



Research Article

Beyond Borders: Conflict Mediation and Governance in Central Asia's Fergana Valley

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Abstract: Borders are not just territorial lines but instruments of power that regulate mobility, security, and sovereignty. This article examines the evolving politics of border disputes and their resolution in the Fergana Valley, a historically unstable region shared by Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Despite recent legal agreements to demarcate state borders, tensions remain over access to water, the management of enclaves, and the control of infrastructure. Drawing on political geography, mediation theory, and peacebuilding, this article argues that demarcation of borders does not eliminate disputes but reshapes them through new forms of exclusion and securitization. Using a synthesis of case analysis and theoretical literature, the study shows the extent to which Central Asia's borders continue to be shaped by historical traumas, geopolitical dependencies, and resource interdependencies. This article contributes to debates on territorial governance, conflict transformation, and post-settlement dynamics by emphasizing that sustainable peace requires not only legal clarity but also integrative, relational approaches to sovereignty and spatial coexistence.

Keywords: border securitization, territorial governance, mediation, sovereignty, exclusion, Central Asia, geopolitics.

Introduction

Borders are not merely territorial demarcations; they are instruments of power that regulate sovereignty, mobility, security, and exclusion. Political geography

has long debated¹ whether borders function as fixed state perimeters² or as dynamic spaces of governance, contestation, and control.³ In practice, borders operate both as legal frameworks that establish sovereignty and as socially constructed sites where power is negotiated and resistance emerges. The Fergana Valley in Central Asia exemplifies this duality: a historically fragmented territory and, at the same time, a contemporary zone for geopolitical maneuvering, infrastructural leverage, and resource-based security.

This study examines the Fergana Valley—a densely populated and politically sensitive region divided among Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—through the lens of critical political geography and conflict resolution theory. Despite a series of recent diplomatic agreements aimed at resolving long-standing disputes, most notably the 2023 Kyrgyz-Uzbek demarcation and the 2024 Kyrgyz-Tajik border settlement, tensions persist over water management,⁴ enclave governance, ethnic coexistence, and cross-border trade.⁵ These tensions suggest that legal demarcation alone cannot resolve the deeper spatial⁶ and symbolic conflicts that animate border politics.⁷ This study, therefore, addresses the following overarching question: How are historical legacies, resource governance, and recent diplomatic agreements shaping the evolving dynamics of border securitization and conflict resolution in the Fergana Valley?

To answer this question, the study examines: (a) how historical territorial constructions continue to influence contemporary disputes; (b) how water, energy, and economic dependencies reinforce border control and geopolitical entanglements; and (c) how recent legal agreements reshape, rather than resolve, issues of sovereignty, exclusion, and security. Borders are thus considered not as passive outcomes of state negotiations but as active, relational spaces shaped

¹ John Agnew, "Borders on the Mind: Re-framing Border Thinking," *Ethics & Global Politics* 1, no. 4 (2008): 175-191, <https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v1i4.1892>.

² Paul Reuber, "Conflict Studies and Critical Geopolitics – Theoretical Concepts and Recent Research in Political Geography," *GeoJournal* 50 (2000): 37-43, <https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007155730730>.

³ Chiara Brambilla, Jussi Laine, and Gianluca Bocchi, *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making* (London: Routledge, 2016).

⁴ Sirojiddin Gulomov, "Politics of Partition: Understanding Border Issues in Central Asia," *Science and Innovation: International Scientific Journal* 2, no. 10 (October 2023): 5-16, <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8422408>.

⁵ Niels Drost, Giulia Cretti, and Babette van Giersbergen, "Central Asia Emerging from the Shadows: European Union – Central Asia Relations in Evolving Eurasian Geopolitics," *Clingendael Report* (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations "Clingendael," January 2025), <https://www.clingendael.org/pub/2025/central-asia-emerging-from-the-shadows/>.

⁶ Krista E. Wiegand, "Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes," *International Negotiation: A Journal of Theory and Practice* 19, no. 2 (2014): 343-370, <https://doi.org/10.1163/15718069-12341281>.

⁷ Wei Cheng, "Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia," *Journal of Conflict Management* 4, no. 3 (2024): 1-13, <https://doi.org/10.47604/jcm.2627>.

by infrastructure, power asymmetries, and geopolitical competition. Building on Klare's insight that 21st-century conflicts are increasingly defined by struggles over resource corridors and infrastructural sovereignty,⁸ the Fergana case reveals how water, energy, and labor migration reinforce border contestation even after formal agreements are signed.⁹ The valley's hydropolitics, centered on the Syr Darya River and upstream reservoirs, serve as flashpoints for both state rivalry and transnational cooperation.¹⁰

Methodologically, this study adopts a synthesis approach grounded in critical political geography and conflict studies. Rather than conducting fieldwork, it draws on scholarly literature, policy reports, and empirical case studies to reassess the implications of border resolution efforts. It engages theoretical frameworks from mediation studies,¹¹ alternative dispute resolution,¹² and spatial conflict transformation,¹³ bringing them into dialogue with the evolving material and symbolic geographies of the valley.¹⁴

This study argues that while border agreements mark a shift in legal sovereignty, they rarely take into account the infrastructural, environmental, or emotional realities that are responsible for the recurrence of conflict. In this sense, the Ferghana Valley contributes to broader theoretical debates in political geography, particularly in relation to the limits of technocratic border demarcation and the need for relational, multi-scalar frameworks for peacebuilding.¹⁵ As re-

⁸ Michael T. Klare, "The New Geography of Conflict," *Foreign Affairs* 80, no. 3 (2001): 49-61, www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2001-05-01/new-geography-conflict.

⁹ Sukhrob Buronov, "Water Geopolitics in Central Asia: Threat Analysis," *Oriental Journal of History, Politics and Law* 3, no. 3 (2023): 27-34, <https://supportscience.uz/index.php/ojhpl/article/view/549>; see also Kemel Toktomushev, "Understanding Cross-Border Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia: The Case of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 17, no. 1 (2018): 21-41, <https://doi.org/10.11610/Connections.17.1.02>.

¹⁰ Shavkat Kenjabaev and Hans-Georg Frede, "Irrigation Infrastructure in Fergana Today: Ecological Implications – Economic Necessities," in *Society – Water – Technology: A Critical Appraisal of Major Water Engineering Projects*, ed. Reinhard F. Hüttlet et al. (Cham: Springer, 2016), 129-148, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-18971-0_10.

¹¹ Wiegand, "Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes," 350.

