

THE VIABILITY AND FEASIBILITY OF TRIPP IN THE MIDDLE CORRIDOR: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the viability and feasibility of the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP) as a potential component of the Middle Corridor. It argues that TRIPP is strategically viable but only conditionally feasible, since its implementation depends on more than physical infrastructure. Using Critical Geopolitics, Connectivity Politics, and Risk Governance as analytical lenses, the study evaluates TRIPP as a politically sensitive connectivity project shaped by competing interpretations of unimpeded movement and sovereign jurisdiction, regional competition, legal uncertainty, local legitimacy, financing constraints, and the involvement of external actors. The article shows that TRIPP could strengthen Eurasian route diversification, restore direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic, provide Armenia with reciprocal connectivity benefits, and deepen Türkiye's East-West connectivity. However, these opportunities can be realized only through a governance framework that combines unimpeded connectivity with respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdiction, transparent institutional arrangements, regional coordination, local support along the route and equitable socioeconomic benefit-sharing.

Keywords: TRIPP, Middle Corridor, South Caucasus, Connectivity politics, Risk governance.

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INTRODUCTION

The South Caucasus has acquired renewed significance in Eurasian connectivity. Once viewed mainly as a conflict-affected borderland shaped by Russian influence and long-standing tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the region is now increasingly discussed as a strategic transit space linking Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, Türkiye, and Europe. This shift has been reinforced by growing interest in the Middle Corridor, or Trans-Caspian International Transport Route, as governments and markets seek alternatives to routes exposed to war, sanctions, maritime disruption, and dependence on Russian-controlled infrastructure. Yet the Middle Corridor remains uneven and incomplete. Its long-term scalability is constrained by infrastructure bottlenecks, governance problems, political uncertainty in Georgia, and environmental pressures in the Caspian Sea (Conradi, 2026). Studies on the Zangezur Corridor similarly situate the South Caucasus within broader East-West and North-South transport systems, while acknowledging that corridor development remains embedded in regional power competition (Gawliczek & Iskandarov, 2023).

Within this context, the Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity, commonly referred to as TRIPP, has emerged as one of the most consequential and politically sensitive connectivity proposals in the South Caucasus. The route is intended to connect mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave through southern Armenia, particularly the Mehri area along the Aras River and the Armenia-Iran border. De Waal et al. (2026) describe TRIPP as a 43-kilometer section through Armenian territory that could restore the transport link between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan while creating a potential East-West route between Central Asia and Europe. TRIPP is therefore not only an infrastructure project, but also regional connectivity initiative involving sovereignty, economic interdependence, legal authority, and geopolitical influence.

The project's appeal lies in its capacity to address several connectivity problems at once. For Azerbaijan, it offers a direct overland link to Nakhchivan and supports Baku's ambition to become a central East-West transit state. Studies focused on Nakhchivan argue that the corridor could reduce the exclave's isolation, improve freight and passenger transport, and weaken Iran's leverage over Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan transit (Aliye, 2024). For Armenia, TRIPP may offer integration into regional transport networks, economic diversification, and reduced dependence on narrow trade corridors through Georgia and Iran. For Türkiye, it may strengthen regional trade, reinforce Ankara's role in the Middle Corridor, and expand connectivity with Azerbaijan and Central Asia. Ateş (2025), using a structural gravity model, argues that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor could affect Türkiye's trade with several Asian countries by shortening routes and lowering transport costs. For the United States and the European Union, TRIPP may also serve broader route-diversification objectives (Kroon, 2026).

At the same time, TRIPP's feasibility remains uncertain because its strategic promise is inseparable from the project's political sensitivities. The diplomatic process initiated in Washington in August 2025 produced an important breakthrough, but the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace agreement was initialed rather than formally signed. The January 2026 implementation framework established that infrastructure on Armenian territory would remain under Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction, while third-party operators would provide certain operational services. However,

the principle of unimpeded access remains politically delicate. Azerbaijani policy-oriented analyses present the Zangezur Corridor as a mechanism for implementing the connectivity objective of Article 9 of the 2020 trilateral statement and restoring direct and unimpeded links between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic (Gafarli et al., 2026). Armenian sovereignty-centered commentary, by contrast, emphasizes consent, border control, customs authority, and security jurisdiction over infrastructure crossing Armenian territory (Sarian, 2025). Although TRIPP does not entail territorial transfer, reconciling unimpeded transit with sovereign control over borders and customs administration remains one of the most sensitive operational issues in the debate.

The project also carries wider geopolitical and local implications. Russia and Iran may interpret TRIPP as a Western-backed intrusion into a region they regard as central to their security interests. De Waal et al. (2026) indicate that neither Moscow nor Tehran may be able to block the project outright, but both retain the capacity to delay, complicate, or politicize its implementation. Iran is especially sensitive to the project because the corridor may weaken its role as a connector between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, Türkiye and Central Asia, and wider East-West transport systems (Veliyev, 2022). In Armenia, meanwhile, TRIPP is closely associated with Syunik Province, described in Azerbaijani discourse as Western Zangezur, as well as with the post-conflict legacy of Karabakh, and competing interpretations of the Zangezur Corridor. Corridor-supportive studies argue that the route could generate employment, stimulate local business, improve market access, and support regional integration (Hashimov et al., 2025; Talishinsky et al., 2026). However, such benefits must be assessed alongside local mistrust, financing uncertainty, legal ambiguity, and the risk of uneven benefit distribution.

The central concern of this study is whether TRIPP can move from a diplomatic announcement to an operational corridor, and under what conditions it might contribute to, or complicate, the development of the Middle Corridor. The article's original contribution lies in its integrated assessment of TRIPP as a corridor whose feasibility cannot be explained by transport geography alone. Existing analyses often examine debates surrounding the Zangezur Corridor or TRIPP through separate lenses, including logistics, trade potential, sovereignty, regional geopolitics, or peacebuilding. This study brings these dimensions together by treating TRIPP as a contested corridor shaped simultaneously by geopolitical meaning, connectivity politics, and risk governance.

