

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Introduction to Ethno-religious Conflicts

Ethno-religious conflicts are violent confrontations that occur between groups distinguished primarily by their religious and ethnic identities, often involving a struggle for resources, power, or cultural recognition. These conflicts typically evolve when groups with diverse ethnic or religious identities perceive their beliefs, values, or survival as being threatened by others, leading to exclusion, animosity, or competition. Kaufmann (2020) defines ethno-religious conflict as an “organized, sustained struggle between identity groups, where the boundaries of identity are sharply drawn around ethnicity and/or religion” (Kaufmann, 2020). This definition stated that ethno-religious conflicts are not mere disagreements, but deeply rooted disputes often centered on fundamental aspects of group identity.

The scope of ethno-religious conflicts is broad, affecting regions across the globe and ranging from localized conflicts to large-scale, protracted wars with significant regional and international implications. Modern ethno-religious conflicts often intersect with other issues, such as economic inequality, political exclusion, and resource scarcity, making them multifaceted and complex. According to Cederman et al., (2021), ethno-religious conflicts are frequently compounded by structural inequalities and historical grievances, making them some of the most difficult conflicts to resolve owing to their rootedness in identity rather than purely material concerns (Cederman et al., 2021).

The scope of ethno-religious conflict studies has broadened in recent years to include the impacts of globalization, technology, and migration. These conflicts are not only confined to developing nations or regions with historical ethnic tensions; they are increasingly relevant to Western societies facing rising identity-based divisions and challenges in multicultural integration (Howard & Hussain, 2022). The migration crisis in Europe and the United States, for example, has amplified ethnic and religious tensions, leading to localized conflicts that, while less violent, share the dynamics of traditional ethno-religious conflicts. Therefore, the scope of this field includes understanding both traditional and emerging forms of ethno-religious tensions in diverse socio-political contexts.

2.1.1. Overview of Ethno-Religious Conflicts and their Historical Context

Throughout history, ethno-religious conflicts have left intense marks on societies, shaping policies, national borders, and international relations. Understanding the historical context of these conflicts reveals patterns and recurring themes that continue to influence contemporary conflicts. The breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, for instance, is a fundamental case where ethnic and religious divisions, compounded by political manipulation, led to a vicious conflict that reshaped the Balkans and highlighted the devastating potential of ethno-religious violence in modern times (Brubaker, 2020). This case demonstrated the dangers of ethnonationalism and the manipulation of identity politics (Brubaker, 2020).

In Africa, ethno-religious conflicts have also been prevalent, with prominent cases such as the Rwandan Genocide in 1994, where ethnic tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi groups led to one of the most horrific episodes of mass violence in the 20th century. More recent examples include the ongoing tensions in Nigeria between Christian and Muslim communities, particularly in the Middle Belt region, where competition for land and

resources exacerbates underlying religious tensions. Obi (2019) observes that the Nigerian conflict is a complicated case of ethno-religious violence driven by both religious and economic disparities, as well as deep-seated historical grievances (Obi, 2019).

In Nigeria, the interplay between religion and ethnicity is exacerbated by regional inequalities and the concentration of wealth and political power, particularly around the oil-rich Niger Delta and economically underdeveloped northern regions. The conflict often manifests in violent clashes, kidnappings, and mass displacement, reflecting both material struggles and identity-based tensions. The Nigerian government has struggled to address these conflicts successfully, with peacebuilding efforts often undermined by corruption, inadequate resource distribution, and a lack of sustained policy initiatives to bridge the divides between communities (Ikelegbe & Olarinmoye, 2021). Moreover, interventions from both international and national organizations have achieved limited success, as many solutions fail to address the root causes of the conflict or to consider the complex religious and socio-economic dynamics involved (Ikelegbe & Olarinmoye, 2021).

In societies with multiple ethnic groups, ethnicity is a natural occurrence. This implies that when different ethnic groups interact within the same political framework, it generates ethnic identity. This interaction can create a shared sense of identity among relevant ethnic groups, leading to the formation of in-group and out-group boundaries that are protected over time. Consequently, ethnicity becomes a process through which ethnic identities are politicized, according to Eriksen (Abbah & Olawale Isaac, 2019). According to Osaghae and Suberu (2005), ethnicity is viewed as the primary and most significant identity among Nigerians. This argument relies on the observation that whether in competitive or non-competitive situations, Nigerians tend to identify themselves primarily through their ethnic connections rather than alternative identities. Research conducted in Nigeria by Lewis and Bratton uncovered that approximately 48.2% of the population identified primarily with their ethnic identity, whereas only 28.4% associated themselves with their social class, and

21% aligned themselves with a religious group (Lewis, 2007).

Consequently, a majority of Nigerians, specifically 66%, define themselves as part of a core ethnic or religious group. It's noteworthy that religious and ethnic affiliations carry more weight than class identifications, as pointed out by Lewis and Bratton (2000) and Osaghae and Suberu (2005). This outcome aligns with expectations, considering that ethno-religious groups are the most persistent social units in Nigeria, as observed by Anyanwu (2019).

Despite numerous studies highlighting the significance of ethnicity in Nigeria, the actual number of ethnic groups in the country remains unknown (Canci & Odukoya, 2016). While some sources estimate the number to be 374 (Okpan, 2019), others count over 250 ethnic identities (Central Intelligence Agency, 2016; Omaki, 2023). Nonetheless, the majority of these groups have relatively small population percentages when compared to the seven largest ethnic groups, which together make up about 88% of the country's population. These major ethnic groups include the Hausa and Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%), Igbo (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3.5%), and Tiv (2.5%) (Central Intelligence Agency 2016). Due to this population imbalance, coupled with disparities in political influence among individual ethnic groups, the Nigerian population is broadly categorized into two main groupings: the majority and minority ethnic groups (Madueke, 2019; Onuh & Chinedu, 2019).

Ethnic conflicts have been prevalent throughout history, and their effect on societies can be devastating, resulting in loss of lives, destruction of infrastructure, and displacement of communities (Eze, 2021). This discussion will explore the causes, dynamics, and consequences of ethnic conflict, drawing on relevant literature and examples from around the world. A report from Africanews.com stated that at least 80,000 people have been displaced over the past three months in Central Nigeria. It also reports that North-western and central Nigeria are regularly the scene of tensions and deadly conflicts over the

exploitation of water and land resources (Africanews, 2023). From the southern regions of Cross River and Ebonyi states to the northern areas of Kwara, Kaduna, Taraba, and Benue, conflicting factions are engaging in destructive confrontations, causing significant harm to lives and properties, while the government appears increasingly powerless. In 2017, Punch newspaper reported that hostilities erupted between the Ofioji community in Ebonyi State's Izzi Local Government Area and the neighbouring Ijutun-Idoru community in Obubra LGA of Cross River State. This conflict revolves around disputed boundary farmlands, resulting in a reported death toll of 20 individuals and the destruction of approximately 56 houses (Punch, 2017). As reported by The PUNCH newspaper, a minimum of 676 individuals lost their lives in a range of communal and boundary conflicts in Nigeria from January 2018 to August 2022. Also, during this period, at least 444 houses were demolished because of these conflicts. The research reveals that most of these clashes were rooted in longstanding, unresolved disputes, with a few being new incidents. Upon closer examination of the data, it was determined that a total of 113 individuals lost their lives in the year 2022.

During the year 2018, there were reports of a total of 230 individuals being purportedly killed, with fatalities distributed as follows: Adamawa (6 deaths), Delta (12 deaths), Kwara (2 deaths), Cross River (44 deaths), Kogi (10 deaths), Abia (10 deaths), Nasarawa (39 deaths), Ebonyi (13 deaths), Gombe (1 death), Taraba (73 deaths), Benue (12 deaths), and Niger (8 deaths).

In the year 2021, there were reported incidents of fatalities in various Nigerian states, with the highest numbers recorded in Ebonyi (40 deaths), Benue (48 deaths), Gombe (22 deaths), Taraba (11 deaths), Cross River (3 deaths), and Akwa Ibom (2 deaths). Additional fatalities were documented in Abia (3 deaths), Kwara (5 deaths), Oyo (2 deaths), Osun (6 deaths), Ondo (3 deaths), Edo (1 death), Yobe (11 deaths), Adamawa (13 deaths), Niger (3

deaths), Anambra (2 deaths), and both Bauchi and Delta witnessed five cases each.

In 2019, a total of 121 individuals lost their lives, with Kogi reporting 30 casualties, Ebonyi 15, Taraba 23, Benue 21, Cross River 18, Ondo 4, Bayelsa 2, Lagos 1, and Edo 7. The year 2020 saw the fewest incidents and casualties attributed to the coronavirus pandemic.

