

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Research Background

Competition over scarce, widely used, and decreasing natural resources can frequently spark aggressive global disputes, which ultimately have negative consequences (Murerwa & Guantai, 2019). In general, several disputes may arise whenever people come into contact with each other (Ojelabi et al., 2021). Usually, how people react to those differences would determine whether a conflict situation might result (Murerwa & Guantai, 2019). For a community or any nation to excel and experience relative peace, rapid economic growth, and advancement, the role of the community in managing conflict among its people cannot be over-emphasized. In a country, people have diverse values, personalities, and cultures, making it difficult to have similar philosophies about how things should be done (M. C. Eze, 2021). The degree of peace and harmonious interactions among people determines the quality and quantity of growth and development of any society. A community or nation that has excellent conflict resolution procedures is far better equipped to resolve many challenges that may spring up among the inhabitants (Caputo et al., 2018).

The concept of ethno-religious conflict has recently received significant attention from researchers due to the significance of the subject matter in nation- building (Okechukwu et al., 2019). The contribution to nation-building and human productivity may be undermined by the level of mutual relationships among different ethno-religious groups (Mohammed Shehu et al., 2017). Thus, a conflict-free, smooth and diplomatic

relationship is pertinent to national growth and economic advancement.

Valente Lourenço (2020) state, "A conflict is a condition of deep dispute and disagreement about something perceived to be crucial by at least one of the parties involved". Similarly, according to Johan Galtung (2013), conflicts are a system with incompatible goals, i.e., incompatible military, cultural, economic, or political goals, aims, pursuits, ambitions, desires, and objectives.

The concept of conflict is based on Rahim & Katz (2020) "people in opposition to one another, in such a way that what one wants is contradictory with that which another wants". It could bring about contests in the pursuit of goals. Conflicts trigger disharmony and generate hatred among people of the same or different faith and culture. This hatred can bring about adverse effects on individual productivity and national growth. Conflict is a complex societal issue that undermines people's morale to set goals and strive for accomplishment (Salvatori et al., 2021). In a society where the relationship among various ethno-religious groups is smooth, people will be more productive and develop strong commitment, reducing the likelihood of conflict (John-Eke & Akintokunbo, 2020). Ethno-religious conflicts are a growing concern in many parts of the world, especially in Nigeria, where the diversity of its population has been a source of both strength and division. Northcentral Nigeria, including Kwara State, has experienced a series of ethno-religious conflicts over the years, which have caused significant loss of lives as well as property (Udom & Okolie, 2022). Understanding the underlying causes of these conflicts is crucial in developing effective strategies to address them.

Kwara State, located in North central Nigeria, is home to several ethnic and religious groups, including the Yoruba, Fulani, Hausa, Nupe, and Bariba. The State has a history of ethno-religious conflicts, which have led to the loss of lives and property.

The most notable of these conflicts include the 2000 religious crisis in Ilorin, which claimed over 20 lives, and the 2009 conflict between the Hausa and Yoruba communities in Offa, which resulted in numerous deaths (Olademo et al., 2021). The underlying causes of these conflicts are complex and multifaceted. Some scholars argue that the conflicts result from competition for resources, including land and economic opportunities. Others suggest that the conflicts are driven by political manipulation and religious extremism. Furthermore, historical tensions and prejudices between ethnic and religious groups are often cited as underlying factors (Animasawun & Aremu, 2015). In recent years, efforts have been made to address these conflicts through various means, including interfaith dialogues, community-based conflict resolution mechanisms, and establishing a state-owned security outfit. However, these efforts have not been entirely successful in curbing the recurrence of these conflicts (Olademo et al., 2021). A comprehensive research study is necessary to understand the causes and dynamics of ethnoreligious conflicts in Kwara State. Hence, this study will explore qualitative data collection techniques, including interviews with affected community members, religious leaders, traditional rulers, and government officials.

Also, this study would focus on identifying the root causes of the conflicts, the role of political and religious leaders in exacerbating or mitigating the conflicts, the effectiveness of current conflict resolution mechanisms, and the impact of the disputes on the economic, social, and political fabric of the affected communities. The study's findings could inform policy and practice aimed at averting and settling ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State and beyond.