The paper approaches this question through three analytical lenses: Critical Geopolitics, Connectivity Politics, and Risk Governance. Critical Geopolitics examines how TRIPP is represented, named, mapped, and contested. Connectivity Politics assesses whether the route complements or competes with existing Middle Corridor infrastructure. Risk Governance evaluates whether the project's legal, political, security, financial, operational, social, and legitimacy risks can be managed.

The research question guiding the paper is: How viable and feasible is TRIPP as part of the Middle Corridor, and what opportunities and constraints shape its implementation? The paper argues that TRIPP is strategically viable but only conditionally feasible. Its opportunities include Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, stronger regional connectivity, Armenia's integration into regional transport networks, direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, Türkiye's East-West connectivity, and Middle

Corridor diversification. Its constraints include sovereignty and jurisdictional sensitivities, legal ambiguity, geopolitical rivalry, local confidence concerns along the route, Russian and Iranian resistance, possible competition with Georgia's transit role, uncertain financing, uneven benefit distribution, and megaproject risk.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative desk-based case study based on document analysis and interpretive analysis of academic literature, policy reports, legal analyses, official frameworks, expert commentary, and regional transport assessments. It does not rely on fieldwork, interviews, surveys, or original freight-flow modeling. The following sections present the theoretical and methodological framework, assess the principal opportunities and constraints associated with TRIPP, and discuss the conditions under which the route could become a viable component of the Middle Corridor.

STRATEGIC VIABILITY AND POLITICAL FRAGILITY OF TRIPP

This section advances the central claim of the paper: TRIPP is strategically viable but politically fragile and only conditionally feasible as an operational corridor. Its contribution to the Middle Corridor cannot be assessed solely in terms of transport infrastructure. The issue is not simply whether a road, railway, or multimodal route can be constructed across southern Armenia. Its prospects depend on whether political actors can transform a historically contested borderland into a legally credible, socially legitimate, economically useful, and geopolitically sustainable corridor. TRIPP must therefore be analyzed simultaneously as a connectivity initiative, a peacebuilding instrument, a sovereignty question, and a risk-governance challenge.

TRIPP's strategic promise is significant. The Middle Corridor has gained importance as Eurasian trade routes have become increasingly exposed to war, sanctions, maritime insecurity, and geopolitical fragmentation. Conradi (2026) argues that the corridor has attracted attention as an alternative to routes through Russia and Iran, while also supporting Western interests in trade diversification and access to Central Asian critical minerals. However, he also notes that the route remains constrained by infrastructure bottlenecks, governance weaknesses, environmental pressures in the Caspian Sea, and geopolitical risk. TRIPP may therefore strengthen the Middle Corridor by adding route diversity, but it cannot by itself resolve the corridor's wider logistical, institutional, and commercial limitations.

The appeal of TRIPP also lies in its capacity to address several regional connectivity problems. For Azerbaijan, it offers a direct overland connection with Nakhchivan and supports Baku's ambition to become a central East-West transit state. De Waal et al. (2026) describe TRIPP as a 43-kilometer route through southern Armenia intended to restore connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan while also creating a potential East–West link between Central Asia and Europe. Aliye (2024) argues that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor could improve Nakhchivan's economic prospects, strengthen freight and passenger transport, and reduce Iran's leverage over Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan transit. For Armenia, the project could contribute to country's de-isolation after decades of closed borders with Azerbaijan and Türkiye. For Türkiye, it would reinforce Ankara's role in Eurasian logistics and strengthen Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia connectivity. Ateş (2025), using a structural gravity model, suggests that the corridor could affect Türkiye's foreign trade by shortening existing routes and increasing trade potential with selected Asian countries.

Yet TRIPP's viability is inseparable from the politics of meaning attached to the route. The same corridor may be represented as a peace corridor, a commercial route, a Western-backed strategic project, a mechanism for Armenia's integration into regional transport networks, or a direct Azerbaijani link to Nakhchivan. These descriptions are not merely rhetorical; they shape whether the project is perceived as legitimate, threatening, beneficial, or coercive. Critical Geopolitics is therefore essential because it treats TRIPP not as neutral infrastructure but as a spatial project embedded in power relations. Ó Tuathail's work on geopolitics as the production of spatial meaning, Agnew's critique of rigid territorial thinking, and Kuus's analysis of expert knowledge help explain how different actors authorize competing interpretations of the same route (Agnew, 2018; Kuus, 2014; Ó Tuathail, 1996).

This ambiguity is especially important for Armenia. Supportive studies argue that TRIPP could strengthen regional connectivity, attract investment, expand export and import flows, and support logistics-hub development (Tshughuryan & Meliqyan, 2026). Other analyses suggest that corridor-related infrastructure may generate employment, improve incomes, reduce migration pressure, and stimulate local business activity (Hashimov et al., 2025; Talishinsky et al., 2026). However, Armenia's gains are not automatic. If the country functions only as a transit passage, benefits may remain limited to transit fees, with weak job creation and limited value added. TRIPP's economic value for Armenia therefore depends on whether the country develops domestic logistics operators, customs capacity, warehousing, value-added services, and industrial competitiveness. Sarian (2025) further argues that Armenia's sovereign control should be treated not as an obstacle to efficiency but as a condition of lawful and legitimate cross-border cooperation.

Legal and constitutional feasibility is therefore central to TRIPP. Although the route would pass through Armenian territory, its primary purpose is to provide Azerbaijan with access to Nakhchivan and potentially facilitate broader East–West transit. Its implementation therefore requires a workable balance between Armenia's sovereignty and jurisdiction and the agreed objective of efficient and unimpeded connectivity between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. De Waal et al. (2026) note that the January 2026 framework seeks to combine these principles, although their practical implementation remains politically sensitive. Azerbaijani policy analyses invoke Article 9 of the 2020 trilateral statement as the basis for unimpeded movement (Gafarli et al., 2026), whereas Armenian sovereignty-centered commentary emphasizes consent, jurisdiction, customs control, and constitutional legality (Sarian, 2025). Kocharyan (2026) adds that any arrangement involving territorial change or substantial limitations on sovereign control would need to be assessed under Armenia's constitutional procedures and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties.