¹² Siti Rahmah et al., "Resolution of Land Disputes Through Mediation," *Mahadi: Indonesia Journal of Law* 3, no. 1 (2024): 51-62, <https://doi.org/10.32734/mah.v3i01.15763>.

¹³ Maria-Adriana Deiana, Milena Komarova, and Cathal McCall, "Cross-Border Cooperation as Conflict Transformation: Promises and Limitations in EU Peacebuilding," *Geopolitics* 24, no. 3 (2019): 529-540, 535, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2019.1599518>.

¹⁴ Bogdan Derevyanko et al., "Legal Foundations for Resolving Land Disputes Through Mediation as an Alternative Dispute Resolution Method," *European Energy and Environmental Law Review* 32, no. 5 (2023): 248-256, <https://doi.org/10.54648/eeelr2023014>.

¹⁵ Nick Megoran, "Taking Account of Authoritarian Peacebuilding in Post-Liberal State-building in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey* 42, no. 4 (2023): 732-734, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02634937.2023.2271528>.

cent escalations in enclave zones, such as Vorukh and unresolved water-sharing disputes demonstrate, conflict does not end at the signing table;¹⁶ it is refracted through governance practices, social tensions, and the evolving strategies of regional and external actors.¹⁷

By reinterpreting borders as fluid arenas of negotiation rather than static outcomes, this study contributes to the literature on post-imperial territorial governance, mediation in highly sensitive conflicts, and the role of infrastructure in peacemaking. It places the evolving border politics of Central Asia alongside comparable cases in Kashmir, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Israel-Palestine, where formal agreements coexist with continued securitization, ethnic tensions, and geopolitical realignment. In this way, it offers both a theoretical contribution to the understanding of borders and a practical reflection on what is needed for lasting conflict transformation in fragile border regions.¹⁸

In view of the conceptual nature of this article, a separate section on methodology has been omitted. Instead, this study integrates method and theory into its analytical structure.

Review of Scholarship and Analytical Approach

In conflict-prone regions, border governance requires analytical frameworks that go beyond static concepts of territory and sovereignty. Traditional political geography viewed borders as fixed state power demarcations, but contemporary scholarship sees them as fluid, negotiated,¹⁹ and symbolic spaces of identity, exclusion, and resource control.²⁰ This is particularly evident in the Fergana Valley, where post-Soviet legacies, ethnic fragmentation, cross-border resource conflicts, and competing geopolitical interests intersect.

Borders as Contested Spatial Practices

Within political geography, recent shifts have emphasized constructionist and multi-scalar perspectives that treat borders not as territorial lines but as lived,

¹⁶ Yevgeny Ivanov, "Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan," in *Handbook of Revolutions in the 21st Century: The New Waves of Revolutions, and the Causes and Effects of Disruptive Political Change*, ed. Jack A. Goldstone, Leonid Grinin, and Andrey Korotayev (Cham: Springer, 2022), 517-547, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-86468-2_20.

¹⁷ See, for example, Helena Desivilya Syna, "Negotiating Distinctiveness and Building Resilience: Arab and Jewish Women's Acts of Micro-Emancipation in the Context of Israeli Municipal Councils," *Conflict Resolution Quarterly* 42, no. 1 (Fall 2024): 181-199, <https://doi.org/10.1002/crq.21440>.

¹⁸ See also B. K. Sharma, "Geopolitics in Central Asia: Implications for India," *Indian Foreign Affairs Journal* 16, no. 4 (2021): 322-330, [https://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol16/16\(4\)/ARTICLE%204.pdf](https://www.associationdiplomats.org/Publications/ifaj/Vol16/16(4)/ARTICLE%204.pdf).

¹⁹ Brambilla, Laine, and Bocchi, *Borderscaping: Imaginations and Practices of Border Making*.

²⁰ Reuber, "Conflict Studies and Critical Geopolitics," 40; see also Toktomushev, "Understanding Cross-Border Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia," 30.

relational processes.²¹ In the Fergana Valley, the borders drawn through Soviet ethno-territorial engineering remain flashpoints not simply because of legal ambiguity but because they bisect historically entangled communities, shared infrastructures, and symbolic geographies.²² These layered contestations transform enclaves, rivers, and checkpoints into emotionally charged and politically constructed spaces.

Such borders remain “alive” through daily encounters, informal economies, securitized mobility, and infrastructural violence. In this context, sovereignty is not resolved through treaties but is performed and contested daily through surveillance, water control, and road access. Moreover, non-state actors and local communities often redefine spatial meaning through bottom-up practices,²³ producing alternative imaginaries that resist elite narratives. Thus, peacebuilding must engage with how space is experienced and symbolized, not just how it is defined.

This reconceptualization has direct implications for conflict resolution in several ways. It demands a shift from “technical demarcation” to “spatial transformation,” a process that must account for the affective geographies of fear, identity, and trauma. Mediation strategies, as Cheng²⁴ and, a decade earlier, Wiegand showed,²⁵ are most effective when they address both conflicting interests and competing spatial narratives, reframing borders as political projects that are open to negotiation.

The Resource Turn: Conflict and Environmental Sovereignty

Territorial disputes in Central Asia increasingly follow resource-based logic rather than traditional geopolitical rivalries. Michael Klare’s thesis on the “new geography of conflict” anticipated that the defining battlegrounds of the 21st century would be over access to water, energy, and minerals, not ideological control.²⁶ In the Fergana Valley, this prognosis has proven prescient. Conflicts over hydropower infrastructure, irrigation systems, and transboundary water rights now dominate regional border tensions.

This shift reflects what Steinberg and Peters described as a “volumetric” understanding of sovereignty – a framework that considers sovereignty as extending beyond surface boundaries into subterranean, atmospheric, and ecological

²¹ Reuber, “Conflict Studies and Critical Geopolitics,” 40.

²² Nick Megoran and Shavkat Rakhmatullaev, “Authoritarianism, Ethnic Management and Non-Securitisation: The Kyrgyz Minority in Uzbekistan,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 74, no. 2 (2022): 237-265, 245, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09668136.2022.2032603>.

²³ Tal Levy, “Political Geography and Grassroots Conflict Resolution,” in *People-to-People Diplomacy in Israel and Palestine*, ed. Sapir Handelman (London: Routledge, 2014), 140-154, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315540276>.

²⁴ Cheng, “Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia,” 7.

²⁵ Wiegand, “Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes,” 350.