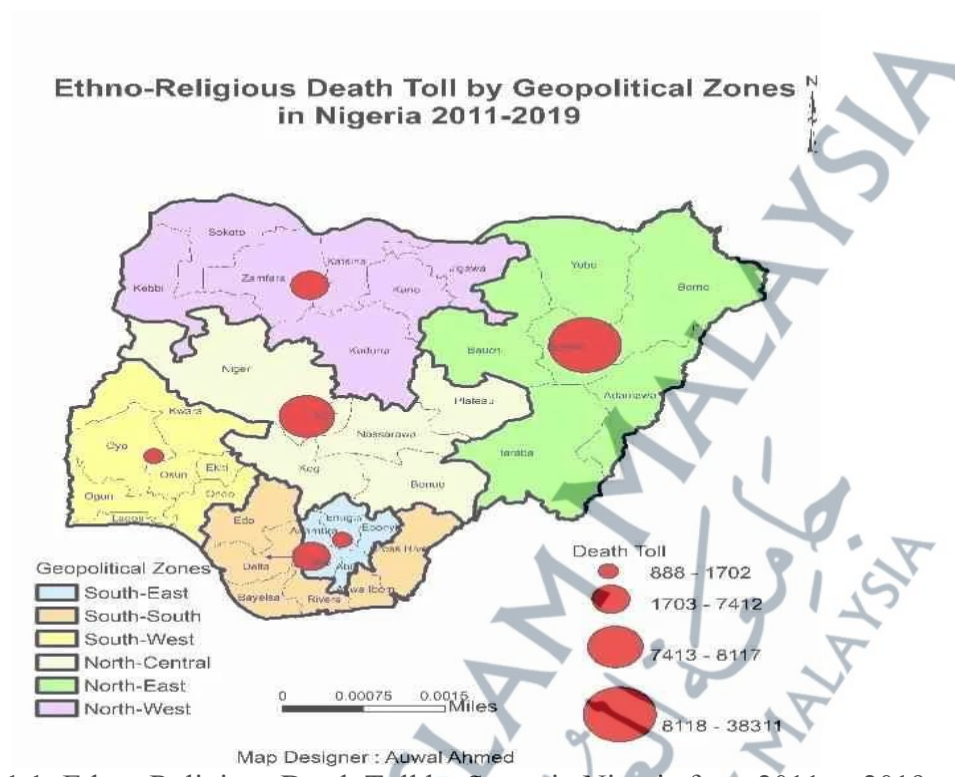


Figure 1.1: Ethno-Religious Death Toll by States in Nigeria from 2011 to 2019 (Yusuf Adam Marafa, 2022)

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Disagreement or dispute among various ethnic and religious groups is a serious problem that reduces the potential opportunities and prospects to compete favorably with other nations in the global markets. Multiple factors have been identified to trigger ethno-religious conflicts, including but not limited to individual differences, religious intolerance, and communication failures (Onah et al., 2018). Particularly in Nigeria, ethno-religious conflicts are now becoming a significant threat to the harmonious atmosphere being enjoyed by the citizen owing to incessant conflicts among various ethnic groups and this has hampered desired national growth and economic propensity (Idike & Eme, 2015; Oboh, 2020).

Nnabuihe,(2019) revealed that the north-central geopolitical zone of Nigeria, where Kwara state falls, is the second largest regarding ethnic spread and cultural

diversity. The prevalence of intergroup crises in this zone is notorious for often manifesting in ethno-religious or communal crises.

Ethno-religious conflicts have been a recurring problem in North Central Nigeria, including Kwara State, for many years. These conflicts have resulted in the loss of lives, dislodgment of communities and property damage, affecting social, economic, and political stability in the affected regions. Despite various efforts to address the conflicts, they continue to occur, causing significant harm to individuals and communities (Animasawun & Aremu, 2015). For instance, Olademo et al., (2021) reported that the recrudescence outbreak of violence between Tsaragi and Share communities is worrisome, and the protracted borderline dispute between the two communities in Kwara State has remained a potent flashpoint for violence.