TRIPP's feasibility also depends on risk governance. Renn's framework is useful because it extends analysis beyond technical assessment to legal, institutional, economic, social, communicative, and participatory contexts (Renn, 2008). Slovic's work on risk perception is equally relevant because different actors interpret the same project through different historical experiences and strategic concerns (Slovic, 2000). What Azerbaijan frames as the restoration of direct connectivity may be viewed in Armenia as raising concerns regarding sovereignty and security; what Washington presents as peacebuilding may be viewed in Iran as diminishing its regional transit and strategic role; and what

transport experts regard as enhanced connectivity may be evaluated by local communities along the route in terms of security, economic benefits, and local participation. These perceptions are central to implementation.

Operational, geopolitical, and commercial risks reinforce this fragility. The governance model seeks to combine unimpeded connectivity with Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction through the provision of certain services by third-party operators, but questions remain over security personnel, incident response, information sharing, financing, customs authority, and operator mandates (de Waal et al., 2026). TRIPP may also compete with Georgia's established transit role, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Georgian road routes, and Black Sea ports. It may strengthen regional network resilience if managed as a complementary route, but could divert existing cargo flows if poorly coordinated (Saçan, 2025). Iran may view the corridor as weakening its role between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, Türkiye and Central Asia, and wider East-West transport systems (Veliyev, 2022). Russia and Iran may not block the project outright, but they may delay, complicate, or politicize its implementation.

Finally, TRIPP must be assessed as a megaproject. Flyvbjerg et al. (2003) warn that large infrastructure projects often suffer from cost underestimation, revenue overestimation, the undervaluation of environmental impacts, and the exaggeration of development benefits. TRIPP's commercial logic therefore still needs to be demonstrated, especially because existing routes through Georgia already operate and because rail and road infrastructure in Nakhchivan and Armenia will require major investment and operational agreements.

Consequently, TRIPP should be treated neither as an inevitable breakthrough nor as an impossible project. It is viable in principle because it responds to real strategic needs: Azerbaijan's direct and unimpeded access to Nakhchivan, Armenia's integration into regional transport networks, Türkiye's connectivity ambitions, Western route diversification, and the search for resilient Eurasian transport links. Yet it is fragile in practice because it depends on legal clarity, a workable framework combining unimpeded connectivity with Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction, local and domestic legitimacy, regional acceptance, financing, credible governance mechanisms, and the management of external resistance. TRIPP can become a meaningful component of the Middle Corridor only if it is governed as a politically sensitive corridor project rather than as a narrowly technical infrastructure scheme.

THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This section presents the theoretical framework used to assess TRIPP's viability within the Middle Corridor. The central claim of the paper is that TRIPP is strategically viable but politically fragile and only conditionally feasible as an operational corridor. This claim requires a framework that captures both the material and symbolic dimensions of corridor politics. TRIPP is not only a proposed transport route through southern Armenia. It is also a contested political object shaped by sovereignty claims, geopolitical narratives, institutional uncertainty, public legitimacy, and risk perception. For this reason, the analysis combines three lenses: Critical Geopolitics, Connectivity Politics, and Risk Governance.

Critical Geopolitics is used to examine how TRIPP is represented, named, mapped, and politically authorized. The route may be interpreted as the restoration of direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, a mechanism for Armenia's integration into regional transport networks, or a Western-backed connectivity project. These meanings are not secondary to feasibility. They influence whether the project is perceived as legitimate, coercive, beneficial, or threatening. Ó Tuathail's view of geopolitics as the production of spatial meaning is useful because TRIPP should be analyzed not only as a 43-kilometer infrastructure segment but also as a geopolitical representation through which actors define peace, sovereignty, connectivity, threat, and regional influence (Ó Tuathail, 1996). Agnew's critique of rigid territorial thinking helps frame the tension between Armenian sovereignty and transnational corridor governance, while Kuus's work on expertise explains how diplomats, policy experts, consultants, and institutions produce authoritative claims about what counts as viable, rational, or stabilizing infrastructure (Agnew, 2018; Kuus, 2014).

Connectivity Politics provides the second lens. It examines infrastructure both as a mechanism of cooperation and as a source of competition. Corridor projects may create interdependence, reduce transport costs, support regional integration, and contribute to normalization. However, they may also redistribute power, create dependencies, intensify competition over cargo flows, and produce unequal benefits. This duality is especially important in the South Caucasus, where transport routes function not only as commercial channels but also as instruments of state strategy and external influence. Claessen (2026) argues that geography has become a source of power in the region because transport routes shape the geopolitical and economic trajectories of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. TRIPP must therefore be assessed within the wider connectivity system linking Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Türkiye, the Caspian Sea, and Central Asia as part of the broader Middle Corridor.

The literature on connectivity further shows that infrastructure does not automatically produce peace. Ordukhanyan and Ananyan (2026) argue that TRIPP may support stabilization through interdependence, infrastructure integration, diversified transit routes, and confidence building, provided that sovereignty, territorial integrity, and jurisdictional control are respected. Saçan (2025) similarly emphasizes that transport corridors require customs harmonization, transit guarantees, investment, and coordination. Without such arrangements, a corridor may redistribute benefits unevenly and generate new forms of competition. This is why Papava's question of whether the Middle Corridor and the route discussed in relation to the Zangezur Corridor and TRIPP should be understood as alternative or complementary corridors is central to the present study (Papava, 2025). If TRIPP complements existing routes, it may strengthen regional resilience. If it competes with them, it may redirect cargo flows and intensify rivalry with Georgian infrastructure, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and Black Sea ports.

