's government, had "a cretinous look"[103], appearing "thin and wiry, with a bony face and deeply sunken eyes"[104]; other ministers – Bușilă, Marinescu, Tomescu, Dobre – were depicted as if "taken from a box, only their ties missing"[105]. All were framed as scoundrels, who were feigning opposition to the Legionaries while conveniently "forgetting" their role in imprisoning patriots and antifascists in camps, prisons, and Siguranța cellars[106].

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[92] Teodor, *Anatomia cenzurii*, 432.

[93] Scânteia, „Ziariştii fascişti vinovați de dezastrul țării".

[94] Scânteia, „Act de acuzare împotriva lui Stelian Popescu şi a lui Nichifor Crainic", May 30, 1945.

[95] Ibid.

[96] Radu Gyr (1905–1975) was a Romanian poet, journalist, and assistant professor. Closely associated with the Legionary Movement, he authored poems that became Legionary hymns and contributed articles to far-right newspapers during the interwar period. Under the National Legionary State (1940–1941), he held the positions of Legionary commander and General Director of Theaters.

[97] Scânteia, „Ziariştii trădători în fața judecății poporului", June 1, 1945.

[98] Ibid.

[99] Scânteia, „Rechizitoriul în procesul ziariştilor", June 3, 1945.

[100] The principal trial held at the Bucharest People's Tribunal in May 1946 prosecuted individuals who had occupied leadership positions in the former government, headed by Marshal Ion Antonescu.

[101] Scânteia, „Mâine începe Procesul Marei Trădări Naționale", May 6, 1946.

The same terms, reformulated and rearranged but essentially unaltered, used repeatedly to describe the Legionaries, recur throughout these articles. In an article from June 1946, during the Iași progrom trial, journalist N. Corbu labeled the defendants as "a gallery of monsters"[107], while in another case, accused spies were referred to as "a handful of enemies of the people, cruel and cowardly"[108]. Reinforcing the narrative of Legionary brutality, a 1949 article that focused on the trial of a subversive-terrorist gang, revealed that "the bandits' savagery went so far that they killed one another"[109], while the trial of the group of saboteurs at the Canal once again highlighted the scheming and destructive nature of the Legionary, determined to obstruct the Canal's construction and to "restore the bourgeois-landlord regime"[110].

IV.7. The Legionaries Reemerge

The virulent portrayal of the Legionary in the newspaper *Scînteia* persisted until the final years of the communist regime in 1989. Although more than half of the articles dedicated to the Legionary Movement were published between 1944 and 1947, the communist press continued in subsequent decades to exploit the idea of the Legionary threat whenever the context allowed. The danger of a fascist dictatorship was repeatedly invoked, suggesting to the readers that it was solely thanks to the protection offered by the communist regime that the state was spared such a grim fate. Thus, in moments of crisis, during commemorations, or simply in explanatory articles on Legionary doctrine and the party's antifascist struggle, propagandistic discourse would cast yet another arrow at the long-defeated enemy, maintaining the illusion of a perpetual threat in society.

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid.

[104] Scânteia, „Procesul Ion Antonescu: Chipurile lor!", May 9, 1946.

[105] Scânteia, „Mâine începe Procesul Marei Trădări Naționale".

[106] N. Moraru, „Trădătorii", *Scânteia*, May 11, 1946.

[107] N. Corbu, „Ziua a doua a procesului masacrului dela Iași. Interogatoriul acuzaților din boxă a scos la iveală bestialitatea criminalilor fasciști", *Scânteia*, June 17, 1946.

[108] Scânteia, „Eri a început Procesul grupului de complotiști, spioni și sabotori – Actul de acuzare", October 29, 1948.

[109] Scânteia, „Procesul bandei subversive-teroriste. Depozițiile martorilor acuzării și apărării aduc noui dovezi zdrobitoare ale acțiunii criminale ale bandiților", June 25, 1949.

[110] Scânteia, „Actul de acuzare în procesul grupului de sabotori și diversioniști".

Less than a month after the 1977 earthquake, an article by the writer Mihai Stoian, entitled „Cine uită nu merită" (Eng. trans.: "Those Who Forget Do Not Deserve"), delivered a sharp critique of the Legionaries in exile, using the context of the disaster to remind readers, by analogy, of another "cataclysm that haunted the country – the 'Green Earthquake'"[111]. In a similar vein, the commemoration of Nicolae Iorga's assassination by Legionaries became an opportunity to repeatedly reactivate antifascist rhetoric. Although initially marginalized and placed on the index in 1948, Iorga began to be elevated to the top of the "communist national pantheon" during the 1960s[112], and the press periodically published commemorative articles aimed at reinforcing the Legionary's criminal image. Decades later, in 1980, historian Florin Constantiniu would write: "By assassinating the creator of a scientific oeuvre of prodigious scope and exceptional value (…) the Iron Guard once again revealed its true face, as a fascist-style terrorist organization, opposed to the interests and aspirations of the Romanian people; a weed grown from the seed of hatred and nurtured by international fascism, above all Nazism, to exploit its poisoned fruits against Romania"[113].

V. Conclusion

By tracing the main characteristics attributed to the Legionaries and identifying the recurring narrative patterns, the study has shown how the press crafted a coherent, multifaceted image of the enemy. The analysis of the communist press shows that the figure of the Legionary was consistently shaped through a rigid ideological lens that denied any resemblance between communism and the far right, transforming the former members of the Legionary Movement into the embodiment of the absolute enemy. Initially, in the immediate postwar years, Legionaries were portrayed as an imminent political threat, and their systematic demonization in the press served to legitimize repressive measures and consolidate the Communist Party's authority. Over time, even as most Legionaries were neutralized and their direct political relevance diminished, the communist press continued to invoke the Legionary in moments of crisis, commemorations, and ideological discourses, reinforcing the perception of a perpetual threat and frequently turning them into scapegoats for the regime's shortcomings.

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[111] Mihai Stoian, „Cine uită nu merită", *Scînteia*, April 3, 1977.

[112] Georgiana Țăranu, *Nicolae Iorga și seducția fascismului italian* (București: Humanitas, 2025), 14.

[113] Florin Constantiniu, „O lecție a istoriei, o condamnare mereu actuală a ororilor fascismului", *Scînteia*, November 27, 1980; see also: N. Rădulescu, „Douăzeci de ani de la asasinarea lui N. Iorga", *Scînteia*, November 30, 1960; Scînteia, „25 de ani de la asasinarea lui Nicolae Iorga. O figură proeminentă a culturii românești", November 27, 1965; Ion Spălățelu, „File din cronica celei mai întunecate perioade din istoria modernă a României. 30 de ani de la asasinarea de către legionari a lui Nicolae Iorga", *Scînteia*, November 26, 1970.

Ultimately, the findings highlight the important role of the communist press in consolidating political legitimacy and suppressing any form of opposition, whether extremist, as in the case of the Legionary Movement, or democratic, as with the historical parties. The Communists went beyond establishing a one-party system and censoring public discourse. In keeping with the logic of totalitarian control, they also sought to instill a profound hostility toward their political adversaries, employing the press, especially the daily newspaper *Scînteia*, as a central tool of propaganda. Through this sustained effort, the communist press shaped collective memory and defined enduring enemies in ways that legitimized the regime's rule and maintained the narrative of antifascist vigilance long after the Legionaries' real influence had faded.

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HISTORIES CONNECTED THROUGH ENLIGHTENMENT AND ROMANTICISM: A CROSS-CULTURAL JOURNEY OF IDEAS FROM FRANCE TO THE DANUBIAN PRINCIPALITIES

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Abstract: In the first decades of the 19th century, two currents of thought brought significant intellectual transformations in the thinking of the Moldavian–Wallachian elites. Enlightenment and Romanticism transmitted impulses that inspired and motivated substantial efforts to reshape local realities. The reconfiguration of intellectual life both determined and was determined by a shift in the sphere of influence. The growing awareness of the urgent need to detach from Eastern culture and move closer to Western culture marked the process of transition toward a new modern era. At that time, the elites of the Principalities most often interpreted the expression of the West through the image of France. The French model of culture and civilization made its presence felt as a result of historical circumstances into which the Principalities had been drawn. The intermediaries who initially facilitated the French influence in Wallachia and Moldavia were the Phanariotes, later succeeded by the Russians. Through what they left behind, they contributed to the process of bringing the Danubian Principalities closer to European culture and civilization. Among all these experiences, the most valuable was the contact with Western ideas and intellectual movements, which the local elites continued to cultivate and reinterpret to serve their own purposes. This practice, encouraged by an increasingly favorable political context during the 1820s and 1830s, made possible a new level of interaction with Western ideas. At that moment, the elites of the Principalities assigned to the French model the role of main collaborator, one that would accompany it in the effort to reshape local intellectual and political realities into new modern forms.

Keywords: connected histories, cross-cultural history, cultural transfer, Enlightenment, French influence, Romanticism

Rezumat: În primele decenii ale secolului al XIX-lea, două curente de idei au produs mutații intelectuale importante în gândirea elitelor moldo-valahe. Iluminismul şi Romantismul au transmis atunci impulsuri ce au inspirat şi motivat eforturi semnificative de transformare a realităților locale. Reconfigurarea vieții intelectuale a

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determinat şi a fost determinată de schimbarea spaţiului de influenţă. Conştientizarea nevoii imperioase de decuplare de la cultura orientală şi apropierea de cea occidentală a reprezentat procesul tranziției spre noi vremuri moderne. Atunci, elita din Principate a tradus expresia Occidentului cel mai des prin imaginea Franţei. Modelul de cultură şi civilizaţie franceze şi-a făcut simţită prezenţa în urma unor conjuncturi istorice în care s-au aflat Principatele. Intermediarii care au mijlocit, în primă fază, *influența franceză* în Valahia şi Moldova au fost fanarioţii, succedaţi ulterior de ruşi. Prin ceea ce au lăsat în urma lor, ei au contribuit la procesul de apropiere al Principatelor Dunărene de cultura şi civilizaţia europeană. Din suma acestor experienţe, cea mai de preţ a fost contactul cu ideile şi curentele de gândire apusene, pe care elita locală a continuat să le cultive şi interpreteze în interes propriu. Această practică, stimulată de contextul politic tot mai favorabil ale deceniilor trei-patru ale secolului al XIX-lea, au permis interacţiunea la un nou nivel cu ideile occidentale. Atunci, elita din Principate a recunoscut în modelul francez cadrul principal de sprijin care să o însoţească în efortul de redesenare în noi forme moderne a realităţilor intelectuale şi politice locale

Cuvinte cheie: istorii conectate, *histoire croisée*, Iluminism, influenţa franceză, Romantism, transfer cultural

I. Introduction

To what extent can the export of literature reverberate as the diffusion of a broad mindset? I have sought the answer to this question by using the history of how the Moldavian and Wallachian elites interacted with the ideas of Enlightenment and Romanticism in the early 19th century. At that time, social and political background shaped forms of creative expression, determining their transposition into currents of thought and stimulating creativity to the point of reversing hierarchies. The process of transformation and modernization of a generally backward society is a complex one that, in most cases, is driven and developed by a model capable of winning over minds, guiding reforms, and overturning beliefs. The fascinating metamorphosis through which the Danubian Principalities gradually moved away from the experience of the East to embrace the Enlightenment ideas of the West – introduced, among others, by the French influence – stands as one of the most compelling chapters in their search for a new identity.