Breaking down the data for the five years under review, the following numbers of deaths were reported in various states: Delta (22 deaths), Nasarawa (39 deaths), Gombe (24 deaths), Adamawa (19 deaths), Niger (15 deaths), Abia (15 deaths), Yobe (11 deaths), Kwara (7 deaths), Ondo (9 deaths), Anambra (6 deaths), Bayelsa (2 deaths), Edo (8 deaths), Bauchi (5 deaths), Akwa Ibom (5 deaths), Osun (6 deaths), Enugu (1 death), Lagos (1 death), and Oyo (2 deaths).

According to the National Boundary Commission, most of these conflicts stem from longstanding disputes related to boundaries, farmland, and natural resources. The report from the NBC elaborated that as of now, the North-West zone has 15 interstate disputes, the North-Central has 15, the North-East has 14, the South-West has 14, the South-South has 14, and the South-East also has 14 such disputes (*Punch*, 2022).

Regarding religious conflicts, the initial indications that escalating religious tensions were heading toward violence became apparent in mid-December 1999 in the central town of Ilorin. During this time, Muslim extremists launched attacks on and desecrated 18 Christian churches. Ilorin, which serves as the capital of Kwara State, is positioned at the junction between the predominantly Muslim northern region and the predominantly Christian southern region. It is home to substantial populations of both religious groups. In many respects, this town epitomizes the proximity of these two religions in Nigeria. There has been intense debate among followers of these faiths in Ilorin regarding the appropriateness of introducing Sharia law in Kwara State (*Africa News Newsletter*, 2000). In the Ijagbo region of Oyun Local Government Area in Kwara State, a troubling turn on

February 3, 2022, occurred when violence erupted amidst a peaceful protest organized by Muslims. The protest was in response to a decision by the administration of Oyun Baptist High School (OBHS) to prohibit students from wearing hijabs. The ensuing commotion, reportedly marked by the sound of gunfire, resulted in the loss of a resident while 11 other protesters suffered injuries (*The Cable*, 2022). Recently, Leadership newspaper (August 29, 2023) reported that herders/farmers clashes have taken more lives than most of the crises witnessed in the country and the problem is still ongoing affecting Nigeria's collective socioeconomic interests. The Nigeria government has expanded its focus to tackle security issues by addressing the issues through dialogue, and community engagements in collaboration with all relevant authorities. It was also stated that farmers/herders' crises, which were hitherto seen as a regional or confined conflict, have taken new dimensions as it has expanded and grown into a wider conflict beyond the borders of many West African countries.

Therefore, the historical context of ethno-religious conflicts, particularly as seen in Nigeria, illustrates how deeply entrenched social, economic, and political inequalities drive persistent violence. As recent cases demonstrate, these conflicts are dynamic and often adapt to contemporary pressures such as resource scarcity, globalization, and shifts in political power. Understanding this historical context is crucial for identifying patterns and anticipating emerging conflicts, allowing for formulating responses that address the root causes rather than merely the symptoms of such complex and impactful disputes.

2.1.2. Importance of Understanding Ethno-religious Conflicts to Contemporary Society

Understanding ethno-religious conflicts is imperative today, where global migration, identity politics, and social fragmentation build fertile ground for intergroup tensions. Ethno-religious conflicts are not only rampant but have significant impacts on economic growth,

regional stability, social cohesion, and human rights. As Yilmaz (2021) points out, intertwining religious and ethnic identities often becomes politicized in response to economic insecurities and perceived cultural threats, leading to an entrenched "us versus them" mentality. This politicization of identity is extreme in contexts where groups feel that their religious or cultural practices are at risk, creating conditions that can catalyze violence (Yilmaz, 2021). Such dynamics demonstrate the critical need to study these conflicts, as they reveal how perceived or real threats to identity can catalyze social violence and division.

The study of ethno-religious conflicts is further relevant because they often serve as precursors to prevalent instability and humanitarian crises. The ongoing conflicts in the Middle East, including those in Syria and Iraq, illustrate how ethno-religious tensions can exacerbate local grievances and escalate into large-scale violence with global repercussions. Montalvo and Reynal-Querol (2020) argue that ethno-religious conflicts frequently spill over borders, drawing in neighbouring states and regional powers, consequently creating complex, multi-level conflicts (Montalvo & Reynal- Querol, 2020). This cross-border impact presents the importance of understanding the dynamics of ethno-religious conflict to predict, mitigate, and respond to emerging security and migration challenges.

The economic implications of ethno-religious conflicts are also significant, emphasizing the practical relevance of studying these conflicts. According to Devarajan and Giugale (2019), countries entangled in prolonged ethno-religious conflicts often experience negative or stagnant economic growth, as resources are diverted from productive sectors to military expenditures. This economic stagnation leads to cycles of poverty, which can trigger the grievances driving the conflict (Devarajan & Giugale, 2019). This phenomenon not only impacts the affected countries but also destabilizes regional economies as conflicts compromise trade, establish refugee flows, and destabilize neighboring markets. For instance, the South Sudan conflict has spilled over into bordering countries, affecting trade

and regional stability. Understanding the economic dimension of these conflicts is thus essential for policymakers and international organizations working toward sustainable peace and economic recovery in post-conflict regions.

Moreover, ethno-religious conflicts often involve severe human rights violations, making their study crucial for global human rights agendas. Cases such as the persecution of the Rohingya in Myanmar and the treatment of religious minorities in various parts of the Middle East highlight the extent to which ethno-religious conflicts lead to atrocities, including genocide, ethnic cleansing, and forced displacement. According to Simangan (2019), these conflicts are characterized by the deliberate targeting of civilians, with the intent of eradicating or displacing entire communities, emphasizing the importance of international frameworks for prevention (Simangan, 2019). Studying these conflicts is crucial for developing mechanisms to prevent and respond to such atrocities, as well as for informing the work of organizations like the United Nations in protecting vulnerable populations.

The role of digital media in ethno-religious conflicts has further heightened the relevance of studying these conflicts today. Social media platforms, while presenting opportunities for communication, are often used to spread misinformation, fuel hatred, and incite violence. Zeitzoff (2018) demonstrates how digital platforms are increasingly exploited to disseminate propaganda, recruit followers, and coordinate attacks, turning online spaces into "digital battlegrounds" (Zeitzoff, 2018). This revealed the need for new frameworks to understand how online dynamics interact with on-the-ground realities in ethno-religious conflicts. Researchers and policymakers must examine technology's role in escalating or potentially mitigating these conflicts, making this an urgent area for contemporary conflict studies.

Ethno-religious conflicts also challenge democratic principles, pluralism, and social cohesion, which are essential to many modern societies. As Vullnetari (2021) suggests,

persistent tensions between ethnic or religious groups erode trust in democratic institutions, create political instability, and weaken the social fabric of multicultural states (Vullnetari, 2021). This erosion of trust and cohesion is notably concerning in diverse countries, where ethno-religious divides can be exploited by political actors seeking to consolidate power. Studying ethno-religious conflicts, therefore, presents insights into protecting social cohesion and democratic governance, providing valuable lessons for societies facing rising identity-based polarization.

Globalization has also influenced the dynamics of ethno-religious conflicts as transnational identities, international alliances, and global media bring local conflicts into international focus. This interconnectedness often amplifies the effects of ethno-religious conflicts, with foreign powers intervening in domestic issues to support allied religious or ethnic groups. For instance, external actors' involvement in the Syrian civil war, including the United States, Russia, and regional players, has deepened the conflict and complicated peace efforts. As Murdoch and Sandler (2020) observe, foreign interventions often turn local grievances into proxy wars, complicating resolution efforts and deepening societal divisions (Murdoch & Sandler, 2020). This external involvement describes the need to study these conflicts in a global context, given international actors' significant roles in exacerbating or resolving ethno-religious tensions.

Hence, the study of ethno-religious conflicts is essential for addressing some of the most pressing challenges in contemporary society. These conflicts affect economic stability, social cohesion, human rights, and international security. By understanding the causes, dynamics, and consequences of ethno-religious conflicts, researchers and policymakers can develop more effective strategies for conflict prevention, humanitarian response, and sustainable peacebuilding. With identity-based politics and social fragmentation on the rise globally, insights from the study of ethno-religious conflicts are invaluable for building resilient, inclusive, and peaceful societies.

2.2. Causes of Ethno-religious conflicts

Ethno-conflict encompasses disputes between different groups, which can arise within ethnic groups, departments or workgroups in organizations, communities, and similar contexts. Pandy's work, as cited in Murerwa and Guantai (2019), highlights this concept. Other scholars, Deutsch and Coleman, also cited in Murerwa and Guantai (2019), assert that such conflicts may arise due to a lack of mutual agreement, differences in group goals, limited resources, poor communication channels, overlapping responsibilities, a struggle for recognition, and more.