Risk Governance provides the third lens. It assesses whether TRIPP's political, legal, financial, social, security, and operational risks can be managed through credible institutions. Renn's framework is relevant because it treats risk governance as broader than technical assessment by incorporating institutional design, public communication, stakeholder participation, legitimacy, and uncertainty management (Renn, 2008). This is important because the

challenges facing TRIPP include legal ambiguity, customs procedures, security arrangements, investor confidence, domestic legitimacy, local mistrust, regional rivalry, and external spoiler behavior. Slovic's work on risk perception adds that risk is shaped by trust, fairness, control, familiarity, and institutional credibility (Slovic, 2000). Thus, what appears to Azerbaijan as restored access may appear to Armenia as territorial vulnerability, while what appears to external actors as peacebuilding may appear to local communities as insecurity. Flyvbjerg's work on megaprojects adds a further caution: large infrastructure projects often suffer from cost underestimation, benefit overestimation, exaggerated development effects, and weak accountability (Flyvbjerg et al., 2003). TRIPP must therefore be assessed not only in terms of its strategic promise but also by whether it can be governed credibly, financed realistically, and implemented in a manner that manages political and social risk.

Methodologically, this paper adopts a qualitative desk-based case study design. It does not rely on fieldwork, interviews, surveys, or original freight-flow modeling. Instead, it uses document analysis and interpretive analysis of academic literature, policy reports, official frameworks, legal analyses, expert commentary, socioeconomic studies, and regional transport assessments. This approach is appropriate because TRIPP remains an evolving political and infrastructure project whose feasibility depends not only on measurable transport capacity but also on sovereignty arrangements, geopolitical narratives, institutional credibility, financing, domestic legitimacy, and risk perception.

The purpose of this method is not to produce a quantitative forecast of cargo capacity, construction costs, profitability, or financial returns. Rather, the study evaluates the political, legal, institutional, geopolitical, economic, social, and risk-governance conditions that shape TRIPP's viability. The source base was selected purposively according to four criteria: thematic relevance, source type, regional perspective, and analytical function. Thematic relevance refers to sources addressing Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, TRIPP and Zangezur Corridor governance, Middle Corridor connectivity, Armenian sovereignty and constitutional and legal concerns, regional actor positions, and infrastructure, trade, and investment risks. Source type refers to the inclusion of academic studies, policy reports, legal analyses, official frameworks, expert commentary, socioeconomic assessments, and transport-oriented studies. Regional perspective refers to the inclusion of Armenian, Azerbaijani, Turkish, Georgian, Iranian, Western, Russian, Chinese, and wider Eurasian viewpoints. Analytical function refers to the way each source is used: some sources reconstruct legal and sovereignty debates, others assess economic and logistical assumptions, while others examine geopolitical narratives, local legitimacy, financing, or external actor behavior.

This selection is justified by the contested and evolving nature of the case. TRIPP is not yet a fully operational transport corridor with stable long-term freight-flow data, settled legal arrangements, or finalized institutional mechanisms. Available sources are therefore often situated interpretations produced by governments, policy institutes, academic researchers, legal analysts, regional experts, and transport observers. For this reason, the study treats policy reports and expert commentaries not as neutral facts but as interpretive evidence that reflects institutional position, national perspective, policy orientation, or geopolitical interest.

The analysis compares corridor-supportive, sovereignty-critical, legal and constitutional, economic, transport-oriented, socioeconomic, ideological, and geopolitical sources. Azerbaijani legal, policy and corridor-supportive studies are used to reconstruct arguments about Article 9 of the 2020 trilateral statement, “unimpeded movement,” and Azerbaijan’s ambition to become a transport-hub (Gafarli et al., 2026; Gawliczek & Iskandarov, 2023; Talishinsky et al., 2026). Armenian and sovereignty-centered sources are used to examine constitutional procedure, treaty validity, jurisdiction, and the legal limits of corridor governance (Kocharyan, 2026; Sarian, 2025). Turkish and Central Asian perspectives are used to assess East-West connectivity, Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia linkages, and the broader Turkic connectivity agenda. Georgian sources are used to assess possible competition with existing transit infrastructure, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and routes through Black Sea ports. Iranian, Russian, Chinese, European, and American perspectives are used to examine the interests of external actors, route-diversification strategies, and potential spoiler risks. Economic and transport-oriented sources assess the route’s economic and logistical prospects, including its relationship to the Middle Corridor, Türkiye’s trade, Nakhchivan’s connectivity, and regional logistics (Aliye, 2024; Ateş, 2025; Saçan, 2025). Socioeconomic sources assess possible local benefits such as employment, income growth, migration and business development (Hashimov et al., 2025; Talishinsky et al., 2026). Geopolitical and ideological sources are treated cautiously as evidence of how external actors frame the corridor, especially regarding Iran, Pan-Turkism, and regional power competition (Bildik, 2025; Chedia, 2024; Veliyev, 2022).

To reduce source bias, the paper compares claims across different regional and institutional positions. It does not assume that any single national or policy perspective provides a complete account of TRIPP’s viability. Instead, claims are assessed in relation to the position of each source, institutional affiliation, actor interests, internal consistency, and consistency with competing evidence. This comparative procedure is especially important because the same corridor is framed differently by different actors: a means of restoring access, a sovereignty risk, a commercial opportunity, a geopolitical challenge, a peacebuilding instrument, or an external intrusion.

The evidence is organized into five analytical categories: political and legal feasibility; economic and logistical viability; sovereignty and security risks; domestic and local legitimacy; and regional and geopolitical compatibility. The study has limitations. It relies on publicly available documents and secondary analysis and does not include confidential diplomatic materials, internal investment assessments, original interviews, engineering studies, or independent freight-flow modeling. Therefore, its conclusions should be read as a qualitative assessment of conditional viability and managed feasibility rather than as a definitive operational forecast.

The analysis proceeds from the premise that TRIPP can become viable only if geopolitical contestation is reduced through credible governance. The three analytical lenses are therefore used sequentially and relationally. Critical Geopolitics identifies the competing meanings attached to the corridor and explains why TRIPP is interpreted differently by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Türkiye, Georgia, Russia, Iran, Western actors, and local communities along the route. Connectivity Politics then examines how these meanings interact with material infrastructure, trade routes,

cargo flows, and regional competition. Risk Governance finally assesses whether the political, legal, financial, security, social, and operational risks generated by these competing interpretations can be managed through institutions.