In my attempt to trace the roots, reasons, and intellectual breakthroughs that determined and accelerated this reorientation, the main driver was the openness with which the Wallachians and Moldavians spaces allowed themselves to be reshaped by a cultural and civilizational model that was, in many ways, unfamiliar, distant, and complex. In historiography, the impact of French influence during the Romanian transitional period has been analyzed from multiple perspectives[1]. Almost all these approaches arrive at the same conclusion: that of the discovery of the West, whose expression most often took the form of the image of France. The issue of French influence on the Danubian Principalities has seldom been revisited through analytical frameworks provided by modern Western cultural historiography. An examination of the historical context within the Principalities needs to identify the intricate consequences of the increasing French influence[2]. In this sense, employing contemporary methodological tools facilitates a more nuanced analysis of this period. Western scholarly literature analyzes such phenomena of cultural import within the theoretical frameworks of *cross-cultural history*[3] and *connected history*[4]. On the one hand, the concept of *cross-cultural history*, also known as *histoire croisée*, establishes a paradigm for relating social, cultural, and political formations that are assumed to be interconnected. It involves investigating the intersection itself, its practical and intellectual attributes. The concept of *connected histories*, on the other hand, puts forward the fact that the understanding of regional histories is contingent upon an appreciation of the mutual connections that transcend national boundaries, encompassing political, commercial, and cultural domains. Both terms are theorized in connection to the study of networks for the circulation of ideas, people, or goods; mechanisms that are the primary means through which influence is transmitted and increased – supported, directly or indirectly, by the power of the model that exercises it.

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[1] Among the first to seriously document the phenomenon of French influence in the Danubian Principalities was Pompiliu Eliade, with his work *Influența franceză asupra spiritului public din România: Originile. Studiu asupra stării societății românești în vremea domniilor fanariote* (București: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006). An important perspective on the phenomenon of *synchronization* and the assimilation of the French cultural model in the 19th century was also offered in 1920s by Eugen Lovinescu, in his three-volume work entitled *Istoria civilizației române moderne*. Regarding the history of ideas, important studies analyzing the intellectual transformations that took place in Romanian elite thought as a result of contact with the Enlightenment were undertaken by Vlad Georgescu in *Political Ideas and the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities (1750-1831)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971) and *Mémoires et projets de réforme dans les Principautés Roumaines 1831-1848* (București: Association Internationale d'Études du Sud-Est Européen, 1972). Paul Cornea also conducted an important research endeavor, in which he meticulously explores the aspects introduced by French influence in the Romanian cultural sphere through the channel of Romanticism *Originile romantismului românesc: Spiritul public, mișcarea ideilor și literatura între 1780-1840* (București: Editura Minerva, 1972). John Campbell wrote about the contribution of French influence to the development of Romanian nationalism in *French Influence and the Rise of the Romanian Nationalism* (New York: ArnoPress, 1971). Among the recent efforts to uncover the dimensions of modernization and modernity within Romanian society, the research conducted by Constanța Vintilă stands out. She captured various aspects of the East-West transition at the turn of the 18th and 19th centuries. Among the most important contributions on this matter, I would mention Constanța Vintilă, *Changing Subjects, Moving Objects. Status, Mobility and Social Transformation in Southeastern Europe, 1700-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), *Evgheniți, ciocoi, mojici: despre obrazele primei modernități românești: (1750-1860)* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2023) and *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVI-XXth Centuries)* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011). Among the important contributions to the study of the impact of Romanian–French interactions and the role of Western ideas in shaping the first generation of intellectuals are those of Nicolae Isar, în *Relații și interferențe româno-franceze în epoca Luminilor: (1769-1834): Studii* (București: Editura Universitară, 2017) and *Sub semnul „Luminilor": Din istoria generației de la 1821* (București: Editura Universitară, 2018), among others. With regard to the shaping of the idea of *Europe* in the Romanian consciousness, an important study on this subject belongs to Laurențiu Vlad, *Istorii românești ale ideii de „Europa", secolele XVII-XXI (imagini, note, reflecții)* (Iași: Editura Institutul European, 2021).

[2] An interesting debate on the notion of "influence" was opened by Alex Tipei, who, in her study "How to Make Friends and Influence People: Elementary Education, French 'Influence,' and the "Balkans, 1815–1830s", *Modern Intellectual History* 15, no. 3 (2018): 621-649, applies the theory that the term conveys a unilateral and limited impression of the phenomenon – a theory initially developed by Paula Young Lee in her work "Modern Architecture and the Ideology of Influence", *Assemblage*, no. 34 (December 1997): 6-29.

These paradigms were also to be observed in the Danubian Principalities. In the late 18th century, the Romanians reached a crossroads and opted to deviate from the established trajectory that the Oriental model had dictated previously. For several centuries, the Danubian Principalities had remained under Ottoman suzerainty, an experience the local elites perceived to be deeply detrimental to their political, cultural, and social development. The Phanariotes, appointed by the Porte to govern the Danubian Principalities and to prevent any developments outside the Oriental order, became – often unintentionally – the intermediaries through whom European, and frequently French cultural influences entered the Romanian space. By encouraging book trade, translations, and newspapers, and thereby multiplying the contacts with the West, the Phanariotes contributed, for more than a century, to the gradual dismantling of the barriers that had isolated the Danubian Principalities from Enlightenment Europe in the 18th century.

Initially, the tendency to separate themselves from the Oriental world was fueled by the ideas and principles uncovered through the reading of Enlightenment literature, which found resonance with some of the main concerns of Wallachians and Moldavians. Weary of the Ottoman Empire's constant interference in their internal affairs and of the harsh control imposed by the Phanariot regime, the elites began to seek ways to escape this inopportune condition. Thus, the Romanian elite found itself compelled to seek potential support from abroad. Initially, they turned their hopes toward Russia, which was engaged in quasi-constant conflict with the Ottoman Empire and claimed to be the protector of Orthodox Christians in the East. The frequent Russian occupations during the late 18th and early 19th centuries brought not only adverse consequences but also new perspectives for change.

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[3] Significant contributions to this subject have been provided by the following authors: Michael Werner and Bénédicte Zimmermann, "Beyond Comparison: Histoire Croisée and the Challenge of Reflexivity", *History and Theory* 45, no. 1 (February 2006): 30-50, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2303.2006.00347.x. On the matter of cultural contacts and the process of hybridization, see also: Peter Burke, *Cultural Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2009).

[4] For a detailed exposition of the concept's genesis, see its foundational text: Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Connected Histories: Notes towards a Reconfiguration of Early Modern Eurasia", *Modern Asian Studies* 31, no. 3 (July 1997): 735-762. Also see: Serge Gruzinski, *Les quatre parties du monde. Histoire d'une mondialisation* (Paris: La Martinière, 2004) – this work extends the concept's dimensions by exploring the history of early cultural globalization and the circulation of ideas.

Among the most significant outcomes was the growing presence of Western cultural elements, which, by the 1820s and 1830s, contributed decisively to reshaping the Romanian intellectual – and, consequently, political – landscape. These transformations were, in many cases, supported and reinforced by the ideals of Romanticism, as well as by the major political events unfolding across Europe. Then, the transition was marked by a significant shift during the first half of 19th century. Unfortunately, it was characterized by the assemblage of multiple pieces that French influence has placed on top of the old existing base, which came to be detested for the prominent contrast that persisted in the shadow of the changes that were intended to be modern.

The purpose of the present article is to provide an examination of the impact of the French literary currents of Enlightenment and Romanticism on the cultural and political thought of the Danubian Principalities. The analysis will explore the role of French influence in reorienting the course of the cultural and political evolution in the Principalities, as it transitioned from the former Ottoman authority to an embrace of Western culture. Therefore, this article proposes a revision of the origins of French influence in the Romanian space through the paradigm of connection, which extends beyond the conventional narrative of "imitation" or "unilateral influence". In this sense, it formulates a theoretical framework that describes the circulation, mediation, and transformation of ideas in the Danubian Principalities during the 19th century.

II. The French Connection

Throughout history, the importation of literary or artistic themes, concepts, and techniques from other cultures has been a recurrent phenomenon, providing a constant source of inspiration for creators while, at the same time, accelerating the pace of development overall. In Europe, whenever a civilization has experienced an era of cultural flourishing, ideas have been disseminated beyond its national borders. The analysis of the mechanisms of sharing and inspiring different ways of thinking offers a valuable perspective on the substantial contributions made to the reform of various fields. In this regard, we could mention, among other such influences, the role of Greek culture on the Roman civilization or that of the Italian Renaissance on 16th century France[5]. However, this old practice of cultural borrowing will experience the most widespread and complex manifestation during and immediately after the Enlightenment.

On an intellectual level, an important consequence of the transformations that reshaped the world in the 18th century was the movement of ideas through literary and political works that were becoming increasingly widespread across the continent. Unlike Classicism, Enlightenment could be framed as the most extensive form of synchronization between cultures and, more than that, as a means of dispelling with the state of backwardness found in underdeveloped societies, especially where the upper classes were concerned[6]. For foreign ideas to permeate and leave their mark on the mentalities of European societies, a fragmentation of local tradition was required. This was perhaps the most difficult and troubling aspect of this transformation, frequently met with opposition – particularly from the clergy, that felt it was their duty to reject such atheistic representations[7]. The transition happened gradually and followed a different dynamic from case to case, especially in the Balkans, where evolution was slower.

For centuries, French influence has stood as the cultural compass of Europe. This kind of status further intensified the popularity and the diffusion of the French political and cultural model across the European continent in the 18th century[8]. The Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism endowed the Enlightenment movement with a broader scope[9]. The spread of ideas reached remarkable proportions throughout the century, culminating with the Revolution of 1789. Even after its decline, Enlightenment principles continued to circulate, subtly reshaping the mentality of the age, where they were often unconsciously assimilated. The ideals of equality and individual liberty, the emphasis on emotion and sensibility, and the search for the common good represented innovative aspects of the Enlightenment – constituting a fundamentally different foundation for a new social order. Its adherents were primarily attracted to these theoretical and philosophical frameworks, which held the promise of transforming existing forms of social and political expression[10]. The complex legacy of 1789 increasingly drew the attention of Europeans to France at the dawn of the 19th century. Culturally, the prestige and allure of the French model expanded, awakening renewed curiosity about its origins – both directly, through encounters with its homeland and indirectly, through literature and arts[11]. The political doctrines derived from Enlightenment thought and the aspirations that had animated the French Revolution continued to inspire and propel nationalist movements, as well as radical currents in many parts of the world[12].

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[5] For more on the contributions of cultural exchanges and other trends regarding the modernization of European societies, see: Donatella Calabi and Stephen Turk Christensen, *Cultural Exchange in Early Modern Europe – Volume II: Cities and Cultural Exchange in Europe, 1400-1700.*(Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Marc Boone and Martha Howell, eds., *The Power of Space in Late Medievaland Early Modern Europe. The Cities of Italy, Northen France and the Low Countries* (Turnhout: Crepols Publishers, 2013); Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of the Social Environment* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1989), 7-13.

[6] Victor Neumann, *Tentația lui homo europaeus: geneza ideilor moderne în Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est* (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 145.

[7] For more on the difficulty with which the Orthodox clergy, in particular, accepted change, see the first part of the study by Ionuț Biliuță, „'Agenții schimbării'": Clerul ortodox din Principatele Române de la regimul feudal la statul național", in *„Ne trebuie oameni!": elite intelectuale și transformări istorice în România modernă și contemporană*, coord. Cristian Vasile (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2017), 27-49; see also: Constanța Vintilă, et al., *Lux, modă și alte bagatele politicești în Europa de Sud-Est în secolele XVI-XIX* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2021), 369, 373.

[8] Tyler Stovall, *Transnational France. The Modern History of a Universal Nation* (Santa Cruz: Westview Press, 2015), 9-12.

[9] Ibid.

III. Threads of Light

The diffusion of Enlightenment ideas in Europe followed captivating pathways. Contemporary scholarship on the conceptual analysis of *cross-cultural* or *entangled histories* offers a framework for understanding the emergence, spread, and nuances of this current[13]. Although the Enlightenment was far from being a purely French creation, following the trajectory of French Enlightenment works reveals a rich and intricate intellectual landscape[14]. For example, the French Enlightenment literature entered the German cultural space and inspired writers to imitate its models and ideas[15], contributing to such a rise in nationalism that any foreign currents - but especially French - came to be despised and regarded as forces liable to erode the distinctive character of the German spirit[16].

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[10] Gordon Wright, *France in Modern Times. Fron the Enlightenment to the Present* (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Company, 1974), 26-28; Marshall Brown, "Deconstruction and Enlightenment", *The Eighteenth Century* 28, no. 3 (Fall 1987): 259-263.

