

**THE ROOT CAUSES OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONFLICTS  
IN KWARA STATE, NORTH CENTRAL NIGERIA, AND  
CURRENT EFFORTS IN RESOLVING IT**

Katibi Umuani Aliagan

Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment for the degree of  
MASTER OF SOCIAL SCIENCE

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA

August 2025

## AUTHOR DECLARATION

I acknowledge that this thesis is from my work and personal effort. As for the excerpts and quotations, I indicated their source in the margin of the thesis.

Date: 16 August 2025

Signature:



Name: Katibi Umuani Aliagan  
Matric No: 3221450  
Address: BL-303, BLOCK B, ITH  
International students residences,  
230, Jalan Raya 6, Taman Serdang Jaya,  
43300 Seri Kembangan, Selangor

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM  
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية  
ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the name of Allah, the most beneficent, the most merciful.

“Which then of the bounties of your lord will you deny...(Q55v23). All praise is to Allah, the owner of the world I am grateful to Allah for His mercy on my life and the gift of the people I have met along this journey, some who have challenged me, some have inspired me, but all of them help me to realize the wonders of life. My deepest gratitude goes first to Allah the Almighty, who granted me the opportunity, determination, power, and confidence to carry out this thesis from the beginning until its end. This work is dedicated to ALLAH (Subhanahu wata’ala), my guidance Sheikh Imam Yakub Aliagan, whose unwavering support and wisdom have illuminated my path throughout this journey, and my beloved father, Sheikh Sulaiman Aliagan. May Allah increase his abundant blessings on him. This work is dedicated to both of you with profound gratitude and everlasting love.

I extend my sincerest gratitude to my supervisor, Associate Professor Abdul Hakim Moh’d, whose expertise, encouragement, and invaluable guidance have been instrumental in the completion of this thesis. Your unwavering support, constructive feedback, and mentorship have helped shape my ideas and refine my research, culminating in its success. My utmost gratitude also goes to my co-supervisor, Dr. Ibrahim Fahad, for his dedication, patience, and belief in my abilities throughout this journey. Your mentorship has not only enriched my academic experience but has also empowered me to grow both personally and professionally. I am deeply grateful for your contributions and proud to have had the opportunity to work under your guidance.

What would I have been without my parents? You are my guiding light, whose unwavering support and wisdom have illuminated my path throughout this journey. Your guidance has been a beacon of strength, shaping my academic pursuits and nurturing my growth. To my dear mother, thank you for everything. And to my beloved father, though you departed before our paths could intertwine, your presence has always been felt in the deepest chambers of my heart. Your absence echoes with silent wisdom I never had the privilege to know firsthand, yet in moments of reflection, I feel your unseen hand guiding me, urging me forward with a strength born of your legacy. Though our time together was brief, your spirit endures within me, a silent companion in every triumph and challenge. I would also express my gratitude and thanks to the Dean of the Centre for Graduate Studies of Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia for his guidance and instructions, and the director of Pusat Wakaf dan Zakat (PWZ) Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia for his financial assistance.

Finally, and not least, is my beloved family. My husband and my children, your love, patience, support, and sacrifice are hereby acknowledged and appreciated. I love you all.

I'm very grateful to all those who assisted and supported me in one way or the other throughout the journey of my thesis. I say a big Jazakumullohu khoiran.