The erosion of traditional social control mechanisms in African societies, which included kinship, religious, and political systems that emphasized the welfare of the community, has played a role in the escalation of ethno-religious conflicts (Abbah & Olawale Isaac, 2019). The failure of these institutions is a significant factor in the ethnic and communal conflicts that are prevalent in Nigeria today. Disrupted families and financial struggles in many households have led to an increase in immoral behavior, and at the same time, have created a pool of young people who are willing to take up arms for payment to carry out ethno-religious conflicts (Okunola & Adegboyejo, 2013). Ethno-religious conflicts pose a threat to social stability, exacerbate existing divisions among various groups, and impact their ability to participate in various aspects of society, including social, economic, political, and cultural dimensions (Bercovitch & Kadayifci-Orellana, 2009). This, in turn, affects the provision of education in contentious contexts, leading to certain groups enjoying educational privileges while others are disadvantaged (Brooks, 2015).

Internal conflicts within ethnic groups and conflicts between different ethnic groups, are caused by various factors such as poverty and corruption. It is crucial to take practical and preventative measures to address this critical issue as a matter of urgency

(Olademo et al., 2021). Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are different from other

forms of social conflicts because they involve different ethnic groups belonging to different religions. However, religious and ethnic factors often act together in most social conflicts in Nigeria. People have complained of religious and ethnic discrimination and have demanded religious and ethnic rights within their State. The State's use of religion and ethnicity in political discourse or action has also been a cause of these conflicts. Ultimately, accusations and allegations of neglect, oppression, and domination are the major factors that contribute to ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria (Osondu, 2019).

The Nigerian political leaders' failure to implement effective governance, promote national unity, and adopt sound economic policies has resulted in widespread unemployment (Oni et al., 2020). This has contributed to the emergence of communal, ethnic, and religious conflicts that are common in Nigerian politics. Poverty and joblessness have been the driving forces behind many of the ethno-religious conflicts in the country, leading to a growing number of impoverished people who may resort to militancy for pay. This is likely why conflicts in Nigeria often involve a large number of combatants (Adegbenro, 2021).

Some sources have noted that religion is a significant aspect of Nigerian society and that the majority of Nigerians are highly religious (Stevanović, 2022). Religion has played a critical role in shaping the country's geopolitical development, both as a unifying force and as a source of conflict. Religious conflicts have been a recurrent feature of Nigerian society, with numerous conflicts recorded between 1980 and 1994 (Ituma et al., 2022).

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are known for their violent nature and tendency to spread to other areas. These incidents frequently take place in the central region of Nigeria and in border areas of the primarily Muslim-majority Northern states. Distinguishing between religious and ethnic crises in these situations can be challenging, as the distinction between them is often blurred. Illustrative instances of such conflicts encompass the Kafanchan-Kaduna crisis, the Kaduna Sharia riots, and the Jos riots, all of which resulted in numerous fatalities and extended violent repercussions that spread beyond their initial locations. Recent

conflicts include the Oro cultists and Hausa women crisis in Sagamu, resulting in deaths and destruction of property, and the Lagos-Kano conflict, which resulted in the formation of a Yoruba militia and further violence. Religion offers a significant role in the Nigerian circle and has been a potent force for both unity and conflict (Labinjo et al., 2020; Salihu, 2019). Ethno-religious conflicts have been a major challenge to national unity and stability in Nigeria for several decades. The North Central part of Nigeria has witnessed several ethno-religious conflicts that have resulted in loss of lives, and property, and the displacement of communities (Olademo et al., 2021). Kwara State, located in the North Central region of Nigeria, has not been immune to this phenomenon. This literature review aims to dissect the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in North Central Nigeria, with a specific focus on Kwara State.

Ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in Kwara State, are complex and multifaceted, rooted in historical, economic, political, social, and cultural factors. Understanding these causes is essential for developing effective conflict resolution strategies. This section delves into four key causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State: historical legacies, economic disparities, political manipulation, and social and cultural narratives (Ugwuoke, Ajah and Onyejegbu, 2020).

2.2.1. Historical Grievances and Identity-Based Tensions

The historical causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in Kwara State, are deeply rooted in the legacies of colonialism and the subsequent formation of the Nigerian state. During British colonial rule (1861–1960), the policy of indirect rule disrupted pre-existing social and political structures by creating artificial boundaries that grouped diverse ethnic and religious groups into administrative units. This practice exacerbated ethnic divisions, particularly as the British often favored northern Muslim elites over their southern counterparts (Falola & Heaton, 2008). The Yoruba, Fulani, and Hausa groups in Kwara were

among those affected by this uneven distribution of power, a legacy that persists in current political struggles.

Post-independence, Nigeria's state formation compounded these historical tensions. The arbitrary amalgamation of northern and southern protectorates in 1914, with little consideration of the ethnic and religious differences between them, laid the foundation for ethno-religious divisions. This was particularly significant in Kwara State, which borders both the predominantly Muslim northern regions and the religiously diverse south. The lack of a coherent strategy for political power-sharing among these diverse groups has meant that the colonial-era ethnic and religious power imbalances have persisted into the post-colonial era (Osaghae, 1998). This failure to address historical grievances has led to the recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State.

Key historical events have further exacerbated these divisions. The 2000 religious crisis in Ilorin, for instance, is often cited as an example of the long-standing tensions between Christian and Muslim communities in the region. Similarly, the 2009 clash between the Yoruba and Hausa in Offa is rooted in the colonial practice of allocating political and economic power unevenly across ethnic and religious lines (Alao et al., 2019). These incidents highlight how historical grievances are perpetuated through generations, manifesting in violent confrontations.

To address these deep-seated historical causes, it is essential to recognize the role that colonialism and state formation have played in shaping Nigeria's current ethno-religious landscape. Efforts to resolve these conflicts must go beyond surface-level interventions and instead focus on rectifying the historical injustices that have fueled ethnic and religious divisions. Without acknowledging and addressing these legacies, efforts to achieve lasting peace in Kwara State will likely remain ineffective.

2.2.2. Socio-economic Disparities and Competition for Resources

Economic disparities are one of the most significant drivers of ethno-religious conflicts

in Kwara State. Different ethnic and religious groups often find themselves at odds due to unequal access to resources, land, and employment opportunities. This inequality is particularly pronounced in the agricultural sector, where land ownership is central to economic stability. In Kwara State, the Fulani, who are traditionally cattle herders, often come into conflict with Yoruba farmers over access to grazing land, leading to violent clashes. These tensions are exacerbated by the economic reliance of both groups on land for their livelihoods (Salau et al., 2021).

According to Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (2019), the poverty rate in the northern part of Kwara State, which is predominantly Muslim and populated by the Fulani and Hausa ethnic groups, is significantly higher than in the southern, Yoruba-dominated areas. This disparity is not only a source of tension but also a catalyst for violence, as economically marginalized groups feel excluded from opportunities for growth and development. Land ownership systems further compound these issues, with traditional Fulani pastoralists often lacking formal land rights, while the Yoruba, who practice sedentary farming, hold legal claims to land in the region (Mustapha, 2021).

Unemployment, especially among the youth, has worsened these economic disparities. With an unemployment rate exceeding 35% in Kwara State, economically disadvantaged youths from marginalized ethnic and religious groups are often recruited into extremist groups, which offer financial incentives and a sense of purpose (International Crisis Group, 2022). This cycle of economic disenfranchisement and violence is self-perpetuating, as conflicts destroy infrastructure, further limiting economic opportunities and deepening poverty in affected communities.

Addressing the economic disparities that fuel ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State requires comprehensive land reform policies and programs aimed at reducing poverty and unemployment. Ensuring equitable access to land and resources, particularly for

marginalized groups, could help mitigate tensions and prevent the escalation of conflicts. Also, targeted interventions to create job opportunities, especially for the youth, are essential to breaking the cycle of poverty and violence.

2.2.3. Political Exclusion and Marginalization

Political manipulation is a key factor in the perpetuation of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Nigerian politicians have historically exploited ethnic and religious identities to secure political power, often pitting groups against one another in the process. This tactic has deep roots in Nigeria's political history, where leaders have used identity politics to galvanize support along ethnic or religious lines, particularly during election seasons (Enejoh, 2021). In Kwara State, political elites have frequently mobilized ethnic and religious sentiments, turning political competition into violent ethno-religious conflicts.

A prominent example of political manipulation is the role of political elites in framing local disputes, such as land conflicts, in ethno-religious terms. The Share-Tsaragi conflict, which began as a land dispute between the Yoruba and Nupe communities, escalated into a violent ethno-religious clash largely due to the involvement of political leaders who used the dispute to rally support from their respective ethnic and religious constituencies (Olademo et al., 2021). Political leaders framed the conflict as a religious battle between Christians and Muslims, thus inflaming tensions and turning what was a localized dispute into a broader ethno-religious conflict. During elections, politicians in Kwara State have been known to manipulate religious sentiments to gain votes. In the 2015 general elections, for instance, some candidates aligned themselves with the predominantly Muslim Fulani and Hausa communities, portraying their opponents as threats to Islamic values. This strategy deepened the divide between the Muslim and Christian populations, transforming political competition into religious conflict (Akinyele, 2019). By leveraging ethnic and religious identities for political gain, leaders not only exacerbate existing tensions but also undermine efforts at

peaceful coexistence.