Fejewe/Fiangiawa (over 200 hectares) is the area of farmland under dispute between the two communities. According to Salman and Abdulrasaq (2016), the establishment of Ifelodun Local Government Area in 1976, with its headquarters in Share, which is a Yoruba-majority area, was interpreted by the Tsaragi community, predominantly Nupe people as an attempt by the government to designate Share as the rightful landowners. The findings of the Justice Abdul Gafar Mahmud commission support the notion that these two communities coexisted harmoniously until they were separated into two distinct districts, with Share now falling under Ifelodun in the Kwara South Senatorial District and Tsaragi under Edu in the Kwara North Senatorial District. Since this division, the two communities have been involved in violent conflicts over boundary disputes, land ownership disputes, and competing historical claims to the territory. The lack of a comprehensive investigation into the underlying factors contributing to ethno-religious tensions in these local governments hinders the development of targeted interventions. Additionally, the lack of clarity on the broader

consequences of these conflicts on social and economic well-being necessitates an in-depth investigation.

These conflicts have many root causes, some of which are resource competition, historical tensions and prejudices, political manipulation, and religious extremism. The creation of successful policies and methods to deal with these conflicts has been hampered by the absence of a thorough grasp of the underlying dynamics and causes of these conflicts (Okechukwu et al., 2019).

Considering the rash of inter-communal disputes that have occurred there over the years, Kwara state, the State of harmony, is likewise evolving into a hotspot of discord in the North-central zone. Among these community crises in Kwara State, Iloffa/Odo-owa, Offa/Erin-ile, and Share/Tsaragi are among the most combustible. The Share-Tsaragi conflict, however, has been the most explosive since it is inter-ethnic, communal, and identity-based, as opposed to the others, which are communally intra-ethnic (Olademo et al., 2021). Ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, particularly in the Edu and Ifelodun local governments, represent a pressing societal challenge with profound implications for the affected communities. Despite the evident impact on social cohesion, economic development, and political stability, the root causes of these conflicts remain inadequately understood.

Until 1970, the neighboring communities of Offa and Erin-Ile coexisted peacefully. However, in 1970, tensions erupted between the two communities over boundary disputes related to their respective expansionist demands. Alao et al., (2019) recommended that the government take control of the disputed areas in line with the recommendations of the 1972 Adaramola Commission of Inquiry that the Kwara State government should use the disputed land as an industrial layout. This was done to find a long-term resolution to the conflict and prevent its recurrence in the future.

Between 1976 and 2015, almost six commissions or panels were established to address the Share/Tsaragi boundary issue; however, all of their recommendations were disregarded by the warring parties or never executed by the appropriate authorities. The Justice AbdulGafar Mahmud Commission, as reported by Salman and Abdulrasaq in 2016, expressed its regret over the state government's failure to implement the recommendations of various panels and commissions established to investigate the recurring violent clashes between the two communities. This reluctance on the part of the state government has been identified as a contributing factor to the ongoing cycle of violence between these neighbouring communities.

The tension persists despite many official interventions through panels to resolve this problem. It is, therefore, pertinent to know the various root causes of this problem and what constitutes the impediments towards resolving the conflicts.

Furthermore, there is a critical gap in knowledge regarding effective strategies for promoting and resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Addressing these gaps is crucial for formulating evidence-based policies that foster peaceful coexistence and mitigate the region's adverse effects of ethno-religious conflicts.

Hence, this study aims to highlight the need for a research study to identify the root sources of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, including the role of political and religious leaders, the effectiveness of current conflict resolution mechanisms, and the impact of the conflicts on the affected communities.

1.3. Research Questions

The following are the proposed research questions that will be considered for the study;

1. What are the underlying factors of ethno-religious conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin west, and Edu local governments, Kwara State, Nigeria?
2. How have the conflicts impacted the social cohesion of the communities in Kwara State?
3. What strategies can prevent ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State and promote peaceful coexistence among ethnic and religious groups?

1.4. Research Objectives

The objectives of this research include:

1. To investigate the underlying factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts among different groups in Edu, Ilorin West, and Ifelodun local governments of Kwara State, Nigeria.
2. To examine the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on social cohesion in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu local governments in Kwara State, Nigeria.
3. To identify effective strategies to resolve ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, Nigeria.

1.5. Significance of the Study

The study on Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kwara State, Nigeria is significant owing to various justifications. Firstly, it will improve the understanding of the underlying causes of ethno-religious conflicts in the State and their effect on social, economic, and political advancement. By recognizing the root causes of these conflicts, the study can aid in the development of efficient strategies for conflict resolution as well as peacebuilding.