This logic allows the paper to avoid treating TRIPP either as a purely technical infrastructure project or as a purely geopolitical symbol. Instead, it evaluates the route as a conditional corridor project whose feasibility depends on the interaction between meaning, infrastructure, and governance. A corridor may be physically constructible but politically unworkable if sovereignty concerns remain unresolved. It may also be diplomatically attractive but commercially weak if financing, customs procedures, and cargo demand are uncertain.

On this basis, the paper assesses TRIPP through five conditions: reconciliation of Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction with direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan; institutional mechanisms for customs, security, financing, and dispute resolution; coordination with existing Middle Corridor infrastructure, including Georgia's role; public legitimacy among communities along the route and management of external actors, particularly Russia and Iran. These conditions structure the evidence section that follows.

STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES AND IMPLEMENTATION CONSTRAINTS

This section applies the theoretical and methodological framework to the empirical and interpretive evidence. It evaluates TRIPP through two linked questions: what opportunities it may create for the Middle Corridor and the South Caucasus, and what constraints may prevent it from becoming a viable corridor. The evidence suggests that TRIPP has strategic and economic potential, but its implementation remains conditional on legal clarity, institutional design, credible financing, local legitimacy, and the management of regional power competition.

Strategic Opportunities

One of TRIPP's principal opportunities lies in its potential contribution to strengthening the wider Middle Corridor. Since the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, the Northern Corridor through Russia has faced greater sanctions-related and geopolitical disruption. This has increased the strategic value of routes linking Europe, the South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, and Türkiye. Claessen (2026) argues that the South Caucasus occupies a crucial position in Eurasian connectivity because major transport routes linking Europe, Asia, Russia, and the Gulf must pass through or around the region. In this context, infrastructure has not only commercial significance but also serves as a source of geopolitical power and state positioning.

TRIPP could add a southern branch to the Middle Corridor by connecting Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan through Armenia and onward to Türkiye. It would not necessarily replace the established route through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye, including the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway and Georgian Black Sea ports. Rather, its value depends on whether it functions as a complementary route that increases resilience or as a rival route that redirects cargo flows and intensifies regional competition. Papava's question of whether the Middle Corridor and the Zangezur Corridor are alternative or complementary corridors

is therefore central to the assessment of TRIPP (Papava, 2025). Gawliczek and Iskandarov (2023) similarly place the Zangezur Corridor within broader East-West and North-South transport systems, while Cutler (2026) argues that TRIPP's commercial relevance depends on whether Central Asian states and logistics firms treat it as a normal operating corridor rather than as a political workaround. Its viability therefore depends on freight behavior, port capacity, ferry schedules, railway interoperability, and digital customs systems, not only on diplomatic declarations.

A further opportunity concerns Armenia's regional integration and economic repositioning. Armenia has long faced closed borders with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, limited access to regional markets, and dependence on narrow transit routes through Georgia and Iran. TRIPP could integrate Armenia into East-West and potentially North-South transport networks. Safaryan (2026) situates this possibility within Armenia's Crossroads of Peace initiative and interprets it as part of Armenia's attempt to redefine its security paradigm after the 2020 war and the weakening of long-standing assumptions about Russian security guarantees.

The economic case is also significant. Tshughuryan and Meliqyan (2026) argue that TRIPP could support regional integration, expand trade flows, attract investment, reduce transport costs, and create possibilities for logistics-hub development. They also suggest that a rail connection through Nakhchivan could reduce Armenia's transport costs by 15%-20%. Hashimov et al. (2025) provide socioeconomic evidence that corridor-related infrastructure may support employment, income growth, reduced migration pressure, and local business activity. However, these potential gains are conditional. Armenia benefits most if TRIPP becomes more than a passageway for goods moving between Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and Central Asia. It would need domestic logistics operators, warehousing, customs services, insurance, rail-maintenance capacity, industrial zones, and value-added services. Otherwise, Armenia may receive limited transit fees while bearing substantial political and security risks.

For Azerbaijan, TRIPP addresses the long-standing strategic objective of securing direct overland access to Nakhchivan while strengthening the country's regional transit role. Gafarli et al. (2026) present TRIPP as the post-2025 reconceptualization of the Zangezur Corridor, as a strategic link for trade, transit, and regional growth that could consolidate Azerbaijan's position as a regional transport hub. Azizova (2026) similarly frames Azerbaijan's connectivity strategy as a combination of infrastructure development, diplomacy, and corridor shaping.

Aliye (2024) argues that the opening of the Zangezur Corridor would allow Nakhchivan to reconnect more directly with mainland Azerbaijan, increase its economic potential, strengthen freight and passenger transport, and reduce Iran's leverage over Azerbaijan-Nakhchivan transit. This shows that TRIPP is not merely symbolic for Baku. It is linked to transport security, regional integration, passenger mobility, and Azerbaijan's broader ambition to shape Eurasian logistics while balancing relations with Türkiye, the European Union, the United States, Russia, China, and Central Asia.

Türkiye would benefit from a more direct land connection to Azerbaijan and potentially to Central Asia. This would reinforce Ankara's role in the Middle Corridor and strengthen its position as a logistical bridge between Europe, the South Caucasus, the Caspian region, and Central Asia. Ateş (2025), using a structural

gravity model covering 182 countries from 2007 to 2023, argues that the Zangezur Corridor could shorten the existing Baku-Tbilisi-Kars route by approximately 150 kilometers and increase Türkiye's trade with several Asian countries. The model identifies Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan as countries with significant potential to expand Türkiye's exports, while Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Uzbekistan are identified as countries with potential to expand Türkiye's imports.