²⁶ Klare, “The New Geography of Conflict,” 55.

domains.²⁷ In the Syr Darya Basin, for instance, control over upstream reservoirs and seasonal water flows functions as a form of territorial power, restructuring regional hierarchies and producing new hydro-political dependencies.

Resource conflicts, however, elude classical solution models. Their intractability, fragmentation, and embeddedness in the infrastructure make them unsuitable for territorial solutions. These tensions are further exacerbated by the intersection of ethnic grievances and historical marginalization, making environmental sovereignty both a technical and symbolic issue. External actors such as Russia and China complicate matters further by embedding control over infrastructure in new geopolitical dependencies.²⁸

Resolving these conflicts requires environmentally embedded conflict resolution strategies. Khan and Ali suggest that infrastructure, when planned inclusively, can serve as a “tool of cooperation,” reframing borders as zones of interdependence.²⁹ Yet this requires institutional arrangements that ensure joint management, environmental sustainability, and equitable benefit sharing. Otherwise, resource-based development risks entrenching asymmetries and exacerbating conflicts. The shift toward resource sovereignty demands new paradigms of peacebuilding based on environmental justice, infrastructural justice, and transboundary ecological cooperation.

Mediation and Ethno-Spatial Dialogue

In environments saturated with identity, memory, and symbolic trauma, conventional diplomacy often fails to resolve conflicts. The Fergana Valley presents such a case, where overlapping enclaves and nested ethnic communities continue to clash despite formal agreements to the contrary.³⁰ Wiegand found that conflicts based on intangible claims—ethnicity, religion, and identity—are more likely to escalate and benefit from “directive mediation” that actively shapes outcomes rather than merely facilitating dialogue.³¹

Cheng’s work underscores the importance of “multi-track” mediation, involving civil society actors, informal facilitators, and local institutions, especially when elite diplomacy stagnates.³² Derevyanko and coauthors added that effec-

²⁷ Philip Steinberg and Kimberley Peters, “Wet Ontologies, Fluid Spaces: Giving Depth to Volume through Oceanic Thinking,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 33, no. 2 (2015): 247-264, <https://doi.org/10.1068/d14148p>.

²⁸ Ivanov, “Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan,” 525; see also Toktomushev, “Understanding Cross-Border Conflict in Post-Soviet Central Asia,” 30.

²⁹ Sarah Khan and Ahmed Ali, “Cross-Border Infrastructure Projects and Regional Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Regional Connectivity and Development* 2, no. 1 (2023): 172-183, www.journalofregionalconnectivityanddevelopment.com/index.php/2/article/view/19.

³⁰ W. John Morgan, “Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, and Modernity in China and Russia,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 66, no. 2 (June 2023): 279-285, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15387216.2023.2225069>.

³¹ Wiegand, “Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes,” 350.

³² Cheng, “Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia,” 7.

tive mediation must be culturally adaptable, legally supported,³³ and embedded in inclusive procedures – features rarely present in existing Central Asian mechanisms.

However, mediation alone cannot guarantee sustainable peace in the long term. As Pugh showed in the Ecuador-Colombia border context,³⁴ peacebuilding only succeeds when it is linked to local ownership, institutional co-governance, and long-term sequencing. This aligns with the concept of “borderscapes,”³⁵ which understands borders as socially produced, multi-actor spaces shaped by both geopolitical pressures and everyday life.

At the macro level, cross-border infrastructure fosters economic interdependence and diplomatic trust.³⁶ At the micro level, grassroots actors often model alternative spatial imaginaries. Syna demonstrated how women in Israeli municipal councils use informal strategies—such as lobbying, coalition-building, and symbolic disruption—to reshape ethnically stratified institutions.³⁷ Levy, through the *Minds of Peace Experiment*, further reveals how simulated public negotiations can generate territorially flexible, pragmatic solutions, reframing space as co-constructed rather than zero-sum.³⁸ Taken together, these studies argue for a hybrid model of conflict resolution in border regions that combines formal mediation with ethno-spatial dialogue, institutional change, and grassroots engagement.

Toward a Transformative Framework for Border Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding in the Fergana Valley and similarly contested spaces must address the material, symbolic, and infrastructural dimensions of conflict. This entails (a) deploying mediation not as a single event but as a relational, multi-level process; (b) institutionalizing community-based dialogue platforms across borders; (c) designing cross-border infrastructure with equity and environmental foresight; and (d) reimagining sovereignty through shared spatial governance rather than rigid territorial control. Where borders are experienced as trauma, history, and exclusion, resolution must occur not only through treaties but also through space-sensitive practices that reconfigure how territory is lived, shared, and governed. The most effective interventions will be those that mediate spaces and interests, transforming contested borders into platforms for coexistence, resilience, and long-term peace.

³³ Derevyanko et al., “Legal Foundations for Resolving Land Disputes Through Mediation,” 250.

³⁴ Jeffrey D. Pugh, “Peacebuilding among Transnational Youth in Migrant-Receiving Border Regions of Ecuador,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 11, no. 3 (2016): 83-97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15423166.2016.1222591>.

³⁵ Deiana, Komarova, and McCall, “Cross-Border Cooperation as Conflict Transformation.”

³⁶ Khan and Ali, “Cross-Border Infrastructure Projects and Regional Peacebuilding,” 175.

³⁷ Syna, “Negotiating Distinctiveness and Building Resilience,” 190.

³⁸ Levy, “Political Geography and Grassroots Conflict Resolution,” 145

Framework for This Study

This study applies a hybrid theoretical framework that synthesizes three complementary strands of research:

- Critical political geography, which forms the basis for analyzing how sovereignty, exclusion, and territoriality are not fixed but are continuously produced and contested through spatial practices in the Fergana Valley
- The geopolitics of resources, which enables the study of how trans-boundary water and energy infrastructures and migration flows produce dependencies and inequalities that complicate border governance, and
- Conflict resolution and peacebuilding theory, particularly in the areas of mediation, ethno-spatial dialogue, and infrastructure diplomacy, which provides tools for transforming territorially embedded conflicts through inclusive, multi-scalar, and community-rooted approaches.

By integrating these perspectives, this article approaches the Fergana Valley not simply as a region characterized by unresolved territorial tensions but as a critical laboratory for testing strategies for conflict transformation. It argues that space must be understood simultaneously as a source of contestation and a medium for peace, with sustainable solutions requiring both institutional reconfiguration and reconceptualized spatial relationships.

Border Disputes in Central Asia

In Central Asia, borders are not static cartographic demarcations but dynamic spaces of geopolitical conflict, historical legacies, and socio-political frictions (Figure 1). Nowhere is this more evident than in the Fergana Valley, where the territories of Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan intersect. This densely populated, resource-rich, and multi-ethnic region has long been considered the most volatile border area in Central Asia. Its strategic importance—rooted in agriculture, hydrology, and infrastructure—has exacerbated disputes over territorial control and sovereignty.³⁹

The political geography of the Fergana Valley is inextricably linked to its territorial organization in the Soviet era, particularly the 1924 Nation-Territory Delineation (NTD) policy, which divided the region into incongruous administrative units. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, these internal boundaries became international frontiers, embedding ethnic tensions and infrastructural interdependencies within a rigid state framework. For example, as of 2016, the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border contained 58 unresolved segments, triggering frequent local disputes and fueling nationalist rhetoric.⁴⁰

³⁹ Megoran, "Taking Account of Authoritarian Peacebuilding in *Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia*."

⁴⁰ Eric McGlinchey, "The April 2021 Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Dispute: Historical and Causal Context," Crossroads Policy Brief 2-2021, *Crossroads Central Asia*, July 2021, 1-8,

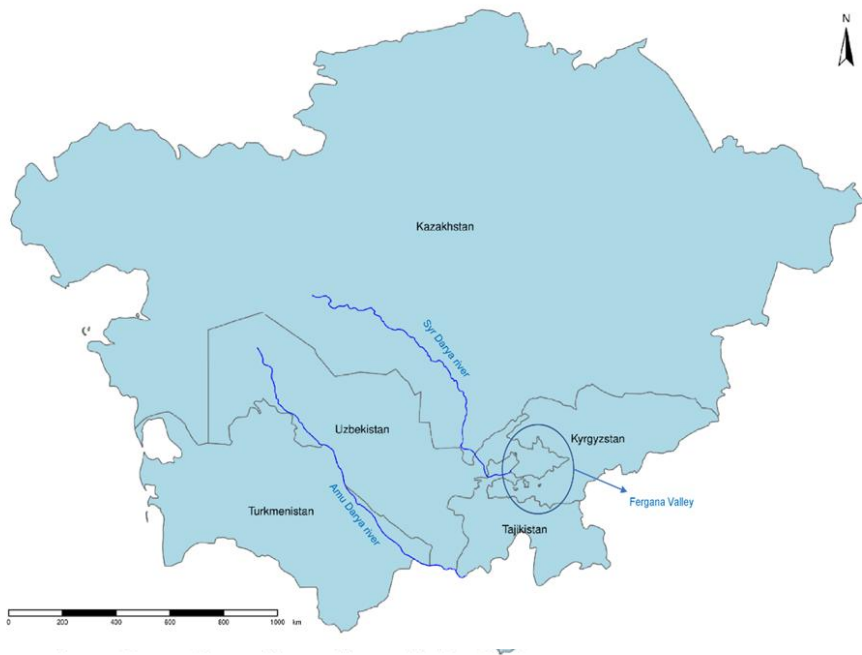


Figure 1: Map of Central Asia.

As shown in Figure 2, these borders do not function as neutral demarcations but as instruments of regional power projection. In the post-Soviet period, states responded to instability by securing borders, militarizing checkpoints, erecting barriers, and deploying troops to the region. The uprisings of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the late 1990s reinforced this security logic and turned the Fergana Valley into a frontline of extremism and the state's vulnerability.⁴¹ Meanwhile, ethnic riots in 1990 and 2010, particularly in Osh, exposed how borders intersect not only with territorial claims but also with identity politics, demographic friction, and state-minority dynamics.⁴²

Within this volatile landscape, border demarcation is not a mere legal or technical task but "a contested form of spatial governance." It shapes access to water, movement, trade, and national identity. The legacies of the Tajik civil war

<https://crossroads-ca.org/the-april-2021-kyrgyz-tajik-border-dispute-historical-and-causal-context/>.

⁴¹ Muhammad Manzoor Elahi et al., "Soviet Practices of (B)ordering: Mapping Blur Borders and Identity Crisis in Post-Soviet Fergana Valley, Central Asia," *Journal of Positive School Psychology* 7, no. 3 (2023): 954-970, <https://journalppw.com/index.php/jpsp/article/view/16267>.

⁴² Megoran and Rakhmatullaev, "Authoritarianism, Ethnic Management and Non-Securitisation: The Kyrgyz Minority in Uzbekistan."

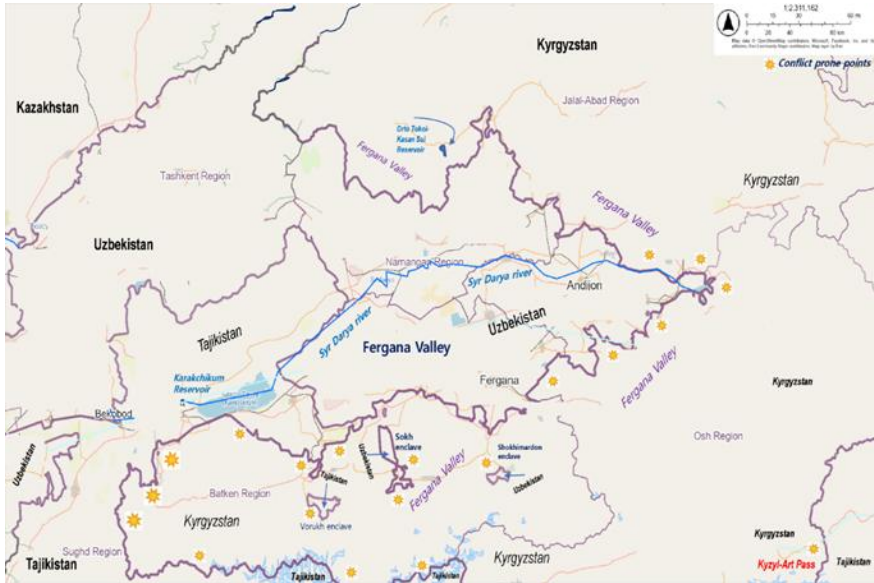


Figure 2: Map of Fergana Valley and Border Conflict-Prone Areas.

(1992–1997) continue to hinder boundary agreements, particularly those with Kyrgyzstan.⁴³ Uzbekistan’s past reliance on unilateral border enforcement—such as mining border areas and fencing off disputed segments—has further entrenched mutual distrust and fragmented regional infrastructure.⁴⁴

Recent agreements, however, have ushered in a new phase. The settlement of the Kyrgyz-Tajik border dispute in 2024 and the land swap between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan over the Barak exclave indicate that border politics in Central Asia are evolving from static territorial defense to negotiated interdependence.⁴⁵ These developments signal a shift from hardened sovereignty to “flexible governance,” prioritizing stability, mobility, and pragmatic cooperation.

The recognition of exclaves and the guarantee of unhindered transit corridors reflect this new dynamic in the region. The rapprochement between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan is another example of how the political benefits of unresolved disputes may be diminishing as economic constraints and geopolitical alignments come to the fore. However, the resolution of border disputes does not eliminate their political function. Rather, it repositions them as strategic assets and points of leverage in trade, infrastructure, and regional connectivity.⁴⁶

⁴³ Zhulduz Baizakova, “Border Issues in Central Asia: Current Conflicts, Controversies and Compromises,” *Revista UNISCI* 45 (2017): 221-234, <https://www.redalyc.org/articulo.oa?id=76754084010>.

⁴⁴ Gulomov, “Politics of Partition: Understanding Border Issues in Central Asia,” 10.

⁴⁵ Drost, Cretti, and van Giersbergen, “Central Asia Emerging from the Shadows.”

⁴⁶ Sharma, “Geopolitics in Central Asia,” 325.

This shift is also reflected in the increasing internationalization of resource management. The fact that Tajikistan co-hosted the 2023 UN Water Conference with the Netherlands underscores how water—once a trigger for regional hostilities—is now being used as a platform for diplomatic engagement.⁴⁷ Similarly, trans-Eurasian trade routes, such as the EU-backed Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), are redefining regional geopolitics by rerouting flows away from Russia's Northern Corridor.⁴⁸ Yet this realignment is not without risk; it may strengthen China's regional influence and allow Russia to bypass sanctions indirectly.⁴⁹

At the same time, the Central Asian states are seeking southern trade corridors through Pakistan and Iran, prioritizing access to the sea over Eurasian interdependence. This recalibration reflects a broader regional strategy that is shifting from landlocked marginality to geopolitical agency. In this context, borders are no longer markers of exclusion but instruments of economic strategy and political signaling.⁵⁰ Sovereignty agreements may reduce the likelihood of violent conflict, but they also shift the terrain of contestation toward resource governance, connectivity, and external influence. The Fergana Valley, once a symbol of fragmentation, now embodies the region's ambition to transform borders into bridges – a space not of rigid division but of fluid negotiation and strategic interdependence.⁵¹

Complexities around the Fergana Valley

Border Complexities: The Shifting Dynamics of Territorial Tensions

The Fergana Valley is more than a borderland; it is a crucible of overlapping sovereignties, fractured spatial identities, and unresolved infrastructural entanglements. To understand its evolving territorial tensions, one must move beyond descriptive accounts and examine how border governance, mediation failures, and enclave isolation reproduce conflicts despite recent diplomatic breakthroughs.

⁴⁷ United Nations, "Report of the United Nations Conference on the Midterm Comprehensive Review of the Implementation of the Objectives of the International Decade for Action, 'Water for Sustainable Development' 2018–2028, New York, 22–24 March 2023," <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4031378?ln=en&v=pdf>.

⁴⁸ World Bank, "Improving Transport Connectivity in Central Asia Requires a Coherent Approach," Press Release No. 2021/ECA/77, April 2, 2021, 12, www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/04/02/improving-transport-connectivity-in-central-asia-requires-a-coherent-approach.

⁴⁹ Drost, Cretti, and van Giersbergen, "Central Asia Emerging from the Shadows."

⁵⁰ See, for example, Pauline Lövgren, "Responsibility to Protect, Eurasianism, or Russkiy Mir?" Master's Essay (Stockholm University, 2022), <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A1665018&dsid=8501>.

⁵¹ Andrew Foxall, "Borders, Boundaries, and Central Asia Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 23, no. 3 (2018): 743–746, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1451845>.

Spanning multiple subnational regions (Table 1), the valley remains ecologically interconnected but politically fragmented, shaped by asymmetrical access to land, water, and transit rights. These material disparities are inseparable from the region's ethno-spatial complexity, where nested communities are divided not only by borders but also by differential mobility regimes and uneven infrastructural reach.⁵² As Wiegand has argued, such disputes—rooted in identity and territory⁵³—are particularly prone to escalation and resistant to standard legalistic resolutions.

While the geography of the valley is fixed, the political significance of its borders has shifted over the decades: from post-Soviet fragmentation to securitized fortification and, more recently, to negotiated stabilization. However, these transitions reveal more than just tactical shifts; they expose the limits of both state-centered border demarcation and top-down conflict management.

Table 1. Fergana Valley Regional Division.

Country	Region	Area (km ²)	Wholly within the Valley
Kyrgyzstan	Batken	17,000	No
	Jalal-Abad	33,700	No
	Osh City	50	Yes
	Osh Region	29,200	No
Tajikistan	Sughd	25,400	No
Uzbekistan	Andijan	4,303	Yes
	Fergana	7,005	Yes
	Namangan	7,101	Yes
Totals		123,759	

Compiled by the authors on the basis of publicly available statistics.

Escalation Without Resolution: A Pattern of Fragmented Governance

1990s–2000s: From Ethnic Tensions to Securitized Inertia

In the 1990s, territorial ambiguities produced by Soviet ethno-territorial design erupted into ethnic violence, most notably the 1990 Osh riots.⁵⁴ These were not isolated incidents but symptomatic of what Dyachuk and Kazbayeva described as “unaddressed identity asymmetries,”⁵⁵ where the absence of reconciliation

⁵² Buronov, “Water Geopolitics in Central Asia: Threat Analysis,” 30.

⁵³ Wiegand, “Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes,” 350.

⁵⁴ Nick Megoran, “For Ethnography in Political Geography: Experiencing and Re-imagining Ferghana Valley Boundary Closures,” *Political Geography* 25, no. 6 (2006): 622–640, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2006.05.005>.

⁵⁵ Marianna I. Dyachuk and Assel G. Kazbayeva, “Particular Qualities of Reconciliation Procedures in the Interethnic Conflict,” *Bulletin of the Institute of Legislation and Legal*

procedures and ethno-mediation allowed historical grievances to harden into spatial segregation.