[11] Christophe Charle, *Les intellectuels en Europe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 17-22; Lucian Boia, "Sur la diffusion de la culture européenne en Roumanie (XIXe siècle et début du XXe siècle)", in *Modèle français et expériences de la modernisation. Roumaine, 19e-20e siècles*, coord. Florin Țurcanu (Bucureşti: Institutul Cultural Român, 2006), 23-24.

[12] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996), 55.

[13] Sebastian Conrad, "Enlightenment in Global History: A Historiographical Critique", *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 4 (October 2012): 1011, https://doi.org/10.1093/ahr/117.4.999.

[14] Ritchie Robertson, *Iluminismul. Căutarea fericirii, 1680-1790* (Bucureşti: Editura Litera, 2023), 17.

[15] Andreas Önnerfors, "Translating discourses of the Enlightenment: transcultural language skills and cross-references in Swedish and German eighteenth-century learned journals", in *Cultural Transfer through Translation. The Circulation of Enlightened Thought in Europe by Means of Translation*, ed. Stefanie Stockhorst (Amsterdam and New York: Editions Rodopi, 2010), 226-228.

[16] Hans-Jürgen Lüsebrink, "Conceptual History and Conceptual Transfer: The Case of 'Nation' in Revolutionary France and Germany", in *History of Concepts. Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Iain

Through this map, one conclusion clearly emerges: the spread of Enlightenment ideas was determined by human needs which shaped their local adaptations and endowed them with distinct nuances[17]. Such was the case of the Wallachians and Moldavians.

The values and ideals of the Enlightenment resonated with their specific social and political conditions. However, Enlightenment ideas did not gain popularity in the Danubian Principalities because the process of modernization required the formation of specialized elites, like in other parts of Europe happened. The political circumstances of the time stood in the way of such an ambitious undertaking. The Romanians elites of the Danubian Principalities embraced Enlightenment principles insofar as they reflected their own aspirations and concerns. Consequently, interpretations varied, and this diversity of meanings played a significant role - especially in the early 19th century – in shaping a critical spirit to guide them through the desired change.

The period of manifestation varied too. While the Enlightenment in the Romanian Principalities, is generally placed between 1770-1780 and 1830, in the territories of historical Poland and Hungary, the current is considered to have developed between the mid-18th century and around 1820, whereas in the Russian Empire it is said to have lasted until the mid-19th century[18].

The 18th century is also seen by some researchers who have studied the Age of Enlightenment as a period of eastward expansion of the European frontier[19]. Pierre Chaunu, for example, placed in one of his studies, the Greek archipelago, the Danubian principalities, and part of Russia as territories that were *annexed* by Europe in the 19th century and which, before this fusion, embodied a sort of *no man's land*[20]. However, such theories have been easily challenged, particularly regarding the term *annexation*[21]. Looking at the internal developments within these regions, we can more often observe voluntary

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Hampsher-Monk, Karin Tumans, and Frank van Vree (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1998), 116-125.

[17] John Gascoigne, "Cross-cultural knowledge exchange in the age of the Enlightenment", in *Indigenous Intermediaries: New Perspectives on Exploration Archives*, eds. Shino Konishi, Maria Nugent, and Tiffant Shellam (Canberra: ANU Press, 2015), 132; Daniel Chernilo, "Theorising Global Modernity: Descriptive and Normative Universalism", in *Legitimization in World Society*, ed. Aldo Mascareño and Kathya Araujo (Oxon and New York: Routledge, 2012), 61-80; Timothy Mitchell, "The Stage of Modernity", in *Questions of Modernity*, ed. Timothy Mitchell (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 7-20; Alexandru Duțu, *Cultura română în civilizația europeană modernă* (București: Editura Minerva, 1978), 60.

[18] Nicolae Liu, „Orizont european în Iluminismul românesc. Francofonie şi cultură franceză", in *Revista Istorică* 19, no. 1-2 (2008): 137-138.

[19] See more about this aspect in: Larry Wolf, *Inventing Eastern Europe. The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); see especially the fourth chapter, "Mapping Eastern Europe: Political Geography and Cultural Cartography".

[20] Pierre Chaunu, *La civilisation de l'Europe des Lumières* (Paris: Arthaud, 1971), 43-63.

[21] Liu, „Orizont european în Iluminismul românesc", 137.

tendencies toward rapprochement with European culture rather than, conversely, tendencies of conquest or unilateral influence. Moreover, Western intellectuals such as the Marquis de Custine and Friedrich Hegel placed Wallachia and Moldavia within the region of the Orient, both geographically and culturally, emphasizing in their writings that the two spheres – the European and the Oriental – stood in clear spiritual opposition to one another[22].

While Enlightenment influenced the course of almost all of Europe, it did so by producing the particular transformations each society most required. Rather than being merely imitated, its ideas were reshaped and adapted to local necessities, filling the intellectual and social voids specific to every political space it reached. In generally backward societies, such as the Danubian Principalities, the Enlightenment generated changes that went far deeper and were more transformative. Naturally, the Romanian case was not an isolated one within the region. In the span of several decades – from the twilight of the 18th century to the dawn of the 19th – most South-East European cultures began to unfold new and varied forms of expression. Throughout the entire region, we can observe that wherever the flow of books increased, the first critical reflections would appear simultaneously. Most often, these were visible in the form of written texts, but also through the emergence of greater or lesser tensions between the emancipated society and the often oppressive political factor.

The development of this intellectual capacity for critical analysis represented perhaps the most important initial step on the path toward modernization. At the same time, such developments were deepening the gap between the cities and the countryside[23]. However, despite their differences, each South-Eastern political space carried traces of Western Enlightenment thought[24]. The analysis of these influences in Southeast Europe is important for outlining a more complex and heterogeneous picture of how modernity arose[25]. In this sense, the concepts of *cross-cultural* and *connected histories* find its very essence in adaptation.

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[22] Orlando Figes, *Europenii: Trei vieți și formarea unei culturi cosmopolite în Europa secolului al XIX lea* (București: Editura Polirom, 2021), 68-71.

[23] Alexandru Duțu, „"Până nu vine iarna, primăvară nu se face". Transformări în mentațitățile Sud-Est europene la început de secol XIX", in *Sud-Estul european în vremea Revoluției Franceze. Stări de spirit, reacții, confluențe*, coord. Alexandru Duțu (București: Institutul de Studii Sud-Est Europene, 1994), 11.

[24] Duțu, *Cultura română*, 85-90.

[25] For more on the issue of the birth of modernity in South-Eastern Europe, see: Evguenia Davidova, *Balkan Transitions to Modernity and Nation-States: through the eyes of three generations of merchants (1780s-1890s)* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov, eds., *Entangled Histories of the Balkans* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Diana Mishkova, ed., *We, the people: politics of national peculiarity in Southeastern Europe* (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2009).

IV. Paths of French Cultural Transfer

The cultural transfer from the West to the East was not a one-way relation but rather the consequence of a broader and ambivalent phenomenon. On the one hand, there was the power associated with the model's expansion. On the other, there was the receiving culture's reaction, interaction, and desire to replicate it, which ultimately took center stage. This dynamic is evident in the Danubian Principalities beginning with the second half of the 18th century when foreign influences, primarily French, emerged, brought about changes, and drove this political space closer to the process of modernization. The context was defined by the proximity of the Habsburg, Russian, and Ottoman empires with the Romanian space evolving both at the periphery and at the intersection zone between them[26]. The path toward the discovery of ideas originating from the French cultural sphere was opened in the 18th century under the Phanariot regime[27]. In such a political landscape, the Phanariot rulers sometimes acted as agents of cultural import: although they maintained an internal situation unfavorable to the Danubian Principalities, their contacts and interactions with the Wallachian and Moldavian boyars marked the early and indirect stages of French influence. Those circumstances arose from the fact that many Greek dragomans of the Phanar were already relatively well acquainted with the French language and culture[28]; thus, almost inadvertently, they came to transmit some of the French customs to the Moldavian and Wallachian boyars. Among the many ways through which this influence brought about change, the one that resonated most profoundly was the cultivation of a taste for reading, especially for works of French literature.

By the end of the 18th century, the long shadow of Greek influence paved the way for the arrival of Western culture. It entered the Principalities through two main channels. The first was the Greek language, esteemed by the upper classes as the most natural path toward refined learning and intellectual grace[29]. The second was the French language, whose presence began to flourish in the main cities of Wallachia and Moldavia, offering a direct bridge to the West. Knowledge of these two languages made it possible for the Enlightenment and classical works to enter the libraries of households in the Danubian Principalities. At first, the Moldo-Wallachian boyars encountered the ideas of Rousseau, Voltaire, La Fontaine, and Lamartine through Greek sources and often through Greek translations. Later, in the early 19th century, the elites of the Danubian Principalities abandoned this intermediary route in favor of directly interpreting and translating French works[30]. In this way, they no longer needed a mediator to access Enlightenment ideas and finally came into direct contact with them. This laid the foundation for profound transformations at the dawn of the 19th century in the Danubian Principalities.

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[26] The analysis of the network of connections between the boyars of the Danubian Principalities and Constantinople, Venice, Vienna, and Saint Petersburg was conducted by Constanța Vintilă, *Changing Subjects, Moving Objects. Status, Mobility and Social Transformation in Southeastern Europe, 1700-1850* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

[27] According to Pompiliu Eliade, the French influence began in the Danubian Principalities with the first Phanariot ruler (Eliade, *Influența franceză*, 116).

[28] Vintilă, *Changing Subjects*, 7-15.

[29] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 62.

The Greek channel also played an important role in establishing connections abroad. For example, knowing the Greek language helped the young Moldavian Nicolae Rosetti-Roznovanu engage with prominent figures in Paris during his journey in 1818. There, he met Greeks who were committed to supporting other Orthodox societies in their struggle to escape Ottoman dominance. They introduced Rosetti-Roznovanu to various social and intellectual circles that included not only Southeastern European luminaries but also a number of liberal French thinkers and politicians[31]. Through these encounters, Nicolae Rosetti-Roznovanu achieved the main goal of his journey which had been to gather models of modern Western institutions. He collaborated with several of these individuals and brought to Moldavia the concept of mutual instruction – a Lancasterian system of education developed by French liberals within the *Société pour l'instruction élémentaire* (Eng. trans.: Society for Elementary Education). The society's mission was to promote an affordable educational model that could be implemented worldwide according to French principles. However, its true scope was broader: to achieve cultural domination and extend French presence across the world[32].

The first decades of the 19th century paved the way for another actor to emerge as an importer of the French model to the Principalities. The Russian Empire, under the pretense of acting as the protector of Orthodox Christianity in the Balkans, became increasingly involved in the internal affairs of the Danubian Principalities as early as the final decades of the 18th century. Seizing upon the many weaknesses of the Ottoman rule, Russian policy discovered an opportunity to win the hearts of much of the boyar class – those who, in time, would come to seek its aid and intervention[33]. Thus, Russia became an indispensable element in the construction of Romanian modernity. Unlike the Phanariotes, the Russia was under a stronger French influence during the 18th century due to the ruling elite's policies of social emancipation[34]. Consequently, the image of the French cultural model was conveyed through Russian intermediaries in the Wallachian and Moldavian Principalities, especially during the military occupations of the first half of the 19th century. The presence of Russia in the two Principalities, in the context of their war efforts against the Turks, offered the Wallachian and Moldavian boyars the opportunity to become acquainted with officer corps whose manners, tastes, social habits, and ideas[35].

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[30] David Popovici, *La Littérature Roumaine à l'Epoque des Lumières* (Sibiu: Centrul de studii şi cercetări privitoare la Transilvania, 1945), 73.

[31] Tipei, *How to Make Friends*, 17.

[32] Ibid., 10, 12.

[33] Victor Taki, *Rusia și Țările Române: imperiu, elite și reforme între 1812 și 1834* (Bucureşti: Editura Corint, 2024), 62-72.