TRIPP also relates to the broader Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia and Turkic connectivity agenda. By linking Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, Türkiye, and potentially Central Asian markets more directly, the route could reinforce the East-West connectivity logic that underpins the Middle Corridor. In this respect, TRIPP may strengthen trans-Caspian cooperation among Turkic states and support Türkiye's wider logistical and economic engagement with Central Asia. However, the realization of this potential should not be regarded as automatic. It depends on operational reliability, customs coordination, infrastructure quality, sustained Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, and a governance model that avoids exclusionary geopolitical narratives. This evidence supports the view that TRIPP may have measurable economic relevance for Türkiye. However, gravity-model findings should be treated cautiously. Such models indicate potential trade effects under assumed conditions. They do not guarantee route shifts, efficient border procedures, stable financing, or reduced political risk.

Beyond these country-specific benefits, TRIPP may also contribute to post-conflict normalization, confidence-building, and greater route diversification. Ordukhanyan and Ananyan (2026) argue that the project could promote economic interdependence, infrastructure integration, diversified transit routes, and confidence building. This reflects the logic that practical cooperation may raise the costs of renewed conflict. However, Sabanadze (2025) cautions that TRIPP also reflects a broader shift from multilateral conflict resolution to transactional peace. It may produce rapid diplomatic results, but it does not necessarily guarantee reconciliation, social trust, or institutional durability. A corridor can support normalization, but it cannot substitute for a legal settlement, border demarcation, humanitarian progress, public trust, and credible mechanisms to prevent renewed escalation or the use of force.

Western engagement adds another opportunity and another risk. De Waal et al. (2026) argue that TRIPP reflects the new geopolitics of connectivity in which the United States becomes directly involved in a region traditionally shaped by Russia, Iran, and Türkiye. For the European Union, the route may complement broader Global Gateway and supply-chain diversification objectives (Kroon, 2026). TRIPP may therefore help diversify Eurasian connectivity away from routes vulnerable to Russian or Iranian pressure. Yet the same feature increases geopolitical sensitivity, since Western backing may provoke stronger resistance from Moscow and Tehran.

Implementation Constraints

A central constraint concerns reconciling Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction with Azerbaijan's objective of direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. TRIPP passes through Armenian territory, and is intended to support this connectivity as well as wider East-West transit. This requires an institutional design that reconciles sovereign jurisdiction with efficient and reliable transit. The key question is not only whether Armenia

retains sovereignty and jurisdiction in law and practice, but also whether the operational arrangements provide Azerbaijan with reliable direct and unimpeded connectivity and are regarded as legitimate by Armenian institutions, political actors, and communities along the route.

De Waal et al. (2026) note that the January 2026 implementation framework seeks to affirm Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction while allowing third-party private operators to provide certain services. Yet unresolved questions remain concerning security personnel, incident response, information sharing, financing, and the mandate of operators. The terms TRIPP and Zangezur Corridor and the Crossroads of Peace initiative carry different political meanings and encode different assumptions about sovereignty, control, memory, and legitimacy. Gafarli et al. (2026) emphasize Article 9 of the 2020 trilateral statement and the principle of unimpeded movement, whereas Sarian (2025) argues that Armenian sovereign control is a legal and political condition for legitimate cross-border cooperation.

Legal uncertainty reinforces this problem. Tkemaladze (2026) stresses the distinction between the signed Joint Declaration and the initialed 17-article Armenia-Azerbaijan peace treaty, since initialing indicates agreement on the text but not full legal consent to be bound. Kocharyan (2026) argues that any agreement involving territorial change or substantial limitations on Armenian sovereign control must be assessed under Armenia's constitutional framework and the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties. Therefore, Armenia and Azerbaijan need legal clarity and binding arrangements regarding the peace agreement, border arrangements, customs procedures, dispute settlement, and the roles of states, private operators, security services, customs agencies, and international financiers.

At the local level, TRIPP's feasibility also depends heavily on public legitimacy and trust among communities along the route. Luciani (2026) shows that communities in Mehri and other areas along the route in southern Armenia do not necessarily perceive the language of connectivity as synonymous with peace. For some local residents, the corridor is associated with insecurity, extraction, perceived territorial vulnerability, and memories of Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict. Slovic's (2000) work on risk perception helps explain this gap. A project may appear rational to diplomats, investors, and transport experts while appearing threatening to communities that associate the territory with past violence and possible future loss of control.

If TRIPP is implemented through elite-level agreements without meaningful public communication and participation, it may face mistrust even if its formal legal design respects both sides' sensitivities. In a politically sensitive borderland, local mistrust can become a strategic vulnerability. It can be mobilized by domestic opposition, amplified by external actors, and used to challenge the legitimacy of the entire project. Public legitimacy among communities along the route is therefore a condition of feasibility.

Financial and operational requirements present another major constraint, since TRIPP cannot become operational through diplomatic support alone. It requires investment in roads, railways, customs systems, logistics facilities, border infrastructure, and possibly energy or digital components. Kininmonth (2026) reports that Armenia is seeking to broaden the investor base by attracting multilateral development banks, Gulf sovereign wealth funds, European infrastructure

investors, and private capital. This indicates an effort to move from diplomatic agreement toward financing and operational development.

Investors require a predictable legal framework, stable political commitments, transparent procurement, security guarantees, and credible revenue projections. If political risks remain high, financing costs will rise. If cargo demand is uncertain, private capital may remain cautious. Flyvbjerg et al. (2003) warn that large infrastructure projects often suffer from benefit overestimation, cost underestimation, and weak accountability. TRIPP's promises of peace, prosperity, and regional transformation must therefore be tested against realistic forecasts of cargo volumes, construction costs, maintenance obligations, customs revenue, transit fees, and local economic benefits.

Operational design is equally important. Even if political agreement is achieved, TRIPP must address customs procedures, border control, cargo inspection, rail compatibility, road standards, security, digital tracking, liability, and incident response. Gafarli et al. (2026) identify digital infrastructure, radio-frequency identification tracking, Internet of Things systems, customs risk management, and modern border technologies as possible tools for balancing efficient transit with Armenian sovereignty. Technology cannot replace trust, but it can help reduce operational uncertainty and support confidence-building if it is supported by agreed protocols, transparent institutional oversight, and a dispute-resolution mechanism accepted by both Armenia and Azerbaijan.