Subsequent securitization, border fencing, military deployments, and enclave isolation deepened the structural rift between ethnic groups and states. Uzbekistan's unilateral border closure policies in the 2000s exemplify what Klare would call the "weaponization of space," where access to mobility, water, and even kin networks became contingent on state-enforced territorial control.⁵⁶

However, such strategies were counterproductive in managing enclave disputes, which intensified during this period. Communities like Sokh, Shokhimardon, and Vorukh became *political anomalies* – physically surrounded, politically unintegrated, and functionally disconnected. As Cheng argued,⁵⁷ these "micro-territorial crises" are emblematic of disputes that require directive mediation strategies and culturally embedded third-party engagement; yet, none were attempted during this era.

2010s–2020s: Negotiation Emerges, but Underlying Frictions Remain

By the 2010s, diplomatic fatigue and the recurrence of ethnic riots (e.g., Osh, 2010) revealed the limitations of securitized containment. However, this era still lacked a robust mediation infrastructure or localized peacebuilding mechanisms. Wiegand emphasized that territorial disputes with high salience,⁵⁸ particularly those involving enclaves or ethnic claims, are often three times more likely to be mediated, yet this presupposes institutional readiness and political will, both of which remain lacking.

It was not until the 2020s that a genuine "strategic pivot" occurred. Landmark agreements, such as the Kyrgyz-Tajik delimitation deal (2024) and the Uzbekistan-Kyrgyz Barak land exchange, marked not only border settlements but also structural shifts in regional diplomacy.⁵⁹ However, as Filyaeva cautioned in her study of non-territorial interethnic conflicts, legal clarity alone does not ensure stability.⁶⁰ Without institutional inclusion and community dialogue, such agreements risk becoming elite-managed solutions detached from local realities.

Simultaneously, hydro-political bargaining has re-emerged as a central vector of negotiation. Today, control over the Syr Darya and its feeder systems is not only the anchor for discussions about access to water, but also about sovereignty, dependency, and ecological resilience. As Siti Rahmah and colleagues argued in the context of land mediation, the success of any agreement hinges on

Information of the Republic of Kazakhstan 2, no. 77 (2024), https://doi.org/10.52026/2788-5291_2024_77_2_267.

⁵⁶ Klare, "The New Geography of Conflict," 55.

⁵⁷ Cheng, "Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia," 7.

⁵⁸ Wiegand, "Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes," 350.

⁵⁹ Drost, Cretti, and van Giersbergen, "Central Asia Emerging from the Shadows."

⁶⁰ Alina I. Filyaeva, "Institutional Settlement of Non-Territorial Interethnic Conflicts: Adaptation and Integration Strategies," *Russian Social and Humanitarian Journal* 2 (2023): 6, <https://doi.org/10.18384/2224-0209-2023-2-1283>. – in Russian

its enforceability, cultural fit, and implementation mechanisms,⁶¹ all of which remain fragile in the Fergana Valley context.

Toward a Multi-Layered Understanding of Border Politics

The recent de-escalation of territorial disputes should not be seen as a solution, but as a new order. The Fergana Valley today embodies a paradox: its formal borders are being resolved, while infrastructural and identity-related conflicts persist. The enclaves continue to pose unresolved logistical challenges, while regional connectivity projects such as the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR) reflect shifting geopolitical alignments, creating new dependencies and introducing new actors.⁶²

As Syna emphasized in her analysis of micro-emancipation in ethnically stratified institutions, spatial transformation cannot occur without grassroots agency.⁶³ This insight is especially relevant to the valley, where lived geographies continue to challenge state-level territorial fixes. The failure to integrate bottom-up dialogue, inclusive planning, and local negotiation platforms leaves open the possibility that the border conflict will flare up again – not along the old lines, but through new tensions over movement, access, and infrastructure.

From Dispute to Dilemma

In sum, the Fergana Valley presents a “post-securitization dilemma.” While formal agreements reduce the visibility of the conflict, they do not resolve the profound spatial and ethnic complexities that underlie border tensions. If anything, the shift from overt territorial disputes to resource and connectivity politics signals a more subtle but no less consequential phase in the evolution of Central Asia’s borders. To avoid history repeating itself, future governance must include: (a) locally based mediation platforms; (b) cross-border, conflict-sensitive infrastructure planning; and (c) a shift from territorial control to cooperative spatial management. This is not just about diplomacy, but about rethinking what it means to manage space in ethnically diverse, ecologically interdependent, and geopolitically fluid borderlands.

Resource Management Complexities

Resource governance in the Fergana Valley has transcended environmental and economic dimensions to become a core terrain of geopolitical contestation.⁶⁴ Conflicts over water, energy, migration, and illicit trade reveal that borders in

⁶¹ Rahmah et al., “Resolution of Land Disputes Through Mediation,” 55.

⁶² World Bank, “Improving Transport Connectivity in Central Asia Requires a Coherent Approach.”

⁶³ Syna, “Negotiating Distinctiveness and Building Resilience,” 190.

⁶⁴ Sobir Kurbanov, “Fostering Prosperity in the Fergana Valley through Economic Development, Cross Border Trade, and Investment,” Visiting Fellow Program (Xinjiang, PRC: CAREC Institute, December 2021), <https://www.carecinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/CI-VFP-2021-Fergana-Valley-10-Dec-2021.pdf>.

Central Asia are no longer simply territorial demarcations; they are strategic interfaces through which regional actors negotiate sovereignty, dependency, and global influence.

Hydropolitics as Sovereignty

The Syr Darya River remains at the heart of regional hydropolitics. Kyrgyzstan's control over upstream reservoirs, including the Orto-Tokoi-Kasan Sai and the Qambar-Ata-3 hydropower project, confers not only water regulation power but also geopolitical leverage over Uzbekistan, whose irrigation-heavy agriculture depends on consistent downstream flow.⁶⁵ Yet these frictions are not merely bilateral; they are embedded in infrastructure diplomacy, where water becomes a medium of both cooperation and coercion.

Steinberg and Peters' concept of "volumetric sovereignty" applies here: state control is exercised not only over land but also over hydraulic flows, dams, and seasonal discharges. The militarized standoff in 2016 at the Orto-Tokoi-Kasan Sai reservoir illustrates this dynamic: resource control becomes securitized, territorialized, and potentially weaponized, producing flashpoints that resist technical resolution.⁶⁶

Mediation approaches in such contexts, as highlighted by Cheng⁶⁷ and Derevyanko and coauthors,⁶⁸ require structured frameworks that blend legal enforceability, cultural legitimacy, and sustained institutional dialogue. However, the absence of permanent hydro-diplomatic institutions has left Central Asia vulnerable to cycles of escalation and temporary de-escalation, without systemic conflict transformation.