The local elite who encountered the occupiers from the east adopted from them the rules of etiquette, a rethinking of certain social relations, a better pronunciation of the French language, as well as some of their reading habits, and through all these, a new bridge toward the West was built. The impulse toward Europeanization opened new perspectives, destroyed traditions[36], reached new generations, and stirred new ambitions for reform[37]. The presence of French influence during periods of Russian domination was stronger than in its earlier manifestations. The beginning of the 19th century and this second stage of Europeanization complemented the French influence that had already entered through Phanariot intermediaries in the preceding decades.

Familiarity with a state of affairs tending to resemble European civilization allowed that, starting from the 1820s and 1830s, Western cultural imports to become increasingly assimilated under the impulse of a more clearly defined desire for modernization. The importance of the Russian contribution to this process is significant[38] – the transformation of the Oriental background, a phenomenon without which Europeanization could not have taken place, is largely due to them. Likewise, the awakening of the European consciousness of the Wallachians and Moldavians at the beginning of the 19th century fostered their desire for emancipation. The context thus created allowed that, by mid-century, the influence directly exerted by France penetrated more easily into Romanian society and mentality.

In comparison with other neighboring regions, the ampleness of French influence in the Moldo-Wallachian cultural space can be explained by questions of origin and identity. *Şcoala Ardeleană* (the Transylvanian School)[39] from Habsburg-ruled Transylvania carried the Latinist current beyond the Carpathians in the early 19th century, where it quickly became a driver of national awakening – equally a fixed idea and a social force. Of course, the Romanian scholars from Transylvania were not directly responsible for the growing popularity of French ideas in the two Danubian Principalities. Though the Enlightenment had influenced their thinking as well, it was by way of French, but rather through its German counterpart, the *Aufklärung*. Very few of them even expressed sympathies toward Paris. Thus, the Transylvanians contributed only indirectly to the more decisive assimilation of the French cultural model in Wallachia and Moldavia, starting around 1810[40].

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[34] For more on the French influence and the trend toward the Europeanization of Russia, see chapter „Rusia europeană" (Eng. trans.: "European Russia") from Orlando Figes, *Dansul Natașei: O istorie culturală a Rusiei* (Iași: Editura Polirom, 2024), 32-75.

[35] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 58.

[36] Nicoleta Roman, *„Deznădăjduită muiere n-au fost ca mine": Femei, onoare și păcat în Valahia secolului al XIX-lea* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2016), 160.

[37] Nicoleta Roman, *„Deznădăjduită muiere"*, 159; Constanța Vintilă, "'Curls and Forelocks': Romanian Women's Emancipation in Consumption and Fashion, 1780-1850", in *Women, Consumption, and the Circulation of Ideas in South-Eastern Europe, 17th-19th Centuries*, ed. Constanța Vintilă- Ghițulescu (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 129-142.

[38] Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu, "Constructing a New Identity: Romanian Aristocrats between Oriental Heritage and Western Prestige (1780-1866)", in *From Traditional Attire to Modern Dress: Modes of Identification, Modes of Recognition in the Balkans (XVIth-XXth Centuries)*, ed. Constanța Vintilă-Ghițulescu (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 110.

According to the literary historian Garabet Ibrăileanu, it was through this foundation of Latin origin that most aspirations toward Western culture took shape, with the elite finding in the French model something both familiar and kindred[41]. In the first decades of the 19th century, Latinity represented an important bond both in the process of cultural rapprochement with France and in justifying the place of the Romanians within Europe[42].

Critical thinking was the main factor that led to the initial assimilation, reinterpretation, and authentic adaptation of Enlightenment and Romanticism's ideas. Its development and manifestation took place in the shadow of the transformations brought about by the influence of Western culture[43]. In the early years of the 19th century, these developments paved the way for a necessary transition to new political realities, marked by an imperative, conscious decoupling that would make possible the future social and political emancipation of the two Principalities[44].

V. Echoes of Enlightenment

Perspectives on the necessity of following a European path appeared in many different forms in the writings of the time. Most of these texts argued for closer ties with Western Europe in a way meant to challenge the reader – to present this *rebirth* or *awakening* as an urgent endeavor, a unique opportunity that could not be missed. The spread of Enlightenment ideas within Romanian society sparked many such reactions. Against this background, the desire for cultural alignment with the more developed parts of the continent grew stronger, as the elites of the two Principalities became increasingly open to and capable of receiving these new influences. In the turbulent time that marked the 19th century, the openness to change, admiration for French ideas, and the aspiration for a new social and political order, all inspired fresh ambitions. The fascination of this generation with Western Europe – and particularly with the French model of culture and civilization – fueled their longing to witness the lights of Paris with their own eyes.

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[39] An Enlightenment-inspired cultural and intellectual movement among Romanian scholars from Habsburg-ruled Transylvania in the late 18th and early 19th centuries.

[40] Eliade, *Influența franceză*, 215-216.

[41] Gabaret Ibrăileanu, *Spiritul critic în cultura românească*, *Vol. I* (Bucureşti: Editura Litera, 2011), 19-22.

[42] Eliade, *Influența franceză*, 216-217.

[43] Garabet Ibrăileanu, *Studii literare*, (Bucureşti: Editura Minerva, 1979), 13.

[44] Mirela-Luminița Murgescu and Bogdan Murgescu, „Tranziție, tranziții: conceptualizarea schimbării în cultura română", in *Istoria României prin concepte: perspective alternative asupra limbajelor social-politice*, ed. Victor Neumann and Armin Heinen (Iaşi: Editura Polirom, 2010), 422-431.

Many of the writings from the early 19th century outline a new image of Romanian thought, distinct from that of previous decades. The novelty of these writing lies both in their frequency and in the conviction with which they speak about the necessity of turning toward Western models. In them, we find arguments explaining why *rebirth* and *awakening* had to take place urgently and inevitably following the model of Western civilization. Admiration for certain illustrious works from the Western world inspired many of these beliefs. The direction of thought was becoming increasingly clear, evident not only in everyday customs and not merely through imitation, but also as a genuine source of inspiration and motivation for future steps toward reform and creation. Thus, we encounter figures such as the poet Barbu Paris Mumuleanu. He wrote in 1822 about how much was owed to the West, about the achievements of Europe's enlightened minds, and about their contribution to the progress of humanity[45]. For him, as for many others, the Western world represented a center radiating civilization and culture, a nucleus from which science and higher spirituality spread their light further: "All the nations of Europe are gilded with knowledge; we see through the light of the sciences what we receive from them"[46]. Seeing in the alignment with the West the only solution to the Romanian problems of the time, Mumuleanu encouraged the youth to open themselves to European culture and to creativity. In an effort to bridge the gap between the local and Western worlds, Mumuleanu urged his readers to discover the works of the great European thinkers. In his view this recommendation served a double purpose: first, by interpreting these works through their own understanding, Romanians would become convinced of the greatness of that world; and second, as a natural consequence, they would thereby initiate their own process of emancipation[47].

Within the body of early 19th century literary works – representing the beginnings of Enlightenment thought among Wallachian and Moldavian societies – we also find *O privire politicească a Evropii toată din 1825 (*Eng. trans.: *A*

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[45] Barbu Paris Mumuleanu, *Rost de poezii, adecă stihuri* (Bucureşti, 1822), I-III.

[46] Ibid., I.

[47] Ibid., III-IV.

Political View of the Whole of Europe from 1825), a translation by Costache Conachi of *Revue politique de l'Europe en 1825*, published in Paris and authored by Pierre François Xavier Bourguignon d'Hérbigny[48]. The text presents the ideas of the French Revolution and the Enlightenment, advocates for constitutional monarchy and representative government, and is characterized by a distinctly anti-aristocratic tone. Conachi's notes provide explanations and adapt these ideas to the internal political life in Principalities. The notion of *politifsire* – that is, "the skill to which man has attained not only in learning but in the knowledge of truth in all things"[49] – represents d'Hérbigny's indirect apology for the Enlightenment movement. The author connects the lack of this *politifsire* among the people to the resistance of the upper classes, who feared losing their privileged status once the others became politically awakened. Costache Conachi applies this thesis to the Romanian case, offering details about what prevented Romanians from achieving emancipation, among the main culprits being the rulers and the boyar system[50]. d'Hérbigny also draws attention to the fact that the intellectual level reached by Europeans no longer corresponded to the political practices of the ruling class, thus making change inevitable. Conachi complements this statement by including Romanians among those emancipated yet persecuted nations, thereby asserting their belonging to the Western world in an effort to instill in the mind of the reader a sense of European solidarity[51].

The first issue of the publication *Albina Românească* draws attention to the revolutionary phenomena of the age, which people should not ignore. Issued in 1829, the magazine highlights the opportunities created by the circulation of ideas and the cultural influences spreading across Europe, which had become increasingly accessible to all nations.. This phenomenon is presented as an opportunity to be embraced, a decisive moment in which the reception and understanding of ideas from the West had the potential to bring about profound transformations, provided they were adopted by those who received them. Moreover, the text emphasizes the importance of cultural enrichment through direct contact, speaking of the honor bestowed by travelers from Western Europe who "share everywhere the rays of their light"[52].

Such urgent calls for awakening were frequently found in the press of the time. This rhetoric was closely tied to the political circumstances in which the Danubian Principalities found themselves at the time and to the desire of certain groups of scholars to steer future developments away from the traditional state of affairs that had dominated the Romanian lands for centuries.

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[48] Paul Cornea, Andrei Nestorescu, and Petre Costinescu, *Scrieri literare inedite (1820-1845): V. Aaron, A. Beldiman, C. Conachi, N. Dimachi, D. Gusti, C. Negruzzi, G. Peșacov, V. Pogor, E. Poteca* (București: Editura Minerva, 1981), 133.

[49] Ibid., 133-134.

[50] Ibid., 134.

[51] Ibid., 137.

[52] Albina Românească, „Înainte cuvîntare", no. 1, June 1st, 1829, 1.

VI. Romantic Stirrings

The essence of the aspirations for freedom, self-determination, emancipation, and modernization can be traced to a movement that set a new course for Europe's development. Romanticism inspired and motivated, more profoundly even than the Enlightenment did before it, a process of restoring – or, in some cases, entirely rebuilding – the values on which 19th century intellectuals built modernity. Through literature, Romanticism translated social and political imbalances into creative expression, mobilizing artistic production across Europe to an unprecedented degree and placing it in the service of modernity. The inclusive and tolerant nature of the Romantic movement significantly broadened its reach, extending its influence into other social strata. It succeeded in bringing together and giving momentum to the emerging ideas of the middle classes – groups whose positions had previously been largely absent from reformist efforts.

If, in the Western world, Romanticism meant the removal of the old order in the name of an unprecedented reconstruction of the intellectual, artistic, social, and political life[53], in the other half of Europe – the Central, Eastern, and Southeastern regions – the movement served, through the same means but in different forms. The Romantic movement can be considered an important ally in the effort to overcome historical delays. In any case, the source of these transformations came through cultural paths. On this foundation, various branches emerged toward the development of a political purpose. This transcendence was, in almost all cases, composed of a dual nature - sustained, on the one hand, by an attachment to the ideas imported from the West, and, on the other hand, by the emotional factor that fostered solidarity in the form of nationalism[54]. This was the outcome of a process initiated by the Enlightenment and carried forward by Romanticism.

The spread of this expression of freedom and reason across almost all fields began in the pre-Romantic period and, in some places, progressed with difficulty. The idea that a newly formed social class – the middle class – could have a voice in reorganizing social and political matters was not generally well received, particularly in the more backward regions of southeastern Europe. This was also the case of Wallachia and Moldavia. Despite the resistance encountered, the attempt to give expression to the new movement acquired impressive dimensions, leading to an unprecedented mobilization of intellectual efforts that put into practice the ideas discovered in the works of Western thinkers.

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[53] Isaiah Berlin, *Originile Romantismului* (Bucureşti: Editura Humanitas, 2024), 145-157.

[54] Campbell, *French Influence*, 1-4.