Secondly, the study will provide insight into the role of political and religious leaders in either mitigating or exacerbating conflicts and help identify strategies for progressing peaceful coexistence and averting the incidence of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. The study's findings will be beneficial for policymakers, government officials, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders involved in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the region.

Thirdly, the study will contribute to existing studies on ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria and globally, providing valuable data for theoretical and practical frameworks for understanding and addressing these conflicts. Lastly, the study will serve as a resource for scholars interested in peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and inter-group relations in Nigeria and other countries facing similar challenges.

Hence, this study is crucial for promoting peaceful coexistence among different ethnic and religious groups in Kwara State and contributing to the region's general stability and development.

1.5.1. Importance Towards Islam

The principal aim of this study is to investigate and illuminate the factual essence of Islam's teachings in addressing ethno-religious conflicts, particularly in the context of Kwara State, Nigeria. Contrary to the misconceptions that Islam is a source of division or a catalyst for intergroup animosities, this study underscores how Islamic principles promote justice, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence among diverse communities. Many prevailing stereotypes about Islam stem from misinterpretations of Quranic verses and Hadith, often taken out of context to justify exclusionary or divisive practices.

Through this research, we aim to clarify these misconceptions by examining the authentic teachings of Islam and their relevance to fostering harmony and resolving conflicts. For instance, the Quran states, "O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into nations and tribes so that you may know one another. Verily, the most honourable of you with Allah is the one with the most Taqwa (piety). Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware" (Quran 49:13). This verse highlights the importance of mutual respect and understanding among diverse communities, emphasizing that true honor lies in righteousness rather than ethnic or tribal identity.

Furthermore, the Prophet Muhammad صلى الله عليه وسلم said, "The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand the people are safe" (Sahih al-Bukhari 10). This Hadith illustrates the foundational Islamic principle of ensuring safety and peace for all individuals, regardless of their backgrounds.

This study is significant in restoring Islam's image as a religion of peace and moderation, countering narratives that misrepresent its core values. By showcasing practical strategies rooted in Islamic jurisprudence and ethics, this research aims to

bridge gaps between conflicting groups, promote mutual respect, and strengthen social cohesion. Ultimately, the study aspires to contribute to a deeper understanding of Islam's role in addressing contemporary societal challenges while aligning with its fundamental commitment to justice and unity.

1.5.2. Importance Towards Kwara Community

Imposing fear has often been used as a simplistic tool for managing societal conflicts in Kwara State, particularly when addressing intergroup differences and resource conflicts. However, this approach often exacerbates divisions rather than resolving them, building an environment of mistrust and further polarizing the community. Such strategies, while seemingly operational in the short term, fail to address the root causes of conflict and instead deepen the fractures within society.

The findings from this study are essential for fostering a healthier, more harmonious Kwara community by offering practical, culturally relevant strategies that focus on mutual understanding and respect. By addressing key issues such as inclusive governance, equitable resource sharing, and collaborative decision-making, this research provides a roadmap for sustainable peace and cooperation. It emphasizes the value of empowering grassroots initiatives and community leaders to lead reconciliation efforts, thus creating an environment where all groups feel heard and valued.

This study seeks to inspire a shift in perspective within the Kwara community, replacing divisive tactics with approaches rooted in fairness, empathy and shared responsibility. By underscoring the potential for collective growth and progress, it aims to pave the way for a united and thriving society. It is hoped that through these findings, the community will move closer to achieving lasting peace and a shared

vision of prosperity.

1.6. Scope of Study

The study will comprehensively examine the historical and contemporary dimensions of ethno-religious conflicts in some selected Local government areas in Kwara State, North Central Nigeria. It will delve into the multifaceted factors driving these conflicts, encompassing historical antecedents, socioeconomic determinants, political dynamics, and religious identities, while also assessing the effectiveness of ongoing conflict resolution efforts. The research aims to provide policymakers and community leaders with useful recommendations to improve conflict resolution tactics and promote peaceful coexistence in Kwara State and as a possible benchmark for addressing related issues on a larger scale in Nigeria. This will ultimately contribute to regional stability and social harmony among various ethno-religious communities in North Central Nigeria.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