The political manipulation of ethno-religious identities highlights the need for reforms that discourage identity-based politics. Political leaders must be held accountable for inciting violence, and efforts to promote issue-based campaigns rather than identity politics are essential. Strengthening democratic institutions and ensuring fair political representation for all ethnic and religious groups can also help reduce the likelihood of political manipulation leading to conflict.

2.2.4. Religious Ideologies and Cultural Intolerance

Religious doctrines play a significant role in shaping both social cohesion and division within societies, particularly where multiple ethno-religious groups coexist. On one hand, religious doctrines often stimulate shared values, ethical norms, and a sense of community among adherents, thereby advancing social cohesion. However, they can also serve as divisive forces when religious interpretations reinforce superiority or exclusivity over other groups. According to Shah and Toft (2022), religious doctrines can be both unifying and polarizing, as religious teachings about identity, morality, and belonging can either foster harmony within societies or, conversely, breed exclusion and suspicion of “the other” (Shah & Toft, 2022).

In multi-ethnic communities, the divisive potential of religious doctrines often becomes apparent when religious identities overlap with ethnic affiliations, as seen in the case of Myanmar’s Rohingya crisis and Nigeria’s Christian-Muslim tensions. For example, religious interpretations that promote the exclusivity of one group can promote a sense of moral superiority and justify discriminatory practices against minority communities. Recent research by Kuran (2023) highlights that some religious leaders use doctrinal interpretations to politicize identity, framing other groups as morally or spiritually inferior. This politicization of religion, when linked with ethnicity, can reinforce ethno-religious

boundaries and deepen existing divisions (Kuran, 2023).

Furthermore, religious doctrines can shape political attitudes that influence societal inclusivity or exclusivity. As Campbell and Putnam (2021) demonstrate, religious ideologies can significantly shape an individual's outlook on political tolerance, acceptance, and views on coexistence with other ethno-religious groups. In highly religious communities, doctrines that emphasize cultural preservation and moral purity can create barriers to integration, fostering a cultural environment where suspicion and hostility toward other groups can flourish (Campbell & Putnam, 2021). Thus, religious doctrines can be instrumental in either promoting inclusivity or intensifying divisions within diverse societies, depending on how they are interpreted and enacted in social and political spheres.

Also, cultural intolerance, often rooted in religious or ethnic ideologies, plays a significant role in exacerbating ethno-religious tensions. When societies are unwilling to respect or accept cultural differences, it can lead to marginalization and hostility toward minority groups. Recent studies show that cultural intolerance is increasingly mobilized by political and religious leaders to gain influence and consolidate power, which can further entrench division within society. Yilmaz and Morieson (2021) assert that political actors often use cultural narratives to create a climate of "us versus them," heightening perceived threats to cultural identity and solidifying intergroup boundaries. In regions with a history of ethno-religious conflict, cultural intolerance can cause an exclusionary national identity, where minority groups are viewed as cultural threats. For instance, in India, the rise of Hindu nationalism has intensified Hindu-Muslim tensions by portraying Muslims as outsiders who threaten the cultural and religious identity of the nation (Singh, 2022). Singh (2022) reported how such rhetoric is not only divisive but also emboldens discriminatory practices, reinforcing a social environment where minority groups are systematically marginalized. Cultural intolerance thus becomes an influential tool for inflaming ethno-religious tensions,

as it creates justification for exclusionary policies and, in extreme cases, legitimizes violence against marginalized communities.

Another key factor is the role of media in spreading and intensifying cultural intolerance. Törnberg and Törnberg (2021) argue that in the age of digital media, narratives of cultural intolerance can spread rapidly, fueling tensions and inciting conflict. Social media platforms often act as echo chambers where individuals encounter polarized views that reinforce negative stereotypes about other cultural or religious groups. This phenomenon exacerbates ethno-religious conflicts by amplifying biases and increasing societal divisions (Törnberg & Törnberg, 2021). Thus, cultural intolerance, both at the societal and digital levels, is a critical element that influences the persistence and intensity of ethno-religious tensions.

2.2.5. External Influence and Geopolitical Interests

Foreign intervention often has a significant influence on local ethno-religious conflicts, as external powers may support conflicting groups for strategic reasons, exacerbating local grievances and prolonging conflict. Foreign interventions are often driven by geopolitical interests, such as establishing strategic alliances, securing resources, or countering the influence of rival powers. When foreign governments provide military, financial, or ideological support to local factions, they successfully transform local disputes into proxy conflicts with global implications. According to Khalil and Wiegand (2023), foreign interventions in countries such as Libya and Syria have escalated internal ethno-religious conflicts, turning them into prolonged and destructive wars due to the involvement of international actors with vested interests (Khalil & Wiegand, 2023).

In the Middle East, for instance, foreign powers have intervened in sectarian conflicts, with Russia, the United States, Iran, and Saudi Arabia supporting opposing groups in conflicts like the Syrian Civil War. Such interventions often have unintended consequences,

leading to prolonged instability and exacerbating sectarian divides within the region. Studies by Murdoch and Sandler (2022) stated that external support for local factions not only triggers the intensity of the conflict but also worsens ethno-religious rifts as groups become reliant on external backing, which incentivizes them to adopt more extreme positions (Murdoch & Sandler, 2022). This reliance on foreign aid produces a cycle of dependency that often stifles peace efforts and undermines local autonomy.

Foreign intervention also influences the narratives within ethno-religious conflicts, as external actors often frame conflicts in ways that align with their geopolitical goals. For example, the framing of conflicts in terms of “terrorism” or “freedom” can shape international perception, delegitimizing some groups while validating others. Westerwinter (2021) reported how this narrative framing has influenced international intervention policies, leading to selective support that exacerbates local grievances and hardens ethno-religious identities (Westerwinter, 2021). Such interventions expand local conflicts by introducing international dimensions that complicate efforts for reconciliation and prolong the duration of hostilities.

Geopolitical factors also play a significant role in the escalation and persistence of ethno-religious conflicts. Geopolitical rivalries often transform local ethno-religious issues into proxy wars as major powers seek influence over strategically significant regions. In Yemen, for instance, the Sunni-Shia divide has been exacerbated by regional powers, with Saudi Arabia backing the Sunni-majority government while Iran supports the Houthi rebels. This external involvement has turned Yemen into a battleground for regional dominance, intensifying the ethno-religious dimensions of the conflict (Al-Rasheed & Blumi, 2023). Al-Rasheed and Blumi (2023) argue that the geopolitical stakes in Yemen’s conflict have overshadowed the humanitarian crisis, with external powers prioritizing strategic outcomes over peaceful resolution (Al-Rasheed & Blumi, 2023).

Another instance of geopolitical influence is seen in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. The involvement of regional powers such as Turkey, which supports Azerbaijan, and Russia, with historical ties to Armenia, has intensified the ethno-religious tensions in this long-standing territorial dispute.

According to Abrahamyan (2022), external support has emboldened nationalist sentiments and religious rhetoric, complicated diplomatic efforts, and fueling cycles of retaliation and violence (Abrahamyan, 2022). These interventions illustrate how geopolitical interests transform local ethno-religious disputes into regional conflicts, further complicating efforts for long-term peace.

Hence, the influence of religious ideologies and cultural intolerance, coupled with external geopolitical interests, highlights the complex dynamics that drive ethno-religious conflicts. Religious doctrines can either unify or divide societies depending on how they are interpreted, while cultural intolerance exacerbates social divisions and legitimizes exclusion. Foreign intervention and geopolitical interests often escalate local disputes, turning them into proxy wars that entrench ethno-religious divides. Understanding these factors is crucial for developing comprehensive strategies to address and resolve such conflicts.

2.3. Dynamics of Ethno-religious Conflicts

The dynamics of ethno-religious conflicts are complex and influenced by a range of cultural, socio-political, and psychological factors that evolve. These conflicts are often marred by processes of group solidarity, identity formation, cycles of escalation and retaliation, and the strategic abuse of media and propaganda. According to Abdelal and Khan (2022), these dynamics serve to intensify animosities, solidify intergroup boundaries, and create conditions that make peaceful resolutions gradually more difficult (Abdelal & Khan, 2022).

Ethno-religious conflicts typically begin with the mobilization and construction of

group identities, which define clear distinctions between “in-group” and “out-group” affiliations based on religious or ethnic lines. Ahmed and Greene (2023) elucidate that these identities, often constructed and politicized by elites, foster strong group solidarity that build up collective resistance and heightens intergroup animosity (Ahmed & Greene, 2023). This group cohesion can solidify support for aggressive stances, discouraging compromise.