With the reconfiguration of the political scene in Wallachia and Moldavia following the end of the Phanariot regime in 1821, the Principalities gained a measure of autonomy, and intellectual life began to take on new dimensions. The literary contributions of the Wallachians and Moldavians increased remarkably in the following years[55]. During this period of transition, developments did not unfold under the sign of dethroning Classicism in favor of the new Romantic movement as had happened in the West, nor in terms of redefining moral or religious values[56]. Often, in the Romanian cultural space, the new elements emerged in a confusing symbiosis with the old ones, resulting in a distorted form of the movement itself. From this metamorphosis, authors expanded the boundaries of creation increasingly drawn toward Romantic themes while remaining, throughout the entire period, somewhat connected to the past[57]. The pre-Romantic current took root in the writings of Romanian scholars during the first decades of the 19th century, developing on a foundation that was not yet clearly defined. Romanian culture was taking shape during this period within a double alterity framework: marked, on the one hand, by the distancing from the Orient and the experiences of the past, and, on the other hand, by the idealization of European civilization – still largely unknown yet eagerly embraced by the emerging elites[58].

Pre-Romanticism evolved after 1821 under the impact of the political atmosphere in Wallachia and Moldavia. Three successive events with strong reverberations in society elevated the debates among the elites to a new level. First, the uprising led by Tudor Vladimirescu and the growing awareness within Romanian society regarding the national struggle, formed the basis for the emergence of the first texts dedicated to the insurrectional movements of the early 1820s. Most of the literary contributions from this period reworked the raw material of the events in an artistic tone, thereby distinguishing themselves from the chronicles of the time. Second, the signing of the Treaty of Adrianople in 1829, the official recognition of political autonomy of the Romanian Principalities, and the abolition of the Turkish monopoly further stimulated the transformation of social realities[59]. The ensuing economic, social, and political momentum created the conditions for intensifying the conflict between the high-ranking boyars and the middle and lower nobility. Third, another signal announcing the reformist ambitions of the new generation was the contestation, by the fourth decade, of the Organic Regulations. Over time, the inefficiency of this modernization project became increasingly evident, and its provisions no longer aligned with the vision of the young generation of intellectuals of developing the Principalities in accordance with the European standards of culture and civilization[60].

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[55] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 267.

[56] Şerban Cioculescu, Vladimir Streinu, and Tudor Vianu, *Istoria literaturii române moderne, Vol. I* (Bucureşti: Editura Casa Şcoalelor, 1944), 7-8.

[57] Ibid., 268.

[58] Catrinel Popa, „Locuri comune și locuri ale memoriei", în *Levantini, orientali, balcanici: reflexe ale spiritului oriental în literatura română din secolul al XIX-lea*, ed. Catrinel Popa (Bucureşti: Editura Eikon, 2024), 11-18; For more on the 1821 generation and their literary development, see Isar, *Sub semnul „Luminilor"*, 11-18.

[59] Nicolae Isar, *Istoria modernă a românilor: 1774/1784-1918* (Bucureşti: Editura Universitară, 2006), 70.

The tension accumulated from these profound changes in political life eventually spilled over in culture. An unprecedented phenomenon in its scope, Romantic literary creation broke free from the forms of manifestation dictated by the Oriental rhythm. Literature assumed the dimensions of a complex expression, becoming a means of understanding and transcending the struggles of Romanian society. Distancing from the exclusivity of Slavonic and Hellenic cultural spheres, the abandonment of cultural signals dictated by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, as well as those coming from Russia, represented inevitable fractures in the process of reorientation[61]. The literary creations of the third and fourth decades of the 19th century faithfully reflect the effort to synchronize Romanian culture with the literary developments of Western Europe, particularly those taking place in France.

The first form of synchronization between Romanian and European culture was achieved through the current of Romanticism[62]. French ideas spread with far greater impact between 1820s and 1840s, due to the political circumstances in which the Principalities found themselves and to the growing number of study trips undertaken by Romanian intellectuals to the West. The innovation of ideas, the transformation of tastes, and the acquistion of new cultural sensitivities placed young intellectuals in a position to inaugurate the most comprehensive form of cultural import of that time. The Romanian elite developed in a dynamic society shaped by a fashionable and appealing intellectual movement, and while not yet fully mature, its members saw their own idealistic aspirations reflected in this environment. The importance of Romanian Romanticism extends far beyond its literary dimension. This borrowed, adapted, and reinterpreted current, reshaped by Romanian minds would help spur a prototype of modern thought in the Danubian Principalities. This transformation formed part of the broader upheaval that Romanticism was generating across the continent at the time[63].

The movement of cultural and political rebirth then spread from Central toward Eastern and Southeastern Europe and, in all cases, began with the emergence of a local educated class ready to carry it forward[64]. Romanticism inspired a variety of ambitious projects throughout the Balkans – from Greece's *Megali Idea*[65] (Eng. trans.: Great Idea) to the *Illyrian* cultural movement of the Croats, which later evolved into a political program aimed at uniting all the South Slavs[66].

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[60] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 513.

[61] Elena Siupiur, *Intelectuali, elite, clase politice în sud-estul european. Secolul XIX* (Tărgoviște: Editura Domino, 2004), 16.

[62] Keith Hitchins, *Românii: 1774-1866* (București: Editura Humanitas, 2018), 231.

[63] John R. Gillis, *Youth and History. Tradition and Change in European Age Relations 1770-Present* (New York: Academic Press, 1974), 74.

The transition of Romanian literature from pre-Romanticism to Romanticism is difficult to place within a clearly defined period. Literary creation exhibited Romantic characteristics until roughly the 1830s. Before that, the pre-Romantic and Romantic trends had long coexisted within the broader literary movement, intertwined with other artistic forms such as neo-classicism, pre-Romanticism, and spontaneous realism. The cohesion of these styles was made possible within the process of developing modern Romanian culture, aptly illustrating its accelerated passage through successive stages[67]. The 1830s and the1840s were marked by the emergence of more refined Romantics who overshadowed the works of Paris Mumuleanu, Costache Conachi, and Iancu Văcărescu – previously the main references for modern Romanian literature.

Ion Heliade Rădulescu, Vasile Cârlova, Grigore Alexandrescu, and Cezar Bolliac in Wallachia, and, somewhat later, Costache Negruzzi, Alexandru Hrisoverghi, Dimitrie Ralet, and Vasile Alecsandri in Moldavia, were among the leading figures who brought Romanian prose and poetry into the modern period by integrating their literary creation into the Romantic movement. The inspiration of this new generation was no longer devoted exclusively to national ideals while the habitual idealization of Western civilization gradually faded, giving way to the development of critical thinking[68] and the discovery of the artistic self[69]. The lucidity with which the new generation of writers began to look toward the Western world did not stem from a rejection of the desire for European synchronization, but rather from elevating that goal to a higher level, one adapted to their own intellectual framework. Most representatives of this movement were trained in universities from Western Europe, a place to which they remained both culturally and emotionally attached, and whose model they sought to cautiously transplant at home.

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[64] Siupiur, *Intelectuali, elite, clase politice*, 29.

[65] Dimitrios Stamatopoulos, "Hellenism versus Latinism in the Ottoman East: Some Reflections on the Decline of the French Influence in the Greek Literary Society in Istanbul", *Études Balkaniques*, no. 3 (2007): 84-85.

[66] Mark Biondich, ""We were Defending the State": Nationalism, Myth, and Memory in Twentieth-Century Croatia", in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004), 55-57; Daniel Citirigă, *Europa Centrală și tentația federalismului: Istorie și diplomație în perioada interbelică* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2015), 199-200.

[67] Cornea, *Originile romantismului*, 518-519; Popovici, *La Littérature Roumaine*, 493.

[68] Al. Dima et al., *Istoria literaturii române. De la Școala Ardeleană la Junimea* (București: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste România, 1968), 17.

[69] Hitchins, *Românii: 1774-1866*, 235.

This generation of Romantics thus found solidarity with the authors from whom they drew inspiration. N. I. Apostolescu attributes this to the fact that all Romanian poets of that period were, in essence, disciples of French Romanticism[70]. Ion Heliade Rădulescu, for instance, was an advocate of the theory of imitation, convinced that Romanian poetry could not succeed among the great European names without borrowing from their substance[71]. Consequently, in the lyrical work of the Wallachian author we find themes and approaches similar to those of Alphonse de Lamartine and Victor Hugo, among others. The rejection of the past, the emphasis on cultivating new artistic forms, the need to adapt to the modern world, and the appreciation of contemporary creativity were just a few of the ideas borrowed from French writers around which Heliade built his work[72]. Thus emerged the first form of Romanian Romanticism, modeled after the French one[73].

The manifestation of realism, through or in the absence of Romanticism, introduced satire to the Romanian verse and prose. Another imported element, the realist-Romantic style left its mark in fables and epistles where it created a vivid image of Romanian society in its transitional years toward modernity, during the first half of the 19th century. The social "physiologies" of Alecu Russo, Vasile Alecsandri, and Costache Negruzzi portray in a humorous and descriptive manner the social types struggling to assert themselves amid this modernization process[74]. For these authors, inspiration probably came from Honoré de Balzac[75] and his essays that make up *La Comédie humaine*. Similarly, Alecsandri's earliest verses, written in French, reflect the intellectual atmosphere in which they were conceived. Influenced by numerous circumstances – most notably by the Parisian intellectual environment – Alecsandri infused his works with reinterpreted fragments from Lamartine's *Invocations*[76]. The French author served as an inspiration for the Moldavian poet[77], who, in 1841, dedicated to him the ode *À Mr. de Lamartine, par un jeune Moldave* (Eng. trans.: *To Mr. de Lamartine, by a young Moldavian*) Alecsandri expressed his admiration and gratitude, having been influenced by Lamartine's *Méditations* and *Harmonies*, which had guided the lyrical expression of his deepest emotions[78].

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[70] N. I. Apostolescu, *L'influence des romantiques français sur la poésie roumaine* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1909).

[71] David Popovici, „Introducere", in *Opere, Tom I* by Ion Heliade Rădulescu (București: Editura pentru Literatură și Artă, 1939), 54.

[72] Ibid., 54-63.

[73] Vasile V. Haneș, *Formarea Opiniunii franceze asupra României în secolul al XIX-lea. Vol I* (București: Editura Scrisul Românesc, 1929), 28.

[74] Dima et al., *Istoria literaturii române*, 16.

[75] Ibid.

[76] This refers to the opening of *Méditations poétiques*: *Invocations* and to the verses from *Chant d'amour*, by Alphonse de Lamartine (Paris: La Librairie Grecque-Latine-Allemande, 1820).

[77] For more on the impact of Alphonse de Lamartine's work on Vasile Alecsandri's literary formation, see chapter: „Alecsandri poet liric și romanticii francezi. I. Alecsandri și Lamartine", in Ch. Drouhet, *Vasile Alecsandri și scriitorii francezi* (București: Editura Cvltvra Națională, 1924), 12-30.

In the broader context of the efforts to synchronize or adapt to European realities, the merit of this generation of Romantic writers lies in their capacity to view in a distinct manner the model upon which they gradually sought to build their own modernity. The import of Western culture and civilization reached, with them, far higher dimensions than among their predecessors. Romanticism made its way into the Principalities not solely through French influence; the literary current could enter Romanian thought primarily because of the social-historical context and the prevailing mentalities that allowed its reception.

VII. Conclusion

The story of the interaction between the Moldavian-Wallachian world and the French Enlightenment and Romantic currents reveals the mechanisms through which ideas travel, merge, and give birth to new identities. In a broader context, it reflects a map of connections and relationships that drive transformation. The encounter with Western modernity – first mediated through Greek and Russian intermediaries, later pursued directly by the emerging educated elite – represented far more than the adoption of foreign ideas. Mapping these trajectories allows us to trace and assess their impact. Undoubtedly, the reconfiguration of intellectual, social, and political realities in the Danubian Principalities during the first half of the 19th century is closely linked to – and largely shaped by – the ideas that circulated amongst the local elites at that time. This phenomenon was part of a complex tableau that outlined and reshaped the cultural map of modern Europe.

Southeastern Europe was transformed in the first half of the 19th century into a space for the interpretation of Enlightenment and Romantic ideas imported from the West, most often from France. Within this framework, the Danubian Principalities interacted with these ideas in a markedly different way compared to other neighboring polities. Their historical experience, geopolitical environment, and Latin origin granted them a distinct status, and enabled the development of a particular affinity for the French model of culture and civilization. By internalizing, adapting, and transforming the imported ideals, the Principalities rearticulated them in the context of their own social and political realities. While Enlightenment contributed to build the intellectual foundation for reform, Romanticism inaugurated the feeling of nationalism and gave voice to the aspirations for political awakening, autonomy, and creativity. These transformations led the Francophile elite that inaugurated modernity in various fields by the mid-19th century, to graft the French model onto Romanian life for an indefinite period of time.

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[78] Drouhet, *Vasile Alecsandri*, 12.

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BOOK REVIEWS

GIUSEPPE TATEO, *SUB SEMNUL CRUCII. CATEDRALA MÂNTUIRII NEAMULUI ŞI CONSTRUCȚIA DE BISERICI ÎN ROMÂNIA POSTSOCIALISTĂ* (ENG.: *UNDER THE SIGN OF THE CROSS: THE NATIONAL CATHEDRAL AND CHURCH CONSTRUCTION IN POST-SOCIALIST ROMANIA*), IAŞI: POLIROM, 2024, 264 P., ISBN: 9789734697359

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For a volume with such an intriguing title, it is fitting to begin by highlighting several clear strengths. I would start with the fact that Giuseppe Tateo's book is, to a considerable extent, the result of actual fieldwork, involving the collection of empirical data – albeit primarily up until 2018 – and the direct interaction with the actors involved with the church construction cause. Based on these elements, the resulting analysis was both necessary and, in many respects, highly accurate. The volume also represents a bold attempt to move away from the long-circulated idea of a "religious revival" recorded in Romania after 1989. This is noteworthy because the concept of "religious revival" is replaced by that of an "organizational revival" a term through which the author captures the efforts of the Romanian Orthodox Church to reassert itself publicly not only through the construction of churches and cathedrals but also through institutional expansion, penetration of the informational environment, and the streamlining of economic activities.

The book offers readers much more than its title might suggest. I would argue that it is not primarily – or not solely – about the construction of cathedrals, churches, and crosses, but rather about a particular dialogue, at times cordial, at other times tense, between the Church, the state, society, and the wider world. The building of churches and the construction of the National Cathedral are merely the visible forms of the political use of religion, reflecting the Romanian Orthodox Church's attempt not only to regain public visibility in the post-communist era (the author prefers the terms socialism and post-socialism) but also to reclaim its centrality in public life. From this perspective, one of the author's particularly intriguing observations, referencing Katherine Verdery, is that after 1989, all those who, at an individual or institutional level, considered themselves opponents or victims of the communist regime laid moral claims, operating within what could be termed a compensatory logic. Thus, the Romanian Orthodox Church felt entitled to build churches, cathedrals, or the National Cathedral in Bucharest as a form of moral – and possibly material – reparation for the religious edifices demolished during the 1970s and 1980s and for being expelled from the public sphere for several decades in the name of official atheism.

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From a methodological standpoint, the author positions the work within the field of anthropology, partly due to the diverse documentation methods employed, which included participatory observation, ethnographic description, bibliographic and archival research, as well as legal and economic investigation. Two aspects stand out as particularly significant here because they represent obstacles the author faced and sought to overcome. First, there is the well-known opacity of the Romanian Orthodox Church in providing detailed and concrete information – either voluntarily or upon request – regarding, for example, the financing of the National Cathedral. This lack of transparency prompted the author to undertake a meticulous investigation based on press reports, documents, and records produced by the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs, as well as to catalog government decisions, emergency ordinances, and local council resolutions by various public authorities allocating funds. Second, direct contact with clergy, often for interviews, proved to be a challenge. One explanation, offered by the author, relates to media investigations in recent years that have exposed the Church's more controversial financial dealings. Published in a "sensationalist manner" (p. 35), these investigations have fostered a persecution complex among Orthodox clergy, making them reluctant to speak openly.

The bipartite structure of the volume, aside from facilitating a seamless understanding of the conceptual material and the arguments presented, identifies two highly intriguing themes for analysis. The first, as expected, revolves around the construction of the National Cathedral. This theme branches out into several chapters that foreground the secular history of the cathedral and its location; the parties involved in the project, ranging from the Romanian Orthodox Church, public and private financiers, to the construction workers; controversies regarding its name, aesthetics, architecture, and funding; and finally, the social fabric woven around this monumental endeavor, consisting of clergy, believers, pilgrims, and opponents of the project. The second part of the volume shifts attention to the broader industry of church construction in Romania and Bucharest. The author interprets this post-communist effort as a form of religious revival. The theme of crosses is tackled in two distinct chapters, the first illustrating how their placement often serves as a political statement or as an affirmation of a particular vision of Romania's recent past. Lastly, crosses are also employed by certain groups to block the construction of a mosque in Bucharest, a chapter that is relevant to discussions about immigration, the impact of social media networks, and conspiracy theories.

Very concisely and with reference to the most important contributions in the field, the author manages to traverse more than a century and a half of complex relations between the Romanian Orthodox Church and state authority. Naturally, the starting point is the establishment of the modern state under Alexandru Ioan Cuza, a liberal revolutionary inspired by secular ideas and intentions. Cuza reformed the relationship between the State and the Church to subordinate the latter, not only in terms of property but also regarding the remuneration of clerical staff and administrative organization. Under Kings Carol I and Ferdinand I, orthodoxy held a privileged position within Romania's confessional landscape, and the collaboration between the state and the Orthodox Church proved essential for the successful process of nation-building. After 1945, analyses of the role and attitude of the Romanian Orthodox Church in its relationship with the atheist communist regime have been polarized. On one side, critics condemn what they see as an opportunistic pact with political power, accusing the Church of failing to oppose the regime. On the other side, some argue that entering into an agreement with the regime was a form of tacit resistance that ensured the Church's survival and the continued practice of worship. What is certain is that the Romanian Orthodox Church benefited from the dissolution of the Greek Catholic Church and later, from the mid-1960s, became complicit in Nicolae Ceaușescu's autarkic and nationalist project. After 1990, with the liberalization of the religious domain and the emergence of a clear confessional competition, the Romanian Orthodox Church sought to secure a dominant position within the political sphere.

We are accustomed to considering the topic of the construction of the National Cathedral as strictly contemporary. However, this perspective has the significant disadvantage of ignoring the history behind the cathedral idea, which, in Romania's case, spans nearly 150 years. Over this period, funds were allocated, the most suitable locations were identified and even consecrated, and architectural competitions were organized. The idea originates in the 1880s, shortly after Carol I became Romania's first king. It was intended as a symbol of the country's independence, the autocephaly of the Romanian Orthodox Church, and the Church's aspiration to assert its primary role within society. In the following decades, additional motivations emerged to justify the need for the building. In 1918, after the Great Union, a cathedral was envisioned to celebrate national unity and affirm a religious identity in a country now home to numerous ethnic and religious minorities. By 1925, with the proclamation of the

Romanian Patriarchate, the necessity of such a cathedral became even more apparent. However, despite the seemingly favorable conditions of those times, the project did not materialize, largely due to the political and cultural elites of the period, who held a more secular vision and who recognized that the Romanian state required schools, medical facilities, and administrative institutions. The case of Spiru Haret, Minister of Public Instruction and Religious Affairs, is well known; he redirected funds allocated for the cathedral to the renovation and construction of schools. In subsequent decades, the issue of the cathedral faded from focus due to the economic crisis, World War II, and the communist regime. However, after 1989, the Romanian Orthodox Church ensured the revival of the project and actively pushed for its realization. This time, in addition to debates on the necessity of the cathedral, controversies arose over its location. The site shifted multiple times, from University Square to Alba Iulia Square, through Carol Park, until it finally settled on Arsenal Hill (also known as *Dealul Spirii*), near the Palace of Parliament.

Finally, the chosen site carried a symbolic and emotional weight that could not be overlooked. The geography of that part of Bucharest was deeply marked by one of the greatest traumas of late Ceaușescu-era policies: the transformation of the urban landscape through the demolition of an entire architectural heritage. Renaissance churches and monasteries, neoclassical palaces, and Art Deco buildings were destroyed to make way for standardized apartment blocks, government buildings, wide boulevards, and the Palace of Parliament. Ceaușescu's goal was not merely to build a civic center but, more importantly, to control and manipulate collective memory. By altering the urban space, Ceaușescu sought to force Romanians to forget their past. From this perspective, the Church views the construction of the cathedral on Arsenal Hill as both a commemoration of the churches demolished in the 1980s and a moral and historical reconsecration of the entire area.

One of the most important ethnological observations made by the author is that, before transforming the urban landscape, the new cathedral initiated a social shift in the surrounding area and in Bucharest as a whole. Tateo notes that Patriarch Daniel's intention was to build an active community of believers around the edifice. To achieve this, a small chapel was erected in 2011 on the edge of the cathedral complex. This chapel quickly became an attraction in its own right. To serve there, the Patriarch brought a monk from Sihăstria Monastery, Father Ciprian Grădinaru, who had been a disciple of the renowned Elder Ilie Cleopa for ten years. Over time, Father Ciprian became one of the most popular spiritual figures in Romania.

Giuseppe Tateo provides an inventory of the arguments invoked by the Romanian Orthodox Church in support of the cathedral's construction that is comprehensive and clearly explained, even for less-informed readers. It begins with liturgical motivations, highlighting the Church's claim that the current cathedral on Patriarchal Hill is far too small to accommodate a large number of believers and clergy during religious services. Secondly, the author proceeds with the argument stating that the new edifice will host major national events, commemorations, anniversaries, and festive ceremonies on national holidays. Thirdly, the cathedral is envisioned as a symbol of social and spiritual cohesion, serving not only liturgical functions but also charitable purposes. The fourth argument also relates to unity but emphasizes the cultural unity of the Romanian people, reflected in the Romanian Byzantine architectural style. In connection with this, the National Cathedral is intended to satisfy a sense of "national dignity", given that the Romanian Orthodox Church is the only Orthodox Church without a cathedral.

Addressing the legal grounds for the construction of the National Cathedral, the author references Law 261/2005, which, based on the Church's status as a public utility organization, justifies substantial state assistance for the construction works. On the one hand, this involves the allocation of public funds from central and local authorities, funds that are not subject to oversight regarding their expenditure or the organization of tenders. On the other hand, it includes the transfer of an 11-hectare plot in the city center, which the author sees as a striking example of the "desecularization" of property.

For many readers of the volume, perhaps the most intriguing part is the one addressing the funds allocated and spent on the cathedral project. Giuseppe Tateo dedicates a subchapter to this issue, and beyond the exact figures – which were valid as of 2018 – other conclusions stand out. For instance, when comparing the estimated costs of approximately 130 million euros (excluding VAT, painting, and finishing) with public fund allocations, the author concludes that the building is almost entirely funded by the state since the State Secretariat for Religious Affairs allocated the largest sums of money. However, the other religious denominations in Romania did not protest, given that they, too, received funding proportional to their number of believers, on the model of the Romanian Orthodox Church. Unsurprisingly, significant amounts were allocated during election years, such as 2014 and 2016, with the Bucharest City Hall being the second-largest financier.

Regarding private funding, such as sponsorships or donations from believers, the author estimates that these do not exceed 20% of the total costs and serve more of an auxiliary role, such as covering VAT or social contributions. While a fundraising campaign was launched, the Patriarchate did not impose a fixed amount of donations on parishes across the country.

Giuseppe Tateo also examines the most notable opponents of the National Cathedral project: a number of humanist associations that, in the early 2000s, contested public funding for religious denominations and the presence of the Church in education and administration, sometimes even protesting in the streets. Based on interviews with some members of these associations, the author concludes that their actions target the government and political sphere rather than the Romanian Orthodox Church itself, though he notes the existence of a clear anticlerical tone in their discourse.