At the regional level, TRIPP may diversify the Middle Corridor, but it may also intensify competition involving Georgia and external actors. Arvak (2025) argues that Georgia's support for the Black Sea-Caspian route linking Romania, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan can be read as an attempt to preserve Tbilisi's transit relevance under conditions where TRIPP may redirect cargo through Armenia. If regional coordination is strong, TRIPP, the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, the ports of Anaklia and Poti, and Caspian Sea routes may form a more resilient network. If coordination is weak, the result may be competition over cargo volumes, investment, political attention, and strategic centrality. Saçan (2025) therefore treats the corridor as a regional trade and transport issue rather than only as an Azerbaijani-Turkish project.

External actors create further constraints. Russia may view TRIPP as reducing its traditional role in Armenia-Azerbaijan mediation and regional infrastructure management. Iran may view it as a threat to its Armenia border position, North-South connectivity ambitions, and resistance to Western presence near its frontier. Veliyev (2022) argues that Tehran fears losing its role as the main connector between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, its intermediary position between Türkiye and Central Asia, and its relevance in East-West transport as the Middle Corridor expands. China's response is more ambiguous. Nan (2025) argues that TRIPP could add an East-West route but also dilute Chinese influence if it becomes a United States-backed or United States-managed corridor. Beijing may therefore avoid open opposition while strengthening ties with Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and other regional actors.

Finally, the viability of TRIPP will depend on how its economic costs and benefits are distributed among states, local communities, investors, and transport operators. Corridor-supportive studies emphasize employment creation, income growth, logistics development, and regional integration (Hashimov et al., 2025;

Talishinsky et al., 2026). However, these benefits are not automatic. Armenia may gain only if it develops domestic logistics capacity, customs services, warehousing, processing facilities, and value-added sectors. Otherwise, the country may function mainly as a transit passage while Azerbaijan, Türkiye, and external logistics actors capture a larger share of the gains. Tshughuryan and Meliqyan (2026) warn that Armenia's benefits may remain limited if it does not develop domestic logistic operators and value-added services. Socioeconomic feasibility therefore depends not only on opening the corridor but also on the domestic economic architecture built around it.

This point is important because it prevents an overly optimistic reading of the corridor's socioeconomic potential. Employment, income growth, and local development are possible, but not automatic. They require targeted investment, local procurement, training, public-private partnerships, and credible benefit-sharing mechanisms. Without these, TRIPP may generate transit flows without generating broad-based domestic development.

DISCUSSION

Taken together, the analysis shows that TRIPP's opportunities and constraints are closely intertwined. The same features that make the project strategically attractive also make it politically fragile. Its ability to connect Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan makes it valuable to Baku but politically sensitive for Yerevan. Its potential contribution to the Middle Corridor may increase route diversity but may also intensify competition with Georgia's transit routes. Its Western backing may make it more financially viable and geopolitically significant, but also more provocative to Russia and Iran. Its promise of peacebuilding through connectivity may create incentives for cooperation, but it may also be criticized as transactional, elite-driven, and insufficiently attentive to local concerns and long-term reconciliation.

The evidence therefore supports the central argument of the paper. TRIPP is feasible in principle, but only conditionally so. It can become a meaningful component of the Middle Corridor only if six requirements are met: respect for Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction alongside direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan; clear legal and institutional arrangements; credible financing and realistic commercial demand; regional coordination with Georgia and existing Middle Corridor infrastructure; public legitimacy among communities along the route; and mechanisms ensuring that socioeconomic benefits are translated into local and national development rather than limited to transit fees or captured by external actors. Without these conditions, TRIPP may remain a high-profile diplomatic initiative whose operational value remains uncertain.

The evidence presented in this study indicates that TRIPP should neither be treated as an inevitable breakthrough nor dismissed as an unworkable geopolitical project. Its viability lies between these two positions. The route has a clear strategic rationale because it responds to several regional needs: Azerbaijan's objective of restoring direct and unimpeded overland connectivity with Nakhchivan, Armenia's interest in strengthening its integration into regional transport networks, Türkiye's interest to strengthen East-West connectivity, and Western efforts to diversify Eurasian transport routes away from corridors exposed to Russian and Iranian leverage. At the same time, TRIPP remains politically vulnerable because these opportunities are embedded in unresolved

sovereignty concerns, contested narratives, legal uncertainty, local mistrust, great-power rivalry, financing questions, and operational risks.

The discussion confirms the relevance of the paper's theoretical framework. From the perspective of Critical Geopolitics, TRIPP is not simply a 43-kilometer transport route through southern Armenia. It is a contested spatial project whose meaning varies across actors. For Azerbaijan, it may represent restored access to Nakhchivan and a strengthened role in Eurasian logistics. For Armenia, it may represent both economic opening and territorial vulnerability. For Türkiye, it may deepen East-West connectivity and strengthen Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia linkages. For Georgia, it may raise concerns about reduced transit centrality. For Russia and Iran, it may appear as a Western-backed challenge to their regional influence. For local communities along the proposed route in southern Armenia, it may evoke concerns about insecurity, extraction, and loss of control. These competing interpretations matter because they shape whether the corridor is perceived as legitimate, coercive, beneficial, or threatening.

Connectivity Politics helps explain why TRIPP has both integrative and competitive potential. The project could strengthen the Middle Corridor by adding route diversity and increasing resilience, especially if it is integrated with existing infrastructure such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, Georgian Black Sea ports, the Anaklia project, Caspian ferry capacity, and Central Asian logistics systems. In that case, it could become a complementary branch of a wider Eurasian transport network. However, if it is treated as a substitute for Georgian routes, it may intensify competition over cargo flows, investment, and regional centrality. TRIPP's contribution to the Middle Corridor therefore depends less on geography alone than on political coordination, customs compatibility, cargo demand, and regional trust.