## ABSTRACT

Kwara State in North Central Nigeria is characterized by a diverse population with multiple ethnic and religious affiliations. However, this diversity has also led to longstanding conflicts between different groups. The persistence of these ethno-religious conflicts has undermined governance structures, weakened institutions, and diverted resources away from essential services and development projects, perpetuating a cycle of poverty and instability in the region. Hence, investigating the root causes of these conflicts and implementing comprehensive strategies to resolve them and promote sustainable peace and development in Kwara State is indispensable. This study examines the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, North Central Nigeria, and the current efforts to resolve them. This study investigates three central research questions: What historical, socio-economic, and political factors drive ethno-religious tensions in Kwara State? How have these conflicts impacted community well-being and development? What measures can resolve disputes and foster peaceful coexistence? The research objectives include identifying root causes, assessing socio-economic and political consequences, and proposing strategies for sustainable peacebuilding. The research employed a qualitative approach, utilizing in-depth interviews with key informants, including community leaders, religious figures, and government officials. The findings reveal that the underlying factors triggering these conflicts are multifaceted, including historical legacies, socio-economic disparities, political influence, and interreligious relations. The study suggests the need for multi-stakeholder collaboration, policy reforms, and community-driven initiatives to address systemic inequalities and promote tolerance. By integrating conflict-sensitive governance and prioritizing inclusive development, Kwara State can mitigate tensions and achieve long-term stability. This research contributes actionable insights for policymakers and stakeholders aiming to transform ethno-religious divisions into opportunities for unity and sustainable peace.

## ABSTRAK

Negeri Kwara di Utara Tengah Nigeria terdiri daripada penduduk dengan pelbagai etnik dan pegangan agama. Namun, kepelbagaian ini juga telah membawa kepada konflik berpanjangan antara kumpulan-kumpulan yang berbeza. Kelangsungan konflik etno-agama ini telah melemahkan struktur tadbir urus, merosakkan institusi serta mengalihkan sumber daripada perkhidmatan asas dan projek pembangunan, sekali gus mengekalkan kitaran kemiskinan dan ketidakstabilan di rantau tersebut. Justeru, penyelidikan terhadap punca utama konflik-konflik ini serta pelaksanaan strategi menyeluruh untuk menyelesaikannya dan memupuk keamanan serta pembangunan lestari di Negeri Kwara adalah amat mustahak. Kajian ini meneliti punca-punca utama konflik etno-agama di Negeri Kwara, Utara Tengah Nigeria, serta usaha-usaha semasa untuk menyelesaikannya. Kajian ini mengemukakan tiga persoalan utama penyelidikan: Apakah faktor sejarah, sosioekonomi dan politik yang mendorong kepada ketegangan etno-agama di Negeri Kwara? Bagaimanakah konflik-konflik ini memberi kesan kepada kesejahteraan komuniti dan pembangunan? Apakah langkah-langkah yang boleh diambil untuk menyelesaikan pertikaian serta memupuk kehidupan bersama yang aman? Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti punca utama, menilai akibat sosioekonomi dan politik, serta mencadangkan strategi untuk pembinaan keamanan yang mampan. Penyelidikan ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan menjalankan temu bual mendalam bersama pemberi maklumat utama, termasuk pemimpin masyarakat, tokoh agama dan pegawai kerajaan. Dapatan kajian mendedahkan bahawa faktor-faktor asas yang mencetuskan konflik ini adalah pelbagai, termasuklah legasi sejarah, jurang sosioekonomi, pengaruh politik dan hubungan antara agama. Kajian ini mencadangkan keperluan kerjasama pelbagai pihak berkepentingan, pembaharuan dasar serta inisiatif yang digerakkan oleh komuniti untuk menangani ketidakadilan sistemik dan memupuk sikap toleransi. Negeri Kwara boleh mengurangkan ketegangan dan mencapai kestabilan jangka panjang dengan mengintegrasikan tadbir urus yang peka kepada konflik serta mengutamakan pembangunan inklusif. Penyelidikan ini menyumbang pandangan praktikal untuk pembuat dasar dan pihak berkepentingan yang berhasrat mengubah perpecahan etno-agama kepada peluang bagi perpaduan dan keamanan lestari.