1.7.1. Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory provides a critical framework for understanding ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State by highlighting the role of perceived inequality and unmet expectations. This theory is built around three key components: expectations, perceived inequity, and feelings of frustration or injustice. Expectations refer to the aspirations or entitlements that individuals or groups believe they deserve based on societal norms, historical precedents, or promises by authorities. In Kwara State, expectations for equitable access to resources such as land, political representation, and economic opportunities are particularly pronounced. When these

expectations are unmet, they create a sense of perceived inequity, where groups feel disadvantaged compared to others, even if their absolute conditions remain the same. The persistence of such inequity's fuels frustration, resentment, and a collective sense of injustice, which often manifests as protests or violence.

This theory is particularly relevant to Kwara State, where land disputes between groups such as the Yoruba farmers and Fulani herders exemplify unmet expectations and perceived inequity. Both groups rely on land for their livelihoods, and disparities in land access have deepened divisions along ethnic lines. Similarly, unequal infrastructure development and economic opportunities across regions in the state exacerbate perceptions of exclusion. These inequities are often framed in ethnic or religious terms, amplifying grievances and fostering intergroup hostility. Moreover, historical grievances, such as unresolved boundary disputes, further contribute to the collective frustration of marginalized communities. These groups often perceive themselves as victims of systemic injustice, which heightens their sense of deprivation and mobilizes them toward conflict.

The psychological dimension of relative deprivation is significant in perpetuating ethno-religious tensions. Marginalized groups frequently develop a sense of collective victimhood, which can be exploited by political elites to further their agendas. In Kwara State, politicians have been known to capitalize on these grievances, framing their campaigns around ethnic and religious narratives to garner support. This manipulation not only inflames existing tensions but also creates cycles of violence during politically charged periods, such as elections. The dynamic interplay of unmet expectations, perceived inequity, and collective frustration underscores the applicability of Relative Deprivation Theory to the region's ethno-religious conflicts.

Addressing relative deprivation in Kwara State requires targeted interventions to reduce inequalities and foster inclusivity. Equitable resource distribution, such as fair access to land, education, and employment, is essential to addressing perceived inequities. Transparent governance and inclusive political representation can also mitigate feelings of exclusion among marginalized groups. Furthermore, fostering interfaith and interethnic dialogue can address the psychological dimensions of deprivation and promote mutual understanding. By addressing both the material and psychological aspects of relative deprivation, policymakers can create a pathway to sustainable peace and development in Kwara State, aligning with the broader goals of this study to resolve the root causes of ethno-religious conflict.

The Relative Deprivation Theory serves as a compelling lens for analyzing ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, shedding light on how unmet aspirations, perceived injustices, and shared frustrations can fuel tensions. Figure 1.1 visually represents the intricate interactions between the theory's core elements and their specific manifestations within the region.

At the heart of the model lies social collective relative deprivation, which emerges when groups perceive significant inequalities in access to resources, political influence, or developmental opportunities. This sense of unfairness is often amplified by the rapid onset of negative social changes, such as deteriorating infrastructure or systematic exclusion from decision-making processes. Meanwhile, temporal collective relative deprivation highlights the perception that conditions are worsening over time, further intensifying feelings of disenfranchisement among marginalized populations.

In Kwara State, these patterns are vividly reflected in conflicts over land between farmers and herders, as well as in stark disparities in regional development. Such

grievances bolster in-group identification, prompting ethnic and religious communities to coalesce around shared identities in response to perceived threats. While this solidarity can strengthen communal bonds, it also deepens divisions, fostering an "us-versus-them" mentality. Over time, the compounded effects of deprivation and exclusion erode the collective esteem of marginalized groups, diminishing their sense of dignity and societal standing.

This framework, as depicted in Figure 1.1, demonstrates how these interconnected factors create a breeding ground for ethno-religious strife. Tackling these challenges demands proactive measures that prioritize equity, enhance transparency, and foster meaningful dialogue. By addressing perceptions of deprivation, such interventions can help bridge divides and promote lasting intergroup harmony.