Escalation and retaliatory cycles further complicate these conflicts, as each act of violence tends to cause an equally aggressive response from the opposing side, thereby perpetuating a cycle of violence. Peterson and Nussio (2021) note that this cycle is particularly evident in conflicts where religious or ethnic symbols are involved, as these actions are seen as direct threats to group honour and identity (Peterson & Nussio, 2021). In this context, media and propaganda increase these dynamics by manipulating public perceptions, spreading polarized narratives, and fuelling divisive emotions. Hsiao and Kim (2022) argue that social media platforms serve as “echo chambers,” strengthening biases and shaping public opinion in ways that deepen societal divisions. This influence indicates the importance of media and propaganda in both inciting and aiding ethno-religious violence.

Understanding these dynamics provides critical insights into why ethno-religious conflicts are particularly resilient and resistant to resolution. By examining the underlying factors of identity formation, escalation, and media influence, we gain a clearer view of the deeply embedded processes that promote these conflicts, as well as the substantial challenges associated with peacebuilding efforts.

2.3.1. Identity Formation and Group Solidarity

Ethno-religious identity formation is a critical process in the dynamics of conflict, as identities are not simply inherited but vigorously constructed and mobilized, especially in contexts of perceived threat. A recent study by Abdelal and Khan (2022) stresses that ethno-religious identities are often constructed via a combination of cultural markers, historical

narratives, and political agendas that frame one group's identity in opposition to others (Abdelal & Khan, 2022). This construction process is particularly strong in communities with histories of colonization or state repression, where groups may draw upon cultural distinctiveness and historical grievances to reinforce their collective identity. Thus, ethno-religious identities are malleable, shaped, and reshaped in response to transforming socio-political conditions.

Once constructed, these identities are mobilized via religious gatherings, social institutions, and political rhetoric. In this case, political elites often play a significant role in mobilizing ethno-religious identities to promote their agendas, thereby solidifying group boundaries and establishing a "rally around the flag" effect (Ahmed & Greene, 2023). This mobilization is especially powerful in divided societies, where political leaders may use identity as a means of consolidating power by reinforcing distinctions between "us" and "them" (Ahmed & Greene, 2023). This process not only deepens identity boundaries but also lays the groundwork for conflict by framing the opposing group as a threat.

Group solidarity is essential to the intensity and endurance of ethno-religious conflicts, as it fosters a sense of collective resilience and purpose among group members. Studies by Rasmussen and Lindquist (2021) suggest that group solidarity becomes particularly pronounced in situations where one group perceives itself as oppressed or marginalized. In such cases, solidarity provides psychological support and motivation to resist, often through violent means, against perceived oppressors or rivals. This solidarity is often reinforced via cultural practices, symbols, and narratives that glorify past struggles or emphasize collective suffering, binding group members together with a shared identity and mission. Furthermore, solidarity within ethno-religious groups can also compromise peace efforts by stigmatizing compromise as betrayal. As reported by Duarte and Williams (2023), leaders who seek to engage or negotiate in peace talks may be viewed as disloyal to the group, with radical elements framing cooperation as capitulation. This dynamic can make

ethno-religious conflicts particularly resistant to resolution, as solidarity-driven opposition to compromise reinforces hardline positions on both sides. Thus, group solidarity promotes conflicts by fostering a collective will to resist and by discouraging any actions perceived as weakening the group's position.

2.3.2. Escalation and Cycles of Retaliation

Escalation in ethno-religious conflicts often follows a pattern where small incidents and initial grievances trigger larger confrontations, leading to cycles of violence that are difficult to control. According to Peterson and Nussio (2021), escalation mechanisms typically include overreaction, provocation, and chain reactions, where actions taken by one group provoke a disproportionate response from the other, setting off a cycle of tit-for-tat violence. In ethno-religious contexts, escalation is triggered by the symbolic value of certain actions, where any perceived harm or insult to a religious or ethnic identity can prompt an emotionally charged response, leading to violent confrontation (Peterson & Nussio, 2021).

Also, escalation is often exacerbated by political leaders and influencers who frame the conflict in existential terms, portraying it as a struggle for survival. This framing builds a “zero-sum” mentality, where groups see any gain by the other as a direct loss for themselves, thereby justifying escalatory responses. D’Cruz and Miller (2022) emphasize that in divided communities, such framing is commonly used by leaders to justify rising aggression and mobilize public support for retaliation (D’Cruz & Miller, 2022). Thus, the mechanisms of escalation are inherently linked to the emotional and symbolic dimensions of ethno-religious identities, which are readily exploited by leaders to intensify conflict.

In addition, retaliatory violence plays a central role in the protraction of ethno-religious conflicts, as each act of violence triggers counterattacks, creating cycles that are hard to break. Retaliation is often driven by a sense of “restorative justice,” where each group

seeks to avenge perceived injustices or restore honour after an attack. According to Bentley and Roberts (2023), retaliatory violence in ethno-religious conflicts is not only reactive but carries a symbolic meaning, as it reinforces group solidarity and justifies continued resistance (Bentley & Roberts, 2023). This cyclical nature of violence becomes self-sustaining, with each side accumulating grievances that fuel further hostilities.

Moreover, retaliatory violence deepens mistrust between groups, as it raises a sense of collective trauma that passes from one generation to the next. This generational transfer of grievances ensures that even when peace processes are initiated, memories of past violence can hinder reconciliation. Hwang and Cho (2022) point out that intergenerational narratives of suffering and revenge become embedded within group identities, creating a “cycle of memory” that perpetuates violence even in times of relative peace (Hwang & Cho, 2022).

2.3.3. Role of Propaganda and Media in Ethno-religious Conflicts

Media plays a significant role in shaping public perceptions of ethno-religious conflicts by framing narratives, highlighting certain events, and reinforcing stereotypes. Social media has become a powerful tool in this regard, as it allows for rapid dissemination of information—often without adequate verification—fueling polarization. Recent research by Hsiao and Kim (2022) suggests that social media platforms serve as “echo chambers” where users encounter information that reinforces their pre-existing biases, creating a one-sided view of the conflict and deepening divides (Hsiao & Kim, 2022).

Traditional media can also play a divisive role by sensationalizing events or adopting biased reporting that favours one group over another. When media outlets focus on incidents that frame one group as aggressors and the other as victims, it can escalate tensions by reinforcing harmful stereotypes. According to Thompson and Reza (2021), biased media coverage often influences public opinion and can increase support for hardline measures, as audiences internalize simplified narratives that do not reflect the complexity of the situation

(Thompson & Reza, 2021).

Propaganda is another critical factor in ethno-religious conflicts, as it is often used to incite hatred, justify violence, and consolidate group solidarity. Political leaders and extremist factions frequently employ propaganda to dehumanize the opposing group, framing them as existential threats to justify aggressive actions. For example, Balan and Fazli (2023) describe how propaganda tactics such as fear-mongering and historical revisionism are used to solidify in-group loyalty while demonizing the out-group, creating a social environment ripe for violence (Balan & Fazli, 2023).

On the other hand, media and propaganda also have the potential to mitigate conflict when used to promote messages of tolerance, coexistence, and mutual understanding. Ahmed (2023) explores cases where community media initiatives have successfully countered divisive narratives, providing platforms for dialogue and peacebuilding efforts. Such initiatives illustrate that while media can exacerbate conflicts, it can also play a constructive role in bridging divides if used responsibly and with a focus on inclusivity (Ahmed, 2023).

Therefore, ethno-religious conflicts are driven by intertwined dynamics of identity formation, group solidarity, escalation cycles, and the influential role of media and propaganda. Identity formation and group solidarity transform cultural differences into potent symbols of resistance, reinforcing an “us versus them” mentality. This solidarity often stigmatizes compromise, complicating resolution efforts. Escalation, triggered by provocations, leads to cycles of retaliatory violence fueled by notions of honor and justice, which deepen divides and sustain mistrust. Media and propaganda amplify these conflicts by shaping perceptions and reinforcing biases, often framing disputes as existential threats. Although media can exacerbate conflict, it also has the potential to promote peace when responsibly used. Together, these dynamics make ethno-religious conflicts resilient and deeply embedded, requiring comprehensive strategies for resolution.

2.4. Impacts of Ethno-religious conflicts on social cohesion, economic development, and political stability

Nigeria, as a nation, has grappled with the difficulties of ethnic and religious conflicts, posing a threat to the foundations of sustainable development. This conflict has resulted in the loss of numerous lives, the devastation of property, and the displacement of individuals from their businesses and residences. Consequently, this article explores the consequences of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria (Kolawole & Eunice, 2021).