## الملخص

تتميز ولاية كوارا في شمال وسط نيجيريا بتنوع سكاني واسع يضم العديد من الجماعات العرقية والديانات المختلفة. ومع ذلك، أدى هذا التنوع أيضاً إلى نشوء صراعات طويلة الأمد بين هذه المجموعات. إن استمرار هذه النزاعات العرقية والدينية أدى إلى إضعاف الهياكل الإدارية، وإضعاف المؤسسات، وتحويل الموارد بعيداً عن الخدمات الأساسية ومشروعات التنمية، مما أدى إلى استمرار دائرة الفقر وعدم الاستقرار في المنطقة. ومن ثم، فإن البحث في الأسباب الجذرية لهذه الصراعات وتنفيذ استراتيجيات شاملة لحلها وتعزيز السلام والتنمية المستدامة في ولاية كوارا أمر بالغ الأهمية. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأسباب الأساسية للنزاعات العرقية والدينية في ولاية كوارا بشمال وسط نيجيريا، بالإضافة إلى الجهود الحالية المبذولة لحلها. وتتناول الدراسة ثلاثة أسئلة بحثية رئيسية: ما هي العوامل التاريخية والاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية التي توجع التوترات العرقية والدينية في ولاية كوارا؟ كيف أثرت هذه النزاعات على رفاهية المجتمع والتنمية؟ وما هي التدابير الفعالة التي يمكن أن تساهم في حل النزاعات وتعزيز التعايش السلمي؟

تتمثل أهداف البحث في تحديد الأسباب الجذرية للنزاعات، وتقييم تداعياتها الاجتماعية والاقتصادية والسياسية، واقتراح استراتيجيات فعالة لبناء السلام المستدام. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهجية نوعية شملت مقابلات متعمقة مع شخصيات بارزة، من بينهم قادة المجتمع، ورجال الدين، والمسؤولون الحكوميون. كشفت النتائج أن العوامل الكامنة وراء هذه النزاعات متعددة الأوجه، وتشمل الإرث التاريخي، والفجوات الاجتماعية والاقتصادية، والتأثير السياسي، والعلاقات بين الأديان. وأوصت الدراسة بضرورة التعاون بين مختلف الجهات الفاعلة، وإصلاح السياسات، وإطلاق مبادرات يقودها المجتمع لمعالجة التفاوتات الهيكلية وتعزيز قيم التسامح. ومن خلال تبني حوكمة حساسة للصراعات وإعطاء الأولوية للتنمية الشاملة، يمكن لولاية كوارا تخفيف حدة التوترات وتحقيق استقرار طويل الأمد. تساهم هذه الدراسة في تقديم رؤى عملية لصناع القرار وأصحاب المصلحة الساعين إلى تحويل الانقسامات العرقية والدينية إلى فرص لتعزيز الوحدة والسلام المستدام.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENT	PAGE
AUTHOR DECLARATION .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
ABSTRACT .....	iv
ABSTRAK .....	v
المخلص .....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	vii
LIST OF TABLES .....	x
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xi
LIST OF APPENDICES .....	xii
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.1. Research Background .....	1
1.2. Statement of the Problem.....	4
1.3. Research Questions .....	8
1.4. Research Objectives .....	8
1.5. Significance of the Study .....	9
1.5.1. Importance Towards Islam .....	10
1.5.2. Importance Towards Kwara Community .....	11
1.6. Scope of Study .....	12
1.7. Theoretical Framework.....	12
1.7.1. Relative Deprivation Theory .....	12
1.7.2. Conceptual Framework .....	16
1.8. Islamic Perspective .....	18
1.9. Operational Definitions of Terminology.....	21
1.10. Chapter Summary .....	22
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	23
2.1. Introduction to Ethno-religious Conflicts.....	23
2.1.1. Overview of Ethno-Religious Conflicts and their Historical Context.....	24
2.1.2. Importance of Understanding Ethno-religious Conflicts to Contemporary Society .....	29
2.2. Causes of Ethno-religious conflicts .....	33
2.2.1. Historical Grievances and Identity-Based Tensions.....	35
2.2.2. Socio-economic Disparities and Competition for Resources .....	36
2.2.3. Political Exclusion and Marginalization.....	38
2.2.4. Religious Ideologies and Cultural Intolerance.....	39
2.2.5. External Influence and Geopolitical Interests.....	41
2.3. Dynamics of Ethno-religious Conflicts .....	43
2.3.1. Identity Formation and Group Solidarity.....	44
2.3.2. Escalation and Cycles of Retaliation .....	46
2.3.3. Role of Propaganda and Media in Ethno-religious Conflicts .....	47
2.4. Impacts of Ethno-religious conflicts on social cohesion, economic development, and political stability.....	49
2.4.1. Economic Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts .....	51
2.4.2. Social Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts .....	53