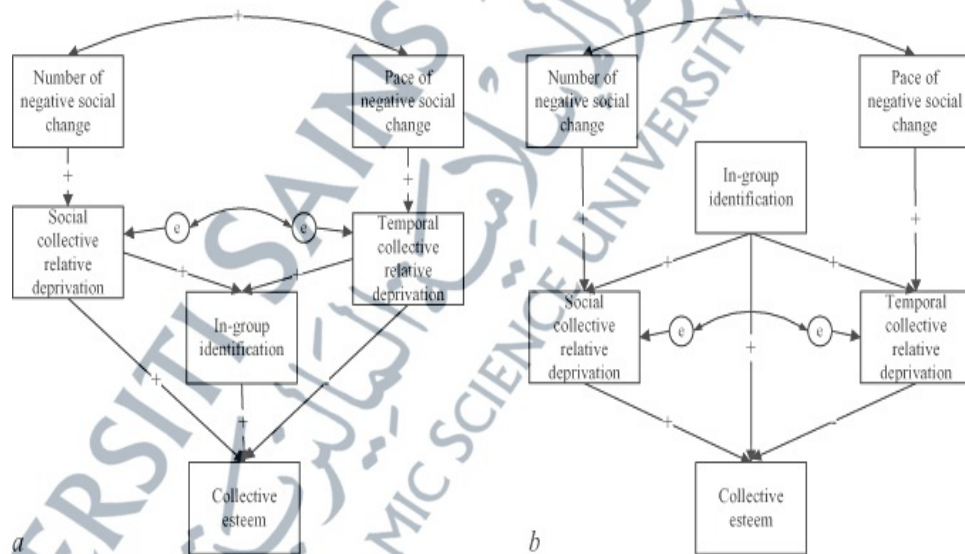


Figure 1.2: A Conceptual Model of Relative Deprivation Theory

1.7.2. Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.4 illustrates a structured approach to analyzing the root causes, impacts, and resolution strategies of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. It outlines the key research objectives (ROs) driving the study and their interconnectedness in understanding the broader problem. The framework emphasizes the importance of addressing not just the surface-level symptoms of conflict but also delving into the underlying factors, consequences, and potential solutions.

The first research objective (RO1) focuses on identifying the underlying factors of ethno-religious conflict. This includes examining historical, socio-economic, and political elements that contribute to tensions among different ethnic and religious groups. Understanding these foundational causes is critical for developing targeted interventions that address the root of the problem rather than merely mitigating its effects.

The second research objective (RO2) focuses on examining the impact of ethno-religious conflicts on social cohesion in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu local governments in Kwara State, Nigeria. This involves evaluating the socio-economic, psychological, and infrastructural consequences of these conflicts within the affected communities. Key areas of analysis include population displacement, loss of lives, destruction of property, and the disruption of livelihoods. By exploring these impacts, the study aims to provide a detailed understanding of how ethno-religious tensions undermine social cohesion, offering insights that can guide the development of sustainable strategies for conflict resolution and community rebuilding.

The third research objective (RO3) aims to identify effective strategies for resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, Nigeria. This involves a critical

evaluation of existing conflict resolution efforts and the proposal of innovative solutions tailored to the region's unique context. Key strategies under consideration include fostering dialogue and negotiation, ensuring equitable resource distribution, and implementing policy reforms designed to promote unity and mitigate tensions. Special emphasis is placed on integrating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms with modern approaches, creating a holistic framework that addresses the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts and fosters sustainable peace in Kwara State.

Hence, Figure 1.4 visually presents the logical flow of the study, connecting the three research objectives to the central problem: understanding the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State and the efforts to resolve them. The arrows illustrate the interrelationship between the objectives, showing how each contributes to a holistic analysis of the issue. By addressing these objectives sequentially, the framework ensures that the study remains focused, comprehensive, and solution-oriented, aligning with the broader goals of promoting peace and stability in Kwara State.