The same logic applies to peacebuilding. TRIPP may support Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization by creating practical interdependence and raising the costs of renewed confrontation. However, connectivity does not automatically produce peace. It may also create new dependencies, asymmetries, and vulnerabilities. A corridor can support normalization, but it cannot substitute for a credible legal settlement, border demarcation, humanitarian progress, public trust, and guarantees against coercion. Therefore, TRIPP should be understood as a possible instrument of peacebuilding rather than as evidence that peace has already been consolidated.

Risk Governance provides the most important framework for assessing feasibility. The central finding of the paper is that TRIPP's feasibility is primarily a governance problem. The route may be physically short, but the institutional complexity surrounding it is considerable. Implementation requires agreement on sovereignty, jurisdiction, customs, security, operators, financing, dispute resolution, and incident response. Legal ambiguity may produce political mistrust; political mistrust may discourage investors; investor caution may delay infrastructure development; and delayed implementation may empower external spoilers. This chain of interdependence shows that TRIPP should be treated as a systemic risk problem rather than as a narrow infrastructure project.

The Armenian dimension illustrates this point clearly. Armenia may benefit from stronger integration into regional transport networks, lower transport costs, and new logistical functions. However, these benefits depend on a governance model that respects Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction while providing the agreed direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and

Nakhchivan, generates domestic economic value, and reassures affected communities. If Armenia functions only as a transit passage, the gains may remain limited to transit fees while political and security concerns persist. For this reason, domestic logistics capacity, customs services, warehousing, value-added sectors, and local benefit-sharing are essential to the project's legitimacy.

For Azerbaijan, TRIPP represents the restoration of direct and unimpeded overland connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. In Azerbaijani official and policy discourse, it is closely associated with the Zangezur Corridor concept and with Azerbaijan's broader ambition to strengthen its role as a regional transport and logistics hub. The project's feasibility will depend on translating these connectivity objectives into a workable framework based on sovereignty, jurisdiction, transparent customs procedures, reciprocal connectivity benefits, and gradual confidence building.

External actors further complicate the risk environment. United States involvement may increase diplomatic credibility and investor interest, but it may also intensify Russian and Iranian concerns. Iran's interests are especially significant because the corridor may reduce its role as a connector between Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan, strengthen transport links among Türkiye and Central Asia, and wider East-West transport systems. Russia may view TRIPP as reducing its traditional influence over Armenia-Azerbaijan mediation and regional infrastructure management. China's position is more ambiguous: it may regard TRIPP as an additional East-West transport route, while remaining cautious about the influence of the United States. These dynamics suggest that TRIPP's external environment is not divided simply between supporters and opponents. Some actors may resist, others may adapt, and others may seek to shape the route indirectly.

The socioeconomic evidence also supports a conditional interpretation. Corridor-supportive studies suggest that TRIPP could generate employment, income growth, regional investment, and social infrastructure development. However, these gains are not automatic. They depend on whether economic activity is distributed in a way that produces domestic legitimacy and local benefit. Without targeted investment, local procurement, training, logistics capacity, and credible benefit-sharing, TRIPP may generate transit flows without broad-based development.

TRIPP's future can therefore be understood through three scenarios. Under a high-feasibility scenario, Armenia and Azerbaijan reach a durable peace settlement, the route operates under clearly defined Armenian sovereignty and jurisdiction, while providing direct and unimpeded connectivity between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhchivan. Customs and security procedures are transparent, financing is secured, local communities are meaningfully consulted, and the project is integrated with existing Middle Corridor infrastructure. Under a partial-feasibility scenario, infrastructure development proceeds, but political trust remains limited. The route may operate for selected cargo or under restricted procedures, while remaining vulnerable to delays, domestic contestation, external pressure, and disputes over access. This appears to be the most realistic medium-term scenario. Under a low-feasibility scenario, the peace process stalls, sovereignty concerns remain unresolved, reliable connectivity arrangements are not established, investors remain cautious, local opposition intensifies, or external actors obstruct implementation. In that case, TRIPP may remain a diplomatic symbol rather than a reliable trade corridor.

CONCLUSION

The research question asked how viable and feasible TRIPP is as part of the Middle Corridor, and what opportunities and constraints shape its implementation. The answer is that TRIPP is viable as a strategic proposition, but only conditionally feasible as an operational corridor. Its opportunities include route diversification, Armenia-Azerbaijan normalization, Armenia's integration into regional transport networks, Azerbaijan's access to Nakhchivan, Türkiye's East-West connectivity, Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia linkages, and Western route diversification. Its constraints include sovereignty and jurisdictional sensitivities, constitutional and legal ambiguity, local mistrust, financing uncertainty, operational complexity, Georgian concerns about the diversion of transit traffic, potential Russian and Iranian resistance, Chinese hedging, uneven benefit distribution, and megaproject risk.

The analysis suggests five policy priorities. First, Armenia and Azerbaijan should define TRIPP through legally binding arrangements that respect Armenian sovereignty, jurisdiction, customs authority, and territorial integrity while enabling predictable transit access. Second, TRIPP should be integrated with the wider Middle Corridor as a complementary route rather than framed as a substitute for Georgian infrastructure. Third, implementation requires transparent mechanisms governing customs, security, financing, operator mandates, and dispute resolution. Fourth, local communities along the route should be included in the project through consultation, employment opportunities, local procurement, and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Fifth, the route should support Türkiye-Azerbaijan-Central Asia and trans-Caspian connectivity through a framework based on mutual benefit and regional coordination rather than zero-sum competition.

The broader implication is that infrastructure cannot be separated from politics. TRIPP is not simply a corridor across territory. It is a corridor across unresolved histories, competing sovereignties, and shifting regional orders. Its viability depends not on connectivity itself, but on the quality of the political and institutional framework through which connectivity is built, controlled, financed, and experienced. If governed inclusively and transparently, TRIPP could become a mechanism of connectivity and cautious stabilization. If governed narrowly as a transactional geopolitical project, it may reproduce the mistrust it claims to overcome.

Ethical Commission Approval

This study did not require approval from an ethics committee as it did not involve human participants, animals, or sensitive personal data. All data used in this research were obtained from publicly available sources.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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