The impact of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria extends to the economic sector, particularly in conflicts involving farmers and Fulani herdsmen. These crises have led to the destruction of farms valued in billions of naira. Idowu's (2015) research indicates that over 1.5 million individuals, predominantly farmers, have been displaced due to various ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. This displacement significantly hampers food production, resulting in shortages and subsequently driving up food prices. The increased costs make food unattainable for some, pushing them into poverty because of the losses incurred, whether from the destruction of their businesses or farmlands (Uhunmwangho, 2011).

The persistent issue of unemployment has been a formidable obstacle to sustainable development since the country gained independence. The growth in the nation's population has not kept pace with the availability of job opportunities. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (2020), as highlighted in their third- quarter labor report for 2018, a concerning 23.1% of Nigerians were unemployed. This statistic raises alarm bells, signaling an increase in unemployment within the country. The situation becomes even more disheartening as individuals who have invested effort in establishing small-scale businesses or farms often find themselves losing their ventures to destructive attacks by criminals. This unfortunate outcome not only forces people out of employment but also hampers the nation's economic progress.

Ethno-religious conflicts have undeniably contributed to the unemployment crisis in Nigeria. Individuals whose workplaces have been destroyed due to these conflicts join the ranks of the unemployed. Many displaced individuals have also fallen victim to unemployment as they are forced out of their communities, either due to attacks by Fulani herdsmen or incidents involving Boko Haram. What adds to the concern is that some of those affected have no alternative sources of income, pushing them to join militant groups that promise payment, thereby contributing to an escalation in the crime rate. Onuoha (2012) supports this perspective, asserting that poverty and unemployment have compelled some individuals to turn to secret cults, armed robbery gangs, prostitution, and even involvement in activities such as becoming child soldiers. The situation is bleak, with people losing their businesses and farms to destructive attacks by criminals, alongside the destruction of government infrastructure. This collective impact sets the nation's economy on a regressive path.

Hence, the consequences of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria are deeply concerning. Lives and properties have been lost, and countless individuals have been compelled to flee their communities, abandoning their farms and businesses. This influx of displaced individuals into the pool of jobless citizens in the labor market further exacerbates the unemployment crisis, all of which can be traced back to the ethno-religious crises that continue to impede Nigeria's path to sustainable development.

Similarly, conflicts exert far-reaching implications on the educational landscape, resulting in the destruction of school infrastructure where teaching and learning activities occur. The impact extends to individuals, encompassing both staff and students. In regions marked by ongoing conflicts, the learning environment becomes inhospitable, hindering effective teaching and learning. Adebayo (2010) highlights the detrimental effects of ethno-religious crises in Northern Nigeria on education, a critical sector for propelling sustainable development. The instability arising from various instances of ethno-religious conflict has

led to a brain drain in the education sector.

To address these challenges, the nation responds to conflicts by declaring a state of emergency, leading to the temporary closure of schools within the affected areas. In some instances, school buildings and essential infrastructure face destruction during conflicts. An evident consequence of these conflicts on education is the disruption of established curricula designed to graduate students within a specified timeframe. This disruption often results in situations where students may spend more years than anticipated in a typical program.

Consequently, educational programs in the country have been significantly impacted by incidents of ethno-religious conflict in Nigeria. The impending effects of these conflicts have contributed to the emergence of school dropouts among some youths. It is apparent that the disruptions caused by conflicts not only impede the learning process but also have broader consequences on the educational trajectories and outcomes for students in the affected regions.

As established, the impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria is deeply concerning, marked by the loss of hundreds of lives and properties. Numerous individuals have been compelled to flee their communities, leaving behind farms and businesses. Consequently, these displaced individuals contribute to the growing number of unemployed citizens in the labor market. This outcome is a direct consequence of the ethno-religious crises, significantly impeding Nigeria's progress towards sustainable development.

2.4.1. Economic Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts

The economic impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State is profound, as these conflicts result in significant destruction of property, reduced investments, and long-term damage to local economies. When communities engage in violent conflicts, businesses and infrastructure are often the first to be destroyed. A study by Salau et al. (2021) revealed that several regions in Kwara State, particularly in Edu and Ifelodun local governments, have

experienced extensive property destruction during clashes between different ethnic and religious groups. Farmlands, homes, and commercial buildings are frequently targeted, leading to massive economic losses for individuals and the community at large. These losses cripple the local economy and severely disrupt livelihoods.

In addition to the destruction of property, ethno-religious conflicts lead to a significant reduction in local and foreign investments. Investors are often wary of regions plagued by instability, fearing that their capital and businesses may be destroyed in the wake of violent clashes. In Kwara State, repeated conflicts have deterred potential investors, stalling economic development projects that could have provided jobs and boosted the local economy. A report from Nigeria's National Bureau of Statistics (2019) highlighted those states with higher instances of conflict, like Kwara, experience lower rates of economic growth compared to more stable regions.

The long-term effects of these conflicts on local economies are also devastating. Beyond the immediate destruction of property, the recurrent nature of these conflicts discourages long-term planning and development. Communities affected by violence often experience a significant drop in agricultural productivity, particularly in rural areas where farming is the primary source of income. The displacement of people due to conflict means that farmlands go untended, leading to food shortages and increased prices. Furthermore, the costs of rebuilding damaged infrastructure and homes drain resources that could have been allocated to economic development initiatives (Kumar and Chowdhury, 2020).

Addressing the economic impact of ethno-religious conflicts requires targeted interventions aimed at promoting peace and stability. Programs that encourage collaboration between different ethnic and religious groups in economic ventures, such as cooperative farming or shared business initiatives, could help foster a sense of mutual dependency and reduce the likelihood of conflict. Moreover, government policies that incentivize investment in conflict-prone areas, along with peacebuilding initiatives, may help to restore investor

confidence and boost economic recovery in Kwara State.

2.4.2. Social Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts

The social impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State is equally far-reaching, affecting social cohesion, community life, and the displacement of people. One of the most significant consequences of these conflicts is the breakdown of social cohesion within communities. Ethnic and religious groups that previously coexisted peacefully are often torn apart by violence, with trust between communities eroded. In the aftermath of such conflicts, communities are left deeply divided, making reconciliation and cooperation difficult (Akinyele, 2019). This social fragmentation weakens the communal bonds necessary for collective problem-solving and mutual support, ultimately leaving communities more vulnerable to future conflicts.

Also, displacement is another major social impact of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Thousands of people have been forced to flee their homes during violent clashes, seeking refuge in neighboring towns or displacement camps. For instance, the International Organization for Migration (2020) reported that during the most recent wave of conflicts in Kwara State, over 10,000 people were displaced, many of whom have yet to return to their homes. The displacement of people leads to overcrowding in host communities, straining local resources and creating tensions between displaced populations and the host communities. This further exacerbates the cycle of violence, as competition for scarce resources intensifies.

The long-term psychological effects of displacement and conflict are significant, particularly for vulnerable populations such as women and children. Many individuals who have witnessed or experienced violence during ethno-religious conflicts suffer from trauma, anxiety, and depression. Children are often deeply affected by the loss of their homes, the disruption of their education, and the violence they have witnessed (Kanas et al., 2022). This

psychological distress can persist long after the physical violence has ended, contributing to long-term social instability in the region. According to Adebayo (2020), mental health services in Kwara State are inadequate to address the scale of the trauma experienced by many conflict-affected individuals, leading to unresolved psychological distress.

Efforts to rebuild social cohesion in conflict-affected areas must prioritize reconciliation and trauma healing programs. Community-based initiatives that bring together different ethnic and religious groups to engage in dialogue and collaborative projects can help rebuild trust and foster social cohesion. Furthermore, the provision of mental health services for displaced and traumatized individuals is essential in addressing the long-term psychological effects of conflict.

2.4.3. Impact on Education and Health

Ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State have had a detrimental impact on access to essential services, particularly education and healthcare. During periods of conflict, schools are often closed, either because they are directly targeted or because it becomes unsafe for students and teachers to attend. According to a report by UNICEF (2021), the dropout rate in conflict-affected areas of Kwara State increased by 40% following a series of violent clashes in 2019, with many children unable to return to school even after the violence subsided. The disruption of education in conflict zones means that children in these areas are often left behind academically, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and social inequality.

In addition to school closures, educational infrastructure is frequently damaged or destroyed during conflicts, leaving communities without the necessary resources to rebuild. Schools that are used as shelters for displaced populations during conflicts are often rendered unusable for long periods, further delaying the resumption of educational activities. The long-term effect of this disruption is the widening of educational disparities between conflict-affected and more stable regions in Kwara State. Children from conflict-prone areas are less

likely to complete their education, reducing their future economic prospects and increasing the likelihood of continued poverty (Salau et al., 2021).

Healthcare services are also severely impacted by ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Many healthcare facilities are destroyed or rendered inaccessible during periods of violence, leaving vulnerable populations without access to critical medical services. The World Health Organization (2020) reported that in some parts of Kwara State, maternal and infant mortality rates spiked during conflict periods due to the closure of healthcare facilities and the inability of pregnant women to access necessary care. This disruption in healthcare services not only affects immediate health outcomes but also has long-term consequences for community health.