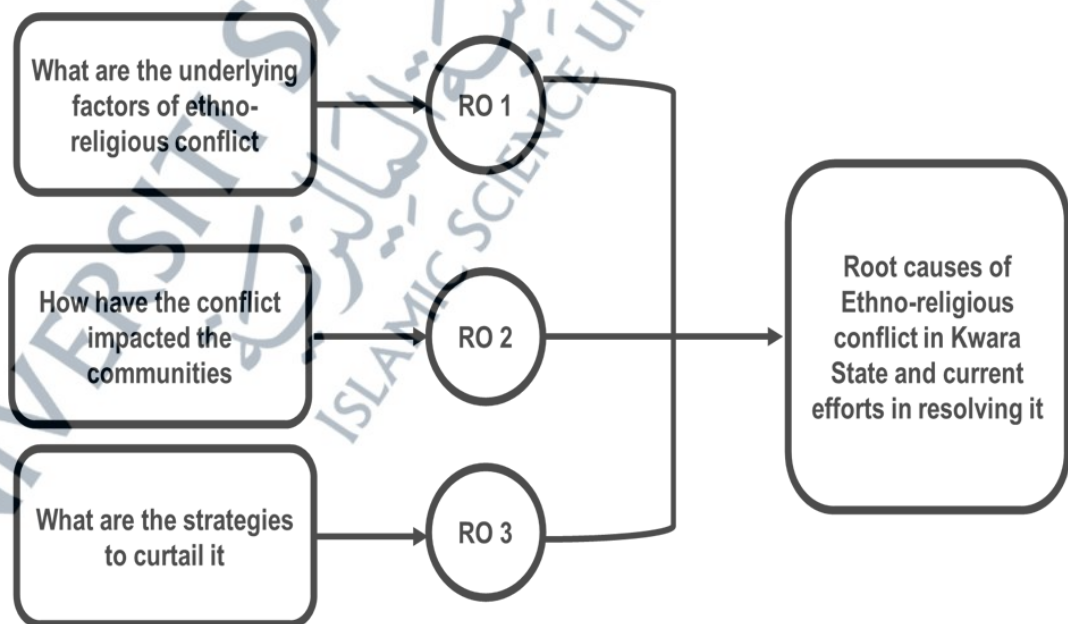


Figure 1.3: Research Framework.

1.8. Islamic Perspective

Islamic perspectives on conflict resolution, particularly concerning ethno-religious conflicts, draw heavily from the teachings of the Quran and the practices of the Prophet Muhammad. The Quran emphasizes justice, fairness, reconciliation, and forgiveness, as seen in verses such as Quran 5:8, which calls for justice even towards adversaries, and Quran 49:9, which advocates for fair settlement between conflicting factions. Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad demonstrated for his followers how to resolve disputes with one another in a variety of situations (Al-Bukhar, 2001: 2691, 2692, 2693, 3245, 4987, 2242, 7370).

The Prophet Muhammad practiced conflict resolution and management throughout his lifetime (Abu-Nimer, 2001; Monjur, 2011; Sarif et al., 2004). The Prophet Muhammad's life offers numerous examples of conflict resolution, such as the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah and the Medina Charter, which demonstrate diplomacy, multi-religious cooperation, and mutual respect. Islamic theory strongly emphasizes community and family as fundamental units of society, advocating for collective responsibility and maintaining harmony through strong social bonds. Islamic jurisprudence provides mechanisms for conflict resolution, including mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation, which are deeply rooted in ethical and moral conduct that promotes peace and discourages discord.

Contemporary Islamic scholars, like Dr. Jamal Badawi, emphasize the importance of these principles in modern contexts, advocating for interfaith dialogue and community-based approaches to conflict resolution. Scholars such as Sheikh Hamza Yusuf highlight the need for Muslims to embody the Prophet's example daily, promoting patience, forgiveness, and active efforts toward reconciliation to foster peaceful coexistence in diverse societies.

The Islamic theory and culture consistently highlight the importance of a robust community bond. In contrast to the Western focus on the individual as the foundational unit of society, Islamic culture and theory precede the family as the fundamental unit, even though the Qur'an strongly emphasizes individual accountability (Okpanachi, 2010). The Islamic theory, particularly as conveyed in numerous "ahadith," revealed the significance of interconnectedness and community. Furthermore, these statements, in conjunction with various Qur'anic teachings, promote active engagement in community matters, advocating for justice even when it goes against one's interests or the interests of loved ones and actively participating in the resolution of disputes (Randeree et al., 2010).

Broadly, both the Qur'an and the examples set by the Prophet illustrate that Islamic theory supports a flexible approach to intervention in various disputes. The Islamic theory is grounded in principles of justice and a commitment to upholding the values of Islam (Amr Abdalla, 2014).