Energy Infrastructure and External Dependencies

Russia's strategic entrenchment in the region's energy infrastructure has transformed border governance into a function of geopolitical alignment.⁶⁹ Despite Uzbekistan's gas reserves, its continued dependence on Russian imports and the Rosatom-backed nuclear power plant illustrate how energy sovereignty is being

⁶⁵ See, for example, Andrei Dörre, "Changes in the Relationship Between Borders and Pastoral Mobility in Mountain Regions of Central Asia," in *Mapping Transition in the Pamirs: Changing Human-Environmental Landscapes*, ed. Hermann Kreutzmann and Teiji Watanabe (Cham: Springer, 2016), 95-112, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-23198-3_7.

⁶⁶ Rahmah et al., "Resolution of Land Disputes Through Mediation," 55.

⁶⁷ Cheng, "Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia," 7.

⁶⁸ Derevyanko et al., "Legal Foundations for Resolving Land Disputes Through Mediation," 250.

⁶⁹ John Heathershaw, Catherine Owen, and Alexander Cooley, "Centred Discourse, Decentred Practice: The Relational Production of Russian and Chinese 'Rising' Power in Central Asia," in *Rising Powers and State Transformation*, ed. Shahar Hameiri, Lee Jones, and John Heathershaw (London: Routledge, 2020), 44-62, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003020042>.

redefined through infrastructural capture.⁷⁰ Kyrgyzstan's own negotiations with Russia on nuclear technology reinforce this trend, indicating a shared regional vulnerability to external control.

Michael Klare anticipated this shift: in the “new geography of conflict,” resource corridors, not ideological blocs, define power relations.⁷¹ The infrastructural dependencies observed here validate that forecast. When control over energy infrastructure is concentrated in external hands, states lose autonomy not only over domestic energy policy but also over border diplomacy, especially when resource sharing and transit routes are negotiated under duress or unequal conditions.

Migration as a Security Vector

Resource politics extend into labor and migration. “Remittance dependence” — 32 % of GDP for Tajikistan, 27 % for Kyrgyzstan, and 18 % for Uzbekistan — anchors regional economies to Russia's labor market, which in turn shapes their border governance strategies and diplomatic flexibility.⁷² The fallout from the 2024 Crocus City Hall terror attack, involving Tajik nationals, triggered xenophobic crackdowns, forced deportations, and economic precarity, exposing the fragility of regional resilience to external policy shocks.

This securitization of migration has direct spatial consequences. Returnees, now jobless and politically stigmatized, exacerbate tensions in already vulnerable border zones.⁷³ As Filyaeva argued, unresolved interethnic tensions become amplified when social reintegration fails and economic despair rises — conditions now observable in enclaves and transboundary labor corridors.⁷⁴ Moreover, Russia's recruitment of Central Asian labor migrants for the war in Ukraine further blurs the boundary between migration governance and militarization, turning border policies into tools of transnational conflict participation.⁷⁵

Illicit Trade and Sanctions Evasion

Emerging trade routes and “sanctions evasion mechanisms” have introduced another layer of complexity. The 2023 interdiction of Chinese drones disguised as agricultural equipment⁷⁶ at the Kazakh-Kyrgyz border signals a shift: borders are no longer policed solely for territorial integrity but also for compliance with

⁷⁰ Ivanov, “Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan,” 525.

⁷¹ Klare, “The New Geography of Conflict,” 55.

⁷² Drost, Cretti, and van Giersbergen, “Central Asia Emerging from the Shadows.”

⁷³ Morgan, “Soft Power, Public Diplomacy, and Modernity in China and Russia,” 4.

⁷⁴ Filyaeva, “Institutional Settlement of Non-Territorial Interethnic Conflicts,” 6.

⁷⁵ Rene D. Kanayama, “Renewed Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Conflict – Cui Bono?” *Sicurezza, Terrorismo e Società* 16, no. 2 (2022): 17-43, www.sicurezzaeerrorismosocieta.it/wp-content/uploads/2022/12/SicTerSoc16-Kanayama-Renewed-Kyrgyz-Tajik-Border-Conflict-%E2%80%93-Cui.pdf.

⁷⁶ Heathershaw, Owen, and Cooley, “The Relational Production of Russian and Chinese ‘Rising’ Power in Central Asia,” 50.

global regulatory regimes.⁷⁷ The rise of illicit transit, whether for banned technologies, black-market goods, or dual-use items, positions Central Asia as a logistical interface between sanctioned economies and global markets.

This underscores Klare's thesis: resource-rich, cross-border regions become "conflict zones by design," not through explicit warfare, but through their centrality to economic realignment and geopolitical maneuvering. As borders become chokepoints in a multipolar regulatory environment, local actors are often caught between national sovereignty, international pressure, and criminal economies.

Infrastructure as Strategy, Not Just Development

Resource management in the Fergana Valley is no longer simply a question of distribution or development – it is a "geostrategic project," where infrastructure, labor, and energy are deployed as tools of influence. Mediation and peacebuilding frameworks must adapt accordingly.⁷⁸ As Derevyanko and coauthors⁷⁹ and Rahmah and colleagues⁸⁰ argue, legal-administrative clarity is necessary but insufficient without inclusive participation and institutional accountability.

Whether the Central Asian states are able to transform external dependencies into regional autonomy—through cooperative governance, joint oversight of water and energy, and community-inclusive border management—will determine whether the valley becomes a model of adaptive peacebuilding or remains a site of ongoing contestation. The Fergana Valley is thus at the center of a broader transformation: resource management is no longer just a domestic concern but is at the forefront of regional sovereignty, geopolitical alignment, and future conflict prevention.

Discussion and Implications

The recent border agreements between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan represent more than a diplomatic achievement. They signify a transition in the spatial politics of Central Asia, from disputed territorial ambiguities to formalized border management. However, if political geography has taught us anything, it is that borders cannot be resolved through treaties alone. As this study has shown, they are constantly redefined through infrastructure, securitization, and strategic narratives.

The Kyrgyz-Tajik delimitation process, which is set to be completed in December 2024 following earlier agreements on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, suggests a

⁷⁷ Charles J. Sullivan, "Battle at the Border: An Analysis of the 2021 Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan Conflict," *Asian Affairs* 52, no. 3 (2021): 529-535, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2021.1940587>; see also Sharma, "Geopolitics in Central Asia," 325.

⁷⁸ Megoran, "Taking Account of Authoritarian Peacebuilding in *Post-Liberal Statebuilding in Central Asia*," 733.