As with many aspects of this grand construction, even its name is not a recent or post-communist innovation. The title *Catedrala Mântuirii Neamului* (Eng. trans.: Cathedral of the Salvation of the Nation) dates to the interwar period, from the time when the first construction proposals emerged. However, now that the project has come to life and is nearing completion, the name has been contested by many, including conservative intellectuals or those close to the Church. For example, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, Teodor Baconschi warned that the name is dangerously close to being an *ethnophyletism,* a heresy condemned by the Constantinople Synod in 1872, which involves an exaltation of ethnic and national elements at the expense of the duty of love for God. Similarly, Adrian Papahagi, professor at the Babeş-Bolyai University, sees this name as a continuation of the nationalist-communist rhetoric of the 1980s. Consequently, the Romanian Orthodox Church attempted to rebrand the cathedral, eventually adopting the name *Catedrala Națională* (Eng. trans.: National Cathedral).

Another well-known controversy in the public space revolves around the architectural style and the dimensions of the building. Once again, art critics such as Sorin Dumitrescu and Petre Guran have criticized the cathedra'ls style, advocating for a reproduction of the iconic Hagia Sophia. For some of these critics, the design of the cathedral is nothing more than an oversized version of a neighborhood church. However, Patriarch Daniel opted for a design that combines Byzantine style with specifically Romanian or Brâncovenesc features. As for the dimensions, these too have been heavily criticized, partly because their sheer scale is said to hinder the intimate spiritual experience characteristic of Romanian Orthodoxy.

The construction of the National Cathedral has also highlighted a particularly interesting and increasingly visible phenomenon: a pronounced anticlerical attitude among significant segments of society, which has led to a decline in the popularity of the Church as an institution. The triggering event was a tragic incident that turned into a national trauma: the Colectiv nightclub fire on October 30th, 2015. The Romanian Orthodox Church's failure to show empathy and solidarity with the victims and their families sparked resentment toward its hierarchy, including the Patriarch. Public hostility peaked when Romania's overwhelmed healthcare system struggled to care for hundreds of injured victims, while public opinion recalled its chronic underfunding, juxtaposed with government allocations for the construction of the National Cathedral. This led to the rallying cry of many protesters in November 2015: "We want hospitals, not cathedrals!"

The author made an uninspired choice when, attempting to illustrate another dimension of anticlerical sentiment – specifically, the Orthodox hierarchy's lack of reaction during the communist regime – he included a quote from Ioan Ianolide, a well-known member of the Iron Guard, the interwar far-right movement, and a central figure in the neo-Legionary campaign *Sfinții închisorilor* (Eng. trans.: The Saints of the Prisons). There were certainly other examples that could have better demonstrated the complicity of the Romanian Orthodox Church's hierarchs with the communist regime.

Additionally, under the topic of anticlerical attitudes, particularly those aimed at bishops, Giuseppe Tateo also includes testimonies from priests about the excessive preoccupation of some hierarchs with raising funds by any means necessary, which is perceived as a betrayal of their Christian mission. Moreover, ordinary priests criticize the unchecked freedom and immense powers that bishops wield within their dioceses, leading to a system of "episcopal autocracy".

In light of the aspects analyzed, I would argue that Giuseppe Tateo's book stands out for its many qualities, achievements, and even groundbreaking contributions. His analysis of church and cathedral construction in post-communist Romania is undoubtedly a novelty and a bold undertaking, all the more so in an editorial landscape where authors often tread cautiously when addressing the intimate and unspoken connections between the Romanian Orthodox Church and the state.

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TUOMO SIPOLA, JANNE ALATALO, MONIKA WOLFMAYR, AND TERO KOKKONEN, EDS., *ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE FOR SECURITY: ENHANCING PROTECTION IN A CHANGING WORLD*, CHAM: SPRINGER NATURE, 2024, 307 P., ISBN 978-3031574511

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Abstract: This review critically examines *Artificial Intelligence for Security: Enhancing Protection in a Changing World* edited by Tuomo Sipola, Janne Alatalo, Monika Wolfmayr, and Tero Kokkonen, published in Springer Nature, in 2024. Structured in three parts: "Methodological Fundamentals", "Critical Infrastructure Protection", and "AI for Anomaly Detection", the volume brings together theoretical insights and applied studies to explore how AI enhances security systems. Part I engages with foundational concepts such as differential privacy, explainable AI, and adversarial robustness. Part II presents sector-specific applications ranging from logistics and smart grids to healthcare systems. Part III demonstrates AI's utility in real-time anomaly detection, providing empirical results on web-attack detection, log analysis, and Internet of Things (IoT) intrusion modeling. The book's strengths lie in its interdisciplinary approach, ethical framing, and strong emphasis on real-world applications. Case studies such as the use of fuzzy logic in smart grids and hybrid models for IoT defense underscore the book's practical relevance. However, limitations include a narrow domain scope (with less attention to areas like financial or defense security), minimal engagement with geopolitical dynamics, and overly technical vocabulary that may limit accessibility for non-specialist readers. Despite these constraints, the volume makes a substantial contribution to the field, integrating technical precision analysis with policy-aligned ethics, offering a valuable resource for cybersecurity researchers, practitioners, and policy architects concerned with building reliable AI-enabled systems.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence, cybersecurity, critical infrastructure, anomaly detection, ethical AI

Rezumat: Această recenzie analizează critic volumul *Artificial Intelligence for Security: Enhancing Protection in a Changing World*, editat de Tuomo Sipola, Janne Alatalo, Monika Wolfmayr şi Tero Kokkonen şi publicat la Springer Nature, in 2024. Structurat în trei părți: „Fundamente Metodologice", „Protecția Infrastructurii Critice" şi „Inteligența

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Artificială pentru Detectarea Anomaliilor”, volumul combină perspective teoretice și studii aplicate pentru a explora modul în care inteligența artificială (IA) contribuie la consolidarea securității. Prima parte abordează concepte fundamentale precum confidențialitatea diferențială, inteligența artificială explicabilă și robustețea împotriva atacurilor adversariale. Partea a doua prezintă aplicații sectoriale din domenii precum logistică, rețele inteligente și sistemele de sănătate. Partea a treia evidențiază utilitatea IA în detectarea anomaliilor în timp real, prezentând rezultate empirice cu privire la detectarea atacurilor web, analiza jurnalelor de sistem și modelarea intruziunilor în în Internetul Lucrurilor (IoT). Punctele forte ale cărții includ abordarea interdisciplinară, accentul pus pe etica IA-ului și accentul pus pe dimesiunea aplicativă. Studiile de caz, precum utilizarea logicii fuzzy în rețele inteligente și a modelelor hibride pentru apărarea IoT, evidențiază relevanța practică a volumului. Cu toate acestea, limitările constau în sfera de aplicare restrânsă a domeniului (acordând mai puțină atenție asupra securității financiare sau militare), observații minime cu privier la dinamici geopolitice și vocabularul tehnic predominant, care poate îngreuna accesibilitatea pentru cititorii nespecializați. În ciuda acestor constrângeri, volumul oferă o contribuție semnificativă domeniului, integrand analiza tehnică de precizie cu etica aliniată la politici, constituind o resursă valoroasă pentru cercetători, practicieni și factori de decizie preocupați de dezvoltarea unor sisteme IA fiabile în domeniul securității cibernetice.

Cuvinte cheie: inteligență artificială, securitate cibernetică, infrastructură critică, detectarea anomaliilor, etică IA

The book is structured to guide the reader from foundational AI principles to concrete applications in security-critical contexts. According to the editors' Preface, Part I "Methodological Fundamentals of Artificial Intelligence" introduces the general frameworks and main challenges in AI security. It opens with broad discussions (chapters by Adrowitzer et al. provide "a blueprint towards a safe world with AI and its development and application" (p. v), while Holmström et al. analyze AI in organizational/managerial cybersecurity, questioning its "silver bullet" hype). The middle chapters of Part I delve into core technical topics: Minna Kilpala and Tommi Kärkkäinen survey differential privacy models, while Sarah van Gerwen and colleagues address explainable AI in threat intelligence. Janševskis and Ošis examine secure knowledge discovery frameworks, emphasizing that data and knowledge extraction must include security considerations. Finally, Glazunov and Zarras's chapter concludes Part I with a detailed analysis of deep learning robustness: they review various attack strategies on neural networks and assess available defenses, grounding the volume in current adversarial Machine Learning (ML) research.

Part II, "AI for Critical Infrastructure Protection", focuses on sector-specific applications. The chapter by Nweke and Yayilgan frames AI's role in securing cyber-physical systems. The volume then includes domain-specific studies: Kai Rasmus discusses AI in small and medium-sized enterprises; Mikko Kiviharju's chapter addresses cybersecurity in logistics; Martinelli, Mercaldo, and

Santone develop fuzzy-logic-based machine learning for smart grid stability; Zolotukhin, Zhang, and Hämäläinen examine adversarial examples in mobile communication networks; while Jonske et al. explore teaching machine learning operating with medical / healthcare data. These contributions collectively demonstrate how AI can reinforce resilience in vital sectors (e.g. transportation, energy, communications, healthcare) while also introducing new challenges for each of the domains analyzed.

Part III, "AI for Anomaly Detection", presents real-world detection systems. Simone Falzone, Gabriele Gühring, and Benjamin Jung's chapter examines automated monitoring of log data, showing how machine learning can identify abnormal events in system logs in real time. Pojan Shahrivar and Stuart Millar focus on web applications, noting the surge in web attacks. They design an ML-based detector to flag malicious scanning. Finally, Mansour Alqarni and Akramul Azim address the issues surrounding IoT security by building a hybrid model that captures both spatial and temporal patterns. They explain that individually Convolutional Neural Networks (CNNs) (for spatial features) and Recurrent Neural Networks (RNNs) (for temporal sequences) each miss aspects of IoT traffic, so their hybrid model integrates both modalities. As the authors observe, this integration is "a crucial step toward more effective and adaptable IoT intrusion detection" (p. 350).

Overall, the book's three parts, from fundamentals to application and case studies, provides the reader with a well-thought and compelling narrative. It mirrors the editors' intent to balance conceptual discussions with applied examples. Each part includes both chapters reviewing literature or analytical frameworks and empirical studies, presenting experiments and results. For instance, in the anomaly-detection section the three chapters include experimental results on real log or network data, illustrating practical AI deployment. In this way, the volume interweaves theory and practice. Its interdisciplinary outlook is evident in Part I (which bridges computer science, data science, and management theory) as well as in the diversity of Part II (engineering, industry, and even educational perspectives on AI). The editors have curated contributions from academia and industry alike that enrich the book's outlook. The breadth of topics (from ethical AI design to smart grid monitoring) demonstrates the book's intention to cover the multifaceted role of AI in the modern security landscape.

In terms of the strengths of the book, I would note several aspects. First, the interdisciplinary and holistic approach ensures that the book's integrates technical depth with broader security concerns. The editors explicitly combine computer science, engineering, and social-science perspectives, for example, Part I pairs algorithmic chapters (differential privacy, deep learning robustness) with managerial or organizational analyses (Holmström et al. on the "silver bullet" myth in cybersecurity). Similarly, chapters on explainability and trust make connections to ethics. This interdisciplinary methodology provides a more comprehensive understanding. As one contribution notes, addressing Explainable Artificial Intelligence (XAI) can "allow stakeholders to trust AI systems, detect biases, and identify potential vulnerabilities" (p. 18), directly linking technical explainability to social trust. The volume thus offers a comprehensive perspective: it does not treat AI security purely as an engineering problem, but also as a socio-technical issue.

A second strength derives from the book's emphasis on policy ethics as ethical AI concepts are woven throughout the text. Differential Privacy (DP), for example, is given a thorough treatment by Kilpala and Kärkkäinen: they note that DP's rigorous definition "ensures that personalized information remains non-disclosed", highlighting AI's privacy safeguards. The Explainable AI chapter explicitly frames XAI as a means to generate human-understandable accounts of AI decisions, meanwhile, in the broader organizational context, Holmström et al. discuss information classification and accountability. By foregrounding these topics, the editors align the book with current global ethics guidelines. Transparency, accountability, fairness and trust – key issues in AI governance – are also given attention. For example, Adrowitzer et al.'s chapter emphasizes that lifting "the veil on the black box" helps build "more ethical, trustworthy, and responsible AI systems" (p. 19) that benefit society. In this regard, the book can also serve to inform policymakers: it highlights how DP and XAI as practical mechanisms support legal and normative frameworks (e.g. data protection laws, standards for trustworthy AI, etc.).