Addressing the impact of conflicts on education and healthcare requires concerted efforts from both the government and international organizations. Rebuilding educational and healthcare infrastructure in conflict-affected areas should be a priority, with a focus on ensuring that these services remain accessible even during periods of instability. Mobile healthcare units and alternative education programs, such as online learning or community-based schooling, could help mitigate the impact of future conflicts on essential services. Therefore, the economic, social, and infrastructural impacts of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State are profound and multifaceted.

Economically, these conflicts result in the destruction of property, reduced investment, and long-term damage to local economies, particularly in rural areas. Socially, these conflicts erode trust, lead to displacement, and cause long-lasting psychological trauma. Access to essential services such as education and healthcare is severely disrupted, further entrenching poverty and inequality in conflict-affected regions. To mitigate these impacts, comprehensive conflict resolution strategies must focus not only on immediate peacebuilding but also on long-term economic recovery, social reconciliation, and the

rebuilding of essential infrastructure.

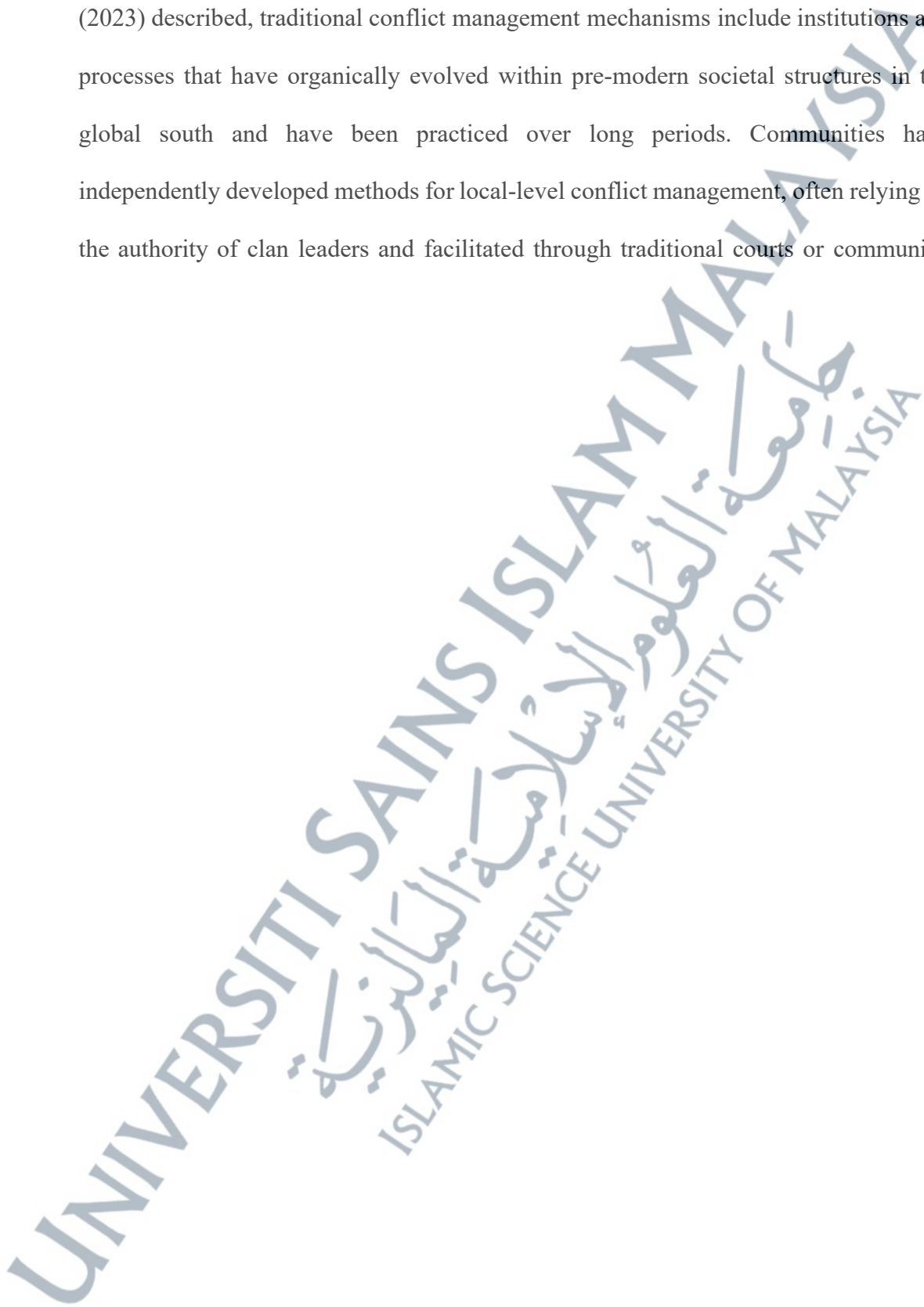
Thus, the economic, social, and infrastructural impacts of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State are profound and multifaceted. Economically, these conflicts result in the destruction of property, reduced investment, and long-term damage to local economies, particularly in rural areas. Socially, these conflicts erode trust, lead to displacement, and cause long-lasting psychological trauma. Access to essential services such as education and healthcare is severely disrupted, further entrenching poverty and inequality in conflict-affected regions. To mitigate these impacts, comprehensive conflict resolution strategies must focus not only on immediate peacebuilding but also on long-term economic recovery, social reconciliation, and the rebuilding of essential infrastructure.

2.5. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Interventions

Various conflict management techniques have been employed, akin to other conflicts requiring the intervention of civil society organizations, yet the issue tends to exacerbate over time. Like previous conflicts in Nigeria, several methods have been utilized, such as negotiation, mediation, litigation, conciliation, arbitration, and alternative dispute resolution. At the community level, traditional conflict resolution techniques are often applied to resolve disputes between individuals and groups (Tehrani & Yamini, 2020). Conflict management aims to transform a detrimental situation into a constructive one, aiming to address and eliminate activities that lead to violence, leaving resolution to the political sphere. Concerns are widespread that the ethno-religious conflict is intensifying due to the government's lack of political will to address it effectively. In some parts of Africa, traditional conflict management techniques have long been used to resolve land-related disputes (Dimelu et al., 2016).

Traditional dispute resolution methods are developed within each community's sociopolitical framework and have evolved in response to the unique realities of African

societies, largely due to the high costs and lack of trust in the legal system. As Aganah (2023) described, traditional conflict management mechanisms include institutions and processes that have organically evolved within pre-modern societal structures in the global south and have been practiced over long periods. Communities have independently developed methods for local-level conflict management, often relying on the authority of clan leaders and facilitated through traditional courts or community



assemblies. Scholars argue that these traditional approaches have historically been significant in addressing various social and resource-related conflicts since the pre-colonial era (Appiah-Thompson, 2020). These mechanisms have emerged from the recognition that communities frequently face conflicts arising from conflicting interests in the use of environmental resources (Festus FIPMD, 2020; Ide et al., 2023).

In traditional conflict management, elders strive to protect social cohesion from disruption or work to restore broken ties caused by actions that violate community norms, culture, or values. Measures such as compensation for the affected party or sanctions against wrongdoers aim to restore harmony and repair relationships rather than seeking retribution (Faregh et al., 2021). Several scholars have noted that traditional mechanisms prioritize establishing rules and norms for the equitable use of common resources to promote sustainable use and reduce user conflicts (Appiah-Thompson, 2020). For example, Tamariz and Baumann (2022) highlight the use of hospitality meetings in Nigeria, where traditional leaders, including heads of families, clans, communities, neighbours, or traditional healers, mediate to negotiate peaceful coexistence and agreements on resource use between farmers and herders. Mediation occurs when conflicts arise between farmers and herders, resulting in crop damage or injuries, and compensation may be offered to the aggrieved party. However, the goal is to maintain social order and harmonious relations (Faure, 2000; Boege, 2006).

According to Ikezue and Ezeah (2017), traditional conflict management techniques were used in Africa even before colonialism and are preferred over current methods. They argued that the main goal of traditional conflict management is to identify the source of the problem and address it amicably before it escalates. Chikaire et al. (2018) noted that traditional chiefs, religious leaders, town unions, Miyetti Allah, police, courts, the military, and local government are among the institutional

mechanisms used to manage the herder-farmer conflict in Nigeria, particularly in Imo state. While the conflicting parties favour arbitration, they prefer to handle disputes informally rather than through the courts or police to maintain relationships.

Therefore, the above studies demonstrate the complexity and persistence of conflict management in Nigeria, particularly within the context of herder-farmer disputes. While various modern techniques such as negotiation, mediation, and litigation are employed, political will and administrative challenges often limit their effectiveness. Traditional conflict management techniques, deeply embedded within the sociopolitical frameworks of African communities, continue to play a prominent role in resolving disputes, especially at the local level. These traditional methods, shaped by centuries of practice and rooted in community norms, prioritize restoring harmony and social cohesion over retribution. Scholars and practitioners alike recognize the value of these indigenous approaches in addressing conflicts related to resource use and social interactions, highlighting the importance of integrating traditional mechanisms with modern conflict resolution strategies. Hence, a comprehensive approach combining traditional and contemporary methods may offer a more sustainable solution to managing conflicts in Nigeria and similar contexts.

2.6. Current strategies for Resolving Ethno-religious conflict

The initial attempt by the Federal government to address conflicts and tensions in the Middle Belt involved the deployment of military and police forces. In addition, special task forces were established in 2010, including Operation Safe Haven for Plateau State, Operation Whirl Stroke, Ayem A'kpatuma I and II, and Operation Puff Adder (Duru, 2018b, 2018a). Despite these efforts, their impact on reducing security threats was limited. The establishment of special task forces became crucial in response

to allegations of human rights violations and ethno-religious accusations against the army and police, as reported by humanitarian organizations such as Human Rights Watch (2001, 2002, 2013, 2020).

However, the use of coercive force has shown minimal effectiveness in mitigating insecurity threats. Dissatisfaction with the federal government's performance led Plateau and Benue states to establish hybrid security structures like Operation Rainbow and agro rangers, respectively, addressing conflict dynamics specific to their states (Longba'am-Alli, 2022).

Ethno-religious conflicts are a recurring issue in Nigeria, with a range of complex conflicts ranging from resource, and communal, to political and ethno-religious conflicts. The political landscape of Nigeria has been inundated with these conflicts, leading to huge human carnage, internal displacements, refugee crises, loss of investments, strained inter-communal or inter-ethnic relations, and threatened internal security and public order (Eze, 2021). The high level of inter-ethnic and inter-religious vendetta in the country has led to Nigeria exhibiting the symptoms of a collapsing state, whose members are perpetually at war with one another. The recurring political and ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have become a matter of great concern. The weaknesses of legalistic and mechanical approaches to conflict resolution are characterized by inter-ethnic and religious conflicts. Many Nigerians loosely blame diversity for most crises in the country, but skewed perceptions and attitudes toward diversity itself nurture the problem. The sensitivity of religion in Nigeria has been of great concern for quite a while. The volatility of religious expression has contributed to violent conflicts and killings in the country (Joshua, 2018). The effects of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria lead to an increase in the withdrawal of foreign investments and an education imbalance. The solution to these conflicts requires

building strong and resilient ethno-religious structures, with emphasis on religious harmony, inclusive political leadership, social justice, and reformed education objectives. Both economic development and religious reconciliation are necessary to rebuild trust and stabilize the country's Ethnicity, Religion, and Polarization in Nigeria (Iwuchukwu, 2021).

Consequently, how leaders and managers manage conflict can determine whether it results in a productive or detrimental outcome. Managers within organizations should be adept at identifying different conflict types to apply suitable strategies that yield positive results. As Adebajo & Adebajo (2023) pointed out, that managers should prioritize effective conflict management rather than avoiding or disliking it. Besides, several measures, such as enhancing representation and inclusion, implementing a rotational system for political power, and initiating reforms in education, can be implemented to alleviate the influence of ethnoreligious factors on representation and participation in decision-making and governance in Nigeria (Ojelabi et al., 2021).

Furthermore, the presence of ethnicity and religion in Nigeria contributes to tensions, as various groups feel inadequately represented, expressing their discontent through conflicting demands. In the Niger Delta region, there is a call for resource control, the minority seeks equal treatment with other groups, and some in the southeast and southwest advocate for the breakup of the federation. Also, discussions revolve around power devolution and altering revenue-sharing formulas to favor states. These pressing issues demand responses to perceived injustices that pose a threat to national unity in Nigeria. Establishing equal opportunities, free from ethno-religious biases, in political governance and national responsibilities can address imbalances in representation and the equitable sharing of benefits within the system. (Abdulkareem, 2020).

Another strategy includes rotation of political power: Implementing power rotation in Nigeria necessitates legislative action defining modalities and enhancing the democratic and integrative benefits. Despite opposition to this peacebuilding strategy, it could potentially mitigate political unrest, creating room for dialogue and shared understanding (Jonah & Wudil, 2021). Many Nigerian politicians and religious leaders perpetuate the fragile unity narrative by emphasizing ethno-religious sentiments and discord among different groups, hindering efforts to promote tolerance and harmony. Nation-building goals should focus on transforming ethno-religious polarization into tools for energizing national consciousness in the pursuit of peacebuilding. Support for a leader or leaders who prioritize unity over ethno-religious sentiments is essential to mitigate intolerance in Nigeria. (Onah et al., 2018).

The education system also plays a crucial role in fostering peace; the Nigerian education system has failed to instill virtues conducive to peacebuilding. Due to their impact on national unity, the government should reassess the use of ethnicity-based quota systems in higher education admission and employment. Such practices can undermine merit-based hiring and lead to dissatisfaction among ethno-religious groups (Oboh, 2020). Reforming civic education in Nigeria's school system is essential, blending theory with practice and ensuring alignment with the actions and inactions of political leaders. An overhauled education system can significantly contribute to instilling positive ethno-religious values and fostering a collective perception based on national ideologies emphasizing equality, irrespective of religion and ethnicity (Ngwoke & Ituma, 2020).

While previous literature provides valuable insights into the broad causes and impacts of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria, significant gaps remain. Few studies disaggregate these issues at the local government level, particularly within Kwara

State's Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu areas. This lack of granularity limits the applicability of broader findings to specific conflict environments. Furthermore, there is a tendency in existing literature to conflate ethnic and religious identities, overlooking the distinct roles they play in shaping community grievances and violence. Several overlapping themes such as poverty, land scarcity, and political marginalization are repeatedly discussed without sufficient comparative analysis, thereby reducing analytical depth. Moreover, while Islamic perspectives on peacebuilding are often noted, they are seldom critically assessed in empirical literature or applied to local conflict contexts. By identifying and addressing these gaps and overlaps, this study positions itself to present a more contextually grounded and theory-informed contribution to the field.

2.7. Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 provides an extensive review of the literature surrounding ethno-religious conflicts, with a focus on the historical, socio-economic, and political contexts that have contributed to the prevalence of these conflicts in Nigeria, particularly in Kwara State. The chapter begins by tracing the roots of ethno-religious tensions in Nigeria to colonial legacies, where the British policy of indirect rule favored certain ethnic groups, creating imbalances in political power and resources. This uneven distribution of power laid the foundation for post-independence conflicts, as ethnic and religious groups continued to compete for dominance in the political landscape. The amalgamation of ethnic groups into a single political entity during colonization, without regard for pre-existing social structures, is identified as a critical trigger for ongoing tensions.

The review also highlights the role of economic disparities in fueling these

conflicts. The unequal distribution of resources, particularly land, has led to competition between ethnic groups, exacerbating tensions in regions like Kwara State, where farming is a major source of livelihood. This section discusses how economic marginalization, especially in rural areas where access to land and resources is limited, has often led to violent clashes between communities. In addition, unemployment and poverty, particularly among the youth, are identified as catalysts for conflict, as disenfranchised groups are more likely to be drawn into violence. These economic factors are linked to political manipulation, where leaders exploit ethnic and religious identities to gain support, further inflaming conflicts.

The chapter also delves into the impact of cultural narratives and stereotypes in perpetuating ethno-religious conflicts. Drawing on Johan Galtung's Cultural Violence Theory, the review explores how deep-rooted beliefs, cultural practices, and religious ideologies contribute to justifying and sustaining violence. Ethnic superiority, historical grievances, and religious extremism are identified as key cultural factors that have been used to legitimize violence and promote division between groups. The chapter examines how these narratives are reinforced by political and religious leaders, who often use them to mobilize support and strengthen their positions, rather than fostering unity and reconciliation. This section describes the significance of addressing these cultural and social narratives as part of any effective conflict resolution strategy.

To conclude, the chapter evaluates existing conflict resolution mechanisms and interventions, both traditional and modern, that have been applied in Nigeria and Kwara State. It discusses the strengths and limitations of these approaches, including legal frameworks, interfaith dialogues, and community-based peacebuilding initiatives. The review emphasizes that while modern conflict resolution methods, such as negotiation and mediation, have been somewhat effective, traditional mechanisms, such as those

led by elders and religious leaders, continue to play a crucial role in managing conflicts at the grassroots level. The chapter concludes by identifying gaps in the literature, particularly the need for more localized and comprehensive studies that incorporate both traditional and modern conflict resolution strategies. These studies are necessary to understand the specific dynamics of conflicts in Kwara State and to develop sustainable solutions that address the root causes of violence while promoting social cohesion and development.