⁷⁹ Derevyanko et al., "Legal Foundations for Resolving Land Disputes Through Mediation," 250.

⁸⁰ Rahmah et al., "Resolution of Land Disputes Through Mediation," 55.

regional consensus on demarcation. However, history warns us not to confuse legal clarity with political closure.⁸¹ As Reuber emphasized,⁸² borders are not neutral technical fixes; they are symbolic, power-laden, and historically constructed tools of governance and exclusion.

Behind the apparent success of border solutions, such as the Barak land swap and the demarcation of Vorukh, lie deeper contradictions. These agreements may resolve disputes on paper, but in practice, they reproduce inequality, displacement, and securitization. As the Barak case shows, territorial cessions may stabilize sovereignty but destabilize communities, especially when the negotiating framework excludes local voices or ignores everyday mobility needs.⁸³

This reflects a broader trend seen in post-conflict regions globally: agreements often transform disputed zones into heavily surveilled, militarized corridors, as seen in the India-Pakistan partition, the Israel-Palestine Oslo process, and the EU's securitized Mediterranean frontier. If the Fergana Valley follows this path, it could soon turn from an area of contestation into one of extended surveillance and controlled cooperation, which would undermine the goals of peacebuilding.

This is where Klare's argument, although made two decades ago, becomes relevant again: resource-rich or strategically important borders are not pacified by colonization but repurposed to consolidate power. Closed borders do not reduce the fears of states; they are geared toward the regulation of trade, the control of infrastructure, and the selective enforcement of mobility, often justified by national security.

While the move toward "trilateral negotiation" suggests regional ownership, external powers remain deeply embedded in border outcomes. Russia retains leverage through the CSTO security architecture, military bases, and energy dependency.⁸⁴ China's infrastructural presence via Belt and Road corridors reconfigures economic flows and diplomatic dependencies.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, the European Union is attempting to assert its influence through trade diversification projects, such as the TITR.

Thus, border agreements do not remove external influence; rather, they redistribute it. Central Asian states now act as both sovereign agents and geopolitical intermediaries, balancing their domestic goals with the strategic interests of larger powers. This echoes what Deiana, Komarova, and McCall called the "double-edged nature of cross-border cooperation": while it offers paths to conflict

⁸¹ See also Gulzana Kurmanalieva, "Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: Endless Border Conflicts," *L'Europe en Formation*, no. 385(1) (2018): 121-130, <https://doi.org/10.3917/eufor.385.0121>.

⁸² Reuber, "Conflict Studies and Critical Geopolitics," 40.

⁸³ Megoan and Rakhmatullaev, "Authoritarianism, Ethnic Management and Non-Securitisation: The Kyrgyz Minority in Uzbekistan," 245.

⁸⁴ Ivanov, "Revolutions in Kyrgyzstan," 525.

⁸⁵ Heathershaw, Owen, and Cooley, "The Relational Production of Russian and Chinese 'Rising' Power in Central Asia," 50.

transformation,⁸⁶ it can also reinforce top-down governance and marginalize grassroots agencies.

The Fergana case raises critical questions regarding conflict resolution theory. Traditional models that view territorial demarcation as the endpoint of dispute resolution are challenged. As Wiegand⁸⁷ and Cheng⁸⁸ showed, high-salience disputes require more than formal settlement; they demand multi-layered mediation and durable institutional capacity – conditions often absent in recent Central Asian agreements.

Moreover, peacebuilding scholarship suggests that long-term stability depends not only on demarcation⁸⁹ but also on relational governance, inclusive dialogue, and bottom-up spatial practices.⁹⁰ However, few of these practices have been institutionalized in Central Asia. The region's shift toward legal border clarity has not yet translated into ethno-spatial reconciliation, equitable resource sharing, or civil society co-ownership of peace.⁹¹

The Fergana Valley thus invites us to reconsider the definition of “solution” among scholars and practitioners. Does a conflict end when lines are drawn, or only when these lines reflect, adapt to, and evolve with lived geographies and power asymmetries? The finalization of Central Asian borders should not be seen as a conclusion, but as a recalibration of the way borders are used. They now function as instruments of (a) surveillance (controlling movement and security), (b) leverage (regulating trade and transit), and (c) external alignment (integrating into global power architectures). The future of the Fergana Valley will depend not on whether borders exist, but on how they are governed, negotiated, and experienced. Whether they become bridges of cooperation or walls of exclusion remains an open question – one that future scholarship must continue to interrogate.

Conclusion

This study argues that the border conflict in the Fergana Valley cannot be understood or sustainably resolved through territorial demarcation alone. Drawing on critical political geography, mediation theory, and peacebuilding, it shows that borders in Central Asia function not only as lines of sovereignty but as dynamic spatial practices shaped by historical legacies, infrastructural power, and evolving geopolitical entanglements.

⁸⁶ Deiana, Komarova, and McCall, “Cross-Border Cooperation as Conflict Transformation,” 535.

⁸⁷ Wiegand, “Mediation in Territorial, Maritime and River Disputes,” 350.

⁸⁸ Cheng, “Role of Mediation in Territorial Disputes in East Asia,” 7.

⁸⁹ Pugh, “Peacebuilding Among Transnational Youth,” 90.

⁹⁰ Syna, “Negotiating Distinctiveness and Building Resilience,” 190.

⁹¹ See also Anchita Borthakur, “An Analysis of the Conflict in the Ferghana Valley,” *Asian Affairs* 48, no. 2 (2017): 334-350, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2017.1313591>.

While recent bilateral agreements signal a regional shift toward stabilization, they should not be mistaken for deep conflict transformation. Legal clarity may resolve disputes on paper, but without institutionalized mediation mechanisms, inclusive governance, and conflict-sensitive infrastructure planning, borders risk becoming vectors of securitization, exclusion, and renewed instability.

In this context, sustainable peace depends not only on where the borders are drawn but also on how they are managed. The Fergana Valley is therefore a crucial test case for the development of conflict resolution strategies that go beyond technical or regulatory solutions. It calls for a relational, multi-scalar approach to coexistence, where sovereignty is negotiated, borders are jointly managed, and peacebuilding is rooted in the lived geography of the affected communities. These findings have direct relevance for regional security cooperation, including within NATO and the Partnership for Peace, and offer lessons for dealing with complex border dynamics in other contested areas.

Disclaimer

The opinions, findings, conclusions, and recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Partnership for Peace Consortium, its participating institutions, or any governmental or international organizations affiliated with its governance structure.

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