Thirdly, the volume provides several case studies that have practical relevance with many chapters presenting detailed examples or experiments. For instance, Shahrivar and Millar's project on web-application scanning is grounded in real production data. The authors point out that in a "production environment with multiple apps and millions of events, it is not feasible to check each [alert] by hand" (p. 326). This real-world constraint motivates their ML solution while their results – an ML classifier detecting Dynamic Application Security Testing (DAST) attacks – demonstrate practical success. Likewise, Falzone et al. empirically show how preprocessing steps influence the performance of Principal Component Analysis (PCA), clustering, and deep-learning algorithms in log anomaly detection. Other studies (e.g. Kiviharju on logistics cybersecurity) include surveys of industry threats and standards. These applications underscore that the book is not merely theoretical: it provides concrete, actionable insights for practitioners. For example, Martinelli, Mercaldo, and Santone's approach explicitly seeks interpretability. As the authors note, their model incorporates "explainability, aimed to understand how the model is working from a global point of view" (p. 222), illustrating how practitioners can combine AI with domain expertise.

Fourthly, another strength is found in the book's clear and coherent structure. The chapters frequently review related work and define terms, for example, Glazunov and Zarras's chapter on deep nets begins by summarizing known Deep Neural Network (DNN) attacks and defenses, setting the stage for new results. Similarly, the introductory sections of many chapters review background (the Jonske et al. chapter starts by tracing AI's history since the 1950s, for instance). This explanative approach aids comprehension since even highly technical chapters frame their contributions in understandable ways, while sections often end with conclusions or future directions.

Lastly, on the topic of strengths, I would also note the volume's relevance to diverse audiences. By explicitly addressing ethics, technology, and case studies, the book appeals to scholars, industry experts, and policy stakeholders. It positions itself as a resource for anyone concerned with modern cybersecurity and AI. As the editors state, "Understanding latest advancements in this field should be useful to ... experts ... who want to follow research and the latest trends." (p. vi). For example, academic researchers can appreciate the thorough literature reviews, while security professionals can learn from the anomaly-detection techniques. Policymakers and regulators can find value in the chapters on privacy, trust, and critical infrastructure resilience. The volume thus succeeds in bridging multiple communities: it translates cutting-edge AI research into insights on "build(ing) more secure systems" (p. vi) in practice.

On the issue of limitations, I would argue that a major blind spot is the limited insights from a geopolitical and global context. The book largely treats AI security in a technical and organizational vacuum, without properly engaging with geopolitical or cross-cultural dimensions. Except for passing mentions (e.g. data sovereignty), the chapters do not analyze how national policies, international rivalries, or cultural differences shape AI security. In an era of AI arms races and global digital governance (e.g. AI regulations by the EU, US, China), a discussion of how these dynamics influence AI adoption in security would have strengthened the volume. For example, critical infrastructure protection often depends on government strategy and international standards, but such perspectives are not fully developed. Expanding this dimension could have provided a more holistic view of AI's global impact.

On a different level, another shortcoming focuses on the limited accessibility for non-specialists. While the technical depth is a strength, it also poses a challenge given that some chapters assume familiarity with advanced AI concepts and use dense jargon. Readers without a strong machine learning background might struggle with sections on, for example, model extraction attacks, or the mathematical formalism of differential privacy. The volume lacks auxiliary tools (like a glossary of terms or appendices) that could help lay readers. Although this level of detail is expected in a research-oriented book, adding more explanatory context or simplifying some discussions could broaden the audience considering how AI has become increasingly integrated in day-to-day activities.

At the interdisciplinary level though the book is interdisciplinary in nature, the connections between technical and social aspects are sometimes implicit rather than explicit. Each chapter addresses its niche well, but overarching synthesis is not explicitly drawn. A concluding chapter synthesizing insights across chapters (for instance, comparing how DP and XAI together contribute to "trustworthy AI") might have better unified the book's contributions. Moreover, while certain topics are comprehensively covered (logistics, smart grids, mobile networks, IoT), other important security contexts (e.g. cloud/edge computing, defense applications, financial system security) receive little or no attention. Similarly, while ethical issues are discussed, topics like algorithmic bias or social impact (beyond privacy and transparency) could have been emphasized more and broadened the ethical discussion.

In terms of broader implications, *Artificial Intelligence for Security*'s scope extends beyond its immediate case studies. Foremost, it underscores that AI is not just a set of algorithms, but a transformative factor in societal resilience. By framing AI security as critical to infrastructure protection, the volume acts as a call to use AI responsibly in an interconnected world. For example, emphasizing the safeguarding of energy grids and transportation nodes highlight that AI failure or misuse could have cascading effects on societies. As Falzone et al. note, modern systems generate "an ever-increasing number of log files" (p. 295) making human monitoring nearly impossible, which implies that AI-based solutions are not optional but necessary for early threat detection. Thus, a point could be made that investing in AI security research is essential for public welfare.

Furthermore, the dual focus on security and ethics helps shape the discourse on "trustworthy AI". Through the chapters on differential privacy and explainability, the book contributes to the policy discussion about how to make AI systems transparent and accountable. The volume's coverage of these topics aligns with ongoing global efforts (e.g. EU's AI Act, Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers' (IEEE) AI ethics standards) to regulate AI. For instance, referencing DP and XAI in a security context shows that privacy and transparency can be built into defensive technologies, not just compliance checkboxes. This integrated approach may influence both the IT community (to prioritize interpretable models) and regulators (to recognize technical solutions).

The book also bridges the gap between research and practice. The detailed case studies and results can inform practitioners on best practices to gain insight into current real-world problems – they can see what data and metrics matter in industrial settings (as shown in the log-monitoring chapter).

Finally, by highlighting remaining challenges, the book sets an agenda for future directions of research. The concluding sections of several chapters point to open problems: for example, Alqarni and Azim stress the difficulty of obtaining balanced IoT datasets and detecting rare attacks. These threads suggest directions for researchers (e.g. better data collection). Policymakers may also glean from the case studies that cybersecurity budgets and standards must adapt to AI-enabled systems. In all, the volume positions AI as a tool that can both strengthen security and create new security needs. The volume's balanced treatment implies that stakeholders must advance AI innovations hand-in-hand with governance measures to maximize benefits and minimize harm.

In conclusion, *Artificial Intelligence for Security* is a timely and substantive contribution to the emerging literature on AI's role in cybersecurity and infrastructure protection. Its greatest achievement is the balance it strikes between advanced technical content and the depth of reflection. The editors and contributors provide a comprehensive resource that spans privacy-preserving analytics, system robustness, and practical detection tools. The volume's multidisciplinary outlook and emphasis on ethical guardrails make it all the more valuable as it demonstrates how AI research can be aligned with societal and governance concerns.

Nevertheless, the review's critique stands, future work should incorporate a wider geopolitical perspective. AI security does not exist in a vacuum, and addressing global policy, cultural, and legal dimensions would enhance the policymakers' ability to regulate the industry.

As a final observation, I would posit that the book will serve as a useful guide for scholars charting new research, for practitioners seeking AI solutions to real problems, and for policymakers looking for technically grounded insights. Ultimately, the editors succeed in delivering "unique perspectives to enhancing protection" (p. 6) in an AI-driven era, with the book representing as a significant step toward understanding how intelligent systems can help safeguard the future – a future in which security and innovation must advance together.

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- Fasiku, Gbenga Cornelius and Adinoyi Anakobe Peter, "Vulnerability as Meaning: Reflections on the Loss of Human Fragility in Transhumanist Futures", *University Abuja Journal of Humanities* 6 no. 2 (2025): 240-248.
- Fasiku, Gbenga Cornelius and Muhammed Fatima, "The Dignity in Labour and Social Media Influencer Culture: Implication for Work Ethic and Socio-Economic Aspirations", *Ochendo: An African Journal of Innovation Studies* 6, no. 1 (April 2025): 102-110.
- Fasiku, Gbenga Cornelius & Stephen Emmanuel, "Enhancement Technology and African Perspective on Beauty: Exploring the Impact of Global Beauty Standard on African Cultural Identity", *Nnadiebube Journal of Gender Studies* 8, no. 2 (February 2025): 132-138.

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  - Filimon, Luiza-Maria, *On Postmodernism in International Relations (1): Poststructuralist Considerations on Theory, Language, and Discourse* (Bucureşti: Editura Tritonic, 2024);
  - Ivănescu, Mihaela, and Luiza-Maria Filimon. "What Do National Parties Campaign on during European Elections? Trends from Romania". *L'Europe Unie* 20 (2023): 119-135.
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- Domenii de interes: poststructuralism şi problematica securității, narațiuni discriminatorii codificate în discursurile politice americane şi europene contemporane, practici de, reborderizare şi tehnologii de securitate a frontierelor în contextul crizei migrației, radicalismul de dreapta şi mainstreamingul dreptei radicale
- Publicații recente:
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  - Filimon, Luiza-Maria, "The Wall as Marker of Identity Construction at the US-Mexico Border, *Studia Securitatis. Security Studies Magazine* 19, no. 1 (June 2025): 44-62;

  - Filimon, Luiza-Maria, *On Postmodernism in International Relations (1): Poststructuralist Considerations on Theory, Language, and Discourse* (Bucureşti: Editura Tritonic, 2024);
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  - Ivănescu, Mihaela, and Luiza-Maria Filimon. "What Do National Parties Campaign on during European Elections? Trends from Romania". *L'Europe Unie* 20 (2023): 119-135;
  - Ivănescu, Mihaela. "Electing the Mayors in Romania's Big Cities in 2020: Voter Turnout, Legislative Changes, and the COVID-19 Pandemic". *Revista de Ştiinţe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 75 (2022): 49-61;
  - Ivănescu, Mihaela. "Pandemic Side-Effects or Same Old Electoral Apathy? The Impact of the Covid-19 Crisis on the 2020 Parliamentary Elections in Romania", *Serbian Political Thought*, no. 4 (2022): 123-141;
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  - Ivănescu, Mihaela. "Electing the Mayors in Romania's Big Cities in 2020: Voter Turnout, Legislative Changes, and the COVID-19 Pandemic". *Revista de Ştiinţe Politice. Revue des Sciences Politiques*, no. 75 (2022): 49-61;
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- Author of the volume *Un adulter în familia comunistă. România și SUA în anii 60* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2016).
- Together with Florin Anghel and Metin Omer, coordinated the volume *Marea loc al memorie și al desfășurărilor geostrategice* (Târgoviște: Editura Cetatea de Scaun, 2014); also coordinator along with Emanuel Plopeanu and Metin Omer, of the volume *The Empire. Between Dispute and Nostalgia* (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2021).
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- His research focuses on the subject of international migrations in Africa and its impact on cross-border insecurity.
- Among notable publications, he has published the article: "Tchadians and Central Africans refugees in Cameroon: Social upheaval in a host country*",* *African Review of Migration and Environment. Revue Africaine de Migration et Environnement* 3 no 2 (Décembre 2019): 57-84.
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- Printre publicațiile notabile, a publicat articolul: "Tchadians and Central Africans refugees in Cameroon: Social upheaval in a host country", *African*

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- He has worked with the Swiss Military Academy ETH Zurich, Switzerland on a book project titled *Captivity in War* and recently on an anthology about *Strategy and Military Technology* and *Visions of African Unity* with the International Studies Department, University of Utrecht, Netherlands and the International Studies Group at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein South Africa.
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- Autorul este stabilit în prezent în Rajasthan ca cercetător independent, unde se dedică cercetării de impact, contribuind la dezvoltarea locală a comunității academice cât și a celei profesionale.
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