Integrating these theories with Islamic perspectives on conflict resolution enhances the understanding of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Islamic principles of justice, reconciliation, and community harmony align with the goals of addressing structural inequalities and transforming cultural narratives. This combined approach can guide effective strategies for conflict resolution, promoting justice, tolerance, and social cohesion. By utilizing Marxist Structural Conflict Theory and Cultural Violence Theory, alongside Islamic perspectives, this research provides a robust framework for understanding and resolving ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, offering pathways to achieve sustainable peace and development in the region.

Islam promotes tolerance, justice, and peaceful coexistence as fundamental principles. The Qur'an establishes freedom of belief—*"There is no compulsion in*

religion. Truth has been made clear from error” (Qur’an 2:256)—and emphasizes fairness even towards adversaries: “...do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness” (Qur’an 5:8). Diversity itself is affirmed as a divine will, where human differences are meant for mutual understanding rather than division (Qur’an 49:13). The Prophet Muhammad ﷺ further demonstrated these values through the Medina Charter, which institutionalized interfaith coexistence, and the Treaty of Hudaibiyyah, which prioritized diplomacy over conflict. His sayings also underline tolerance and compassion: “*The Muslim is the one from whose tongue and hand people are safe*” (Sahih al-Bukhari, Hadith 10) and “*He who does not show mercy to others will not be shown mercy*” (Sahih Muslim, Hadith 2319). Together, these teachings make clear that tolerance is not peripheral but central to Islamic conduct.

Classical scholars such as Al-Ghazali and Ibn Taymiyyah emphasized justice and fairness, while contemporary voices like Jamal Badawi and Hamza Yusuf highlight interfaith dialogue and reconciliation as Islamic responses to modern conflicts. In the Kwara State context, where ethnic and religious plurality has often been exploited for political advantage, these Islamic principles offer a counter-narrative. By promoting dialogue, equitable governance, and mutual respect, Islam provides not only theological guidance but also practical tools for reducing tension and building peaceful coexistence. When authentically applied, tolerance rooted in Islamic ethics can transform diversity into a source of unity, offering a roadmap for sustainable peace in plural societies.

1.9. Operational Definitions of Terminology

Ethno-Religious Conflict: Refers to a conflict between ethnic or religious groups. These conflicts usually involve violence or tension between members of different groups due to perceived or real differences in identity, beliefs, or culture (Madueke, 2019).

Ethnicity: Refers to a group of people who share a common cultural heritage, language, or history. Ethnic groups often have a distinct identity and may have their own traditions and customs (Isajiw, 1993).

Religion: a system of convictions concerning the creation, essence, and intention of the cosmos, often attributed to the influence of superhuman entities; commonly involving ceremonial and devout practices; often including a moral framework that directs human behavior (Nwachukwu et al., 2021).

Conflict Resolution: Refers to the practice of resolving a disagreement or dispute between two or more parties. Conflict resolution strategies may include negotiation, mediation, arbitration, or other methods of addressing and resolving differences between groups or individuals (Onah et al., 2018).

Peacebuilding: Refers to a process that aims to promote long-term peace and stability in a society or community. Peacebuilding efforts may include conflict resolution, reconciliation, dialogue, and other activities aimed at building trust, understanding, and cooperation between different groups (Cheng-Hopkins, 2010).

1.10. Chapter Summary

This chapter sets the stage for the study by introducing the historical and contemporary relevance of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, North-Central Nigeria. It provides a comprehensive background on the complexities of ethno-religious conflicts, explaining how such tensions have contributed to the region's political instability, social fragmentation, and economic decline. The research emphasizes the significance of addressing these conflicts, noting that their persistence threatens the social fabric and hinders sustainable development. The chapter highlights how the competition for resources, political influence, and socio-cultural tensions between ethnic and religious groups, primarily the Yoruba, Hausa, and Nupe, have exacerbated conflict in the state.

Also, this chapter outlines the research objectives and questions that guide the study. It presents the significance of understanding the root causes of these conflicts and identifying sustainable solutions that could be applied to both Kwara State and similar regions in Nigeria. The introduction concludes with a scope of study that details the geographical, socio-political, and cultural factors being analyzed, setting the foundation for the research.