2.4.3. Impact on Education and Health.....	54
2.5. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms and Interventions .....	56
2.6. Current strategies for Resolving Ethno-religious conflict .....	59
2.7. Chapter Summary .....	63
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	66
3.1. Introduction .....	66
3.2. Research Design .....	66
3.3. Research Approach .....	68
3.4. Population and Sampling .....	70
3.4.1. Population.....	70
3.4.2. Sampling.....	71
3.5. Sampling Strategy .....	73
3.6. Location of the study .....	74
3.7. Research instrument (Interview Questionnaire).....	75
3.8. Validity and reliability of instrumentation .....	76
3.9. Validation of Interview Protocol by Field Experts.....	77
3.10. Data Collection and Procedure .....	79
3.11. Ethical Considerations .....	81
3.12. Data Analysis.....	81
3.13. Analysis of Responses by Research Questions of the Study.....	82
3.13.1. Data Analysis and Interpretation of Results .....	82
3.13.2. Qualitative Data Analysis Techniques .....	84
3.13.3. Interview Guide .....	85
3.13.4. Interview Transcriptions.....	86
3.14. Chapter Summary .....	86
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION .....	88
4.1. Introduction .....	88
4.2. Biographical Information of the Respondents.....	89
4.3. Qualitative Analysis of Research Findings & Interpretation .....	93
4.4. What Are the Underlying Factors of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu Local Governments, Kwara State, Nigeria?.....	99
4.5. How Have Ethno-Religious Conflicts Impacted the Social and Economic Well-Being of Affected Communities in Kwara State?.....	101
4.6. What Strategies Can Prevent and Resolve Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kwara State and Promote Peaceful Coexistence Among Ethnic and Religious Groups? .....	102
4.7. Thematic analysis.....	103
4.7.1. Theme 1: Underlying Factors Contributing to Ethno-Religious Conflicts .....	107
4.7.2. Theme 2: Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts .....	109
4.7.3. Theme 3: Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Promotion.....	110
4.8. Findings and Theoretical Framework.....	112
4.8.1. Relative Deprivation Theory .....	112
4.9. Chapter Summary .....	113
CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....	116

5.1. Discussion of Findings.....	116
5.2. Recommendations .....	118
5.3. Conclusion.....	119
REFERENCES.....	121
APPENDICES.....	134

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA  
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية  
ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA

## LIST OF TABLES

Tables	Page
Table 3.1: Thematic Analysis Procedure .....	70
Table 3.2: Target Population Characteristics .....	72
Table 4.1: Demographic Overview of Informants .....	92

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA  
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية  
ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figures	Page
Figure 1.1: Ethno-Religious Death Toll by States in Nigeria from 2011 to 2019 (Yusuf Adam Marafa, 2022) .....	4
Figure 1.2: A Conceptual Model of Relative Deprivation Theory .....	15
Figure 1.3: Research Framework.....	17
Figure 4.1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents .....	92

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA  
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية  
ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA

## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendices	Page
Appendix 1: Thematic Analysis of Participants' Perspectives .....	134
Appendix 2: Research Interview Questionnaire .....	138

UNIVERSITI SAINS ISLAM MALAYSIA  
جامعة العلوم الإسلامية  
ISLAMIC SCIENCE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYSIA