

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the research study, providing a comprehensive examination of the findings obtained through the research methodology outlined in Chapter 3. The chapter presents the findings regarding the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, North Central Nigeria, and current efforts in resolving them, as well as the analysis and interpretation of the research data. The study and understanding of the data were based on the administered in-depth interview.

The distribution of informant participants across different categories and geographical areas is presented in this chapter. Generally, there were 10 respondents from community leaders, 3 from Edu Local Government, 3 from Ifelodun Local Government, and 4 respondents from Ilorin West Local Government. Among these, 3 are religious leaders; 3 are from the Edu Local Government, 2 from the Ifelodun Local Government, and 2 are from the Ilorin West Local Government. Furthermore, 10 respondents are youths, comprising 3 from Edu Local Government, 4 from Ifelodun Local Government, and 3 from Ilorin West Local Government. The thematic analyses in this study were carefully presented following the demographic information. Subsequently, the responses to the research questions were closely examined, and the findings of the survey were thoroughly discussed.

4.2. Biographical Information of the Respondents

A comprehensive analysis of the demographic characteristics of the 30 key informants from Edu, Ifelodun, and Ilorin West Local Government Areas (LGAs) in Kwara State provides critical insights into the socio-economic, cultural, and religious dynamics shaping ethno-religious conflicts in the region. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the underlying social structures, which influence patterns of tension, conflict resolution mechanisms, and peacebuilding efforts.

The study reveals a significant gender disparity, particularly in Edu LGA, where male leadership dominates at 67% as shown in Figure 4.1. This trend aligns with broader societal norms in patriarchal structures, which limit women's participation in decision-making processes. Given that gender inclusivity has been identified as a crucial factor in fostering equitable governance and conflict resolution (Ojo & Adeniran, 2021), addressing this imbalance through gender-sensitive leadership initiatives is imperative. A more inclusive governance approach could lead to balanced policy-making, broader community engagement, and more effective conflict resolution strategies.

The religious composition of participants highlights the predominance of Islam, particularly in Edu and Ifelodun (75%) (Figure 4.1), whereas Ilorin West presents a more balanced representation of Islam and Christianity. This religious diversity necessitates proactive interfaith dialogue and collaboration, as emphasized by Yusuf (2020), to promote tolerance, reduce animosity, and mitigate religious-based tensions. The influence of religious leaders in shaping narratives and fostering reconciliation further underscores their indispensable role in conflict resolution efforts within these communities.

An analysis of educational levels among participants reveals a high level of

secondary and tertiary education, particularly in Ilorin West, where all respondents hold tertiary qualifications. This suggests a strong intellectual foundation that could be harnessed for grassroots conflict mediation, governance, and community development. However, as noted by Falola and Heaton (2008), effectively leveraging this resource requires structured educational outreach programs targeted at younger populations to ensure sustained peacebuilding efforts over time.

The age distribution among participants demonstrates that older individuals (41–50 years and above) predominantly occupy leadership roles. While their experience and historical understanding are invaluable assets in conflict mediation, the integration of youth perspectives is equally crucial in addressing evolving conflict dynamics. Ojabe and Odoh (2019) emphasize that engaging younger demographics in decision-making processes could foster innovative approaches to conflict resolution, increase youth participation, and strengthen social cohesion across different generations.

The occupational diversity of respondents, spanning public service, farming, petty trading, and religious leadership, reflects the economic interdependence of these communities. Economic disparities and competition over resources, particularly land access and employment opportunities, often serve as triggers for ethno-religious conflicts (Kristanto, 2017; Agbarevo & Iworje, 2018). Salau et al. (2021) highlights the necessity of tailored economic interventions that address vulnerabilities, promote equitable land distribution, and enhance job creation as essential strategies for mitigating tensions and fostering cross-community cooperation.

Table 4.1 presents a detailed demographic overview of the study participants, highlighting their age, gender, occupation, religious affiliation, and LGA of residence. The data indicate that male participants dominate leadership and decision-making roles across the study areas, reflecting societal structures that often exclude women

from governance. Also, the table shows a significant concentration of tertiary-educated individuals in Ilorin West, suggesting that higher education levels may play a role in shaping governance and community engagement. The distribution of occupations across public service, farming, business, and religious leadership further emphasizes the economic interdependence of these communities, reinforcing the importance of addressing economic disparities in conflict mitigation strategies.

The demographic findings demonstrate the interconnectedness of socio-economic, religious, and cultural factors in shaping ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. They highlight the need for inclusive, context-sensitive conflict resolution approaches that leverage existing community strengths while addressing identified gaps. Key policy recommendations emerging from this analysis include gender-inclusive leadership initiatives to enhance women's participation in governance and decision-making, interfaith dialogue programs to promote religious tolerance, youth engagement strategies to integrate younger perspectives into conflict resolution mechanisms, educational outreach to maximize intellectual resources for peacebuilding, and economic interventions targeting resource-based disputes and livelihood vulnerabilities.

By understanding the socio-economic and demographic dynamics of these communities, this research provides a foundation for effective, evidence-based interventions aimed at mitigating ethno-religious conflicts and fostering sustainable peace in Kwara State.

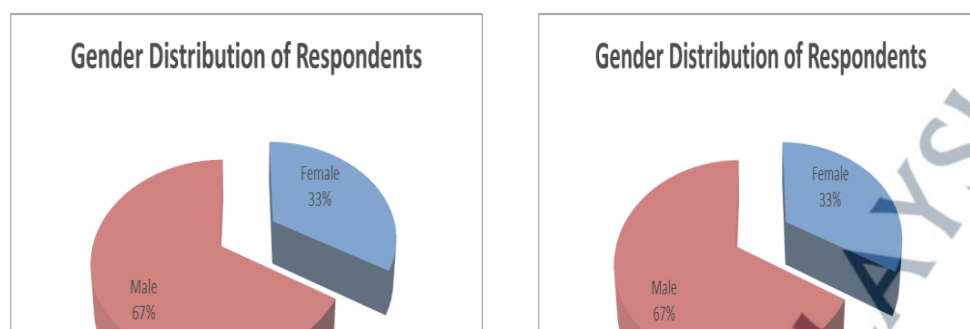


Figure 4.1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents

Table 4.1: Demographic Overview of Informants

Informant ID	Age	Gender	Occupation	Religious Affiliation	LGA of Residence
INF-001	45	Male	Public Servant	Muslim	Edu
INF-002	34	Male	Farmer	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-003	29	Male	Trader	Muslim	Ilorin West
INF-004	51	Male	Community Leader	Christian	Edu
INF-005	41	Male	Religious Leader	Muslim	Ilorin West
INF-006	48	Female	Farmer	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-007	39	Male	Civil Society Advocate	Christian	Ilorin West
INF-008	50	Male	Community Leader	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-009	44	Female	Teacher	Muslim	Edu
INF-010	42	Male	Business Owner	Muslim	Ifelodun
INF-011	23	Male	Farmer	Muslim	Edu
INF-012	33	Female	Public Servant	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-013	50	Male	Community Leader	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-014	44	Female	Trader	Muslim	Edu
INF-015	46	Male	Religious Leader	Christian	Edu
INF-016	51	Male	Religious Leader	Muslim	Ifelodun
INF-017	39	Female	Farmer	Christian	Edu
INF-018	30	Male	Public Servant	Muslim	Ifelodun
INF-019	40	Male	Community	Christian	Ifelodun

			Leader		
INF-020	47	Female	Community Leader	Christian	Edu
INF-021	42	Male	Religious Leader	Muslim	Edu
INF-022	46	Male	Religious Leader	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-023	51	Male	Religious Leader	Muslim	Ilorin West
INF-024	40	Male	Peace Advocate	Christian	Ilorin West
INF-025	36	Female	Farmer	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-026	34	Male	Public Servant	Christian	Ilorin West
INF-027	32	Female	Farming	Christian	Ifelodun
INF-028	45	Male	Public Servant	Christian	Ilorin West
INF-029	29	Male	Farming	Muslim	Ilorin West
INF-030	31	Female	Public Servant	Christian	Ilorin West

4.3. Qualitative Analysis of Research Findings & Interpretation

This section presents the qualitative findings derived from in-depth interviews with 30 key informants from Edu, Ilorin West, and Ifelodun Local Government Areas (LGAs) of Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings are according to the study's research objectives, focusing on the underlying factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts, the impact of these conflicts on social cohesion, and the strategies suggested by respondents to mitigate them. The perspectives and opinions of all 30 participants as presented in Table 4.1, are embedded in the discussion to provide contextual depth and to ensure full representation.

The first objective of this study was to investigate the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. The data revealed five major interrelated factors: economic marginalization, competition over scarce natural resources, inter-group stereotyping, political manipulation, and historical grievances.

Economic exclusion was frequently cited as a major driver of conflict, with

respondents emphasizing inequitable access to employment, land, and government resources as fueling resentment. Marginalized groups perceive others as unfairly benefiting from economic opportunities, leading to hostility and social division. A farmer from Edu LGA (INF-017, Female, 36 years, Christian, Farming) voiced frustration about economic exclusion, stating:

"We work hard on our farms, but when it's time for government support, only a select few receive subsidies. This inequality fuels anger in our community."

Similarly, INF-025 (Male, 42 years, Muslim, Business Owner, Ifelodun LGA) noted that economic disparity worsens inter-group resentment, explaining:

"Some groups have privileged access to land while others are struggling. These imbalances are why conflicts keep recurring."

INF-006 (Female, 44 years, Muslim, Community Leader, Edu LGA) added that certain businesses face discrimination based on ethnicity or religion, stating:

"Some of us cannot get loans just because we are not from the dominant ethnic group in this area. How can we build our businesses if we are locked out of financial opportunities?"

Limited access to land and water emerged as a significant factor in ethno-religious conflicts, particularly in agrarian communities where population growth and environmental degradation have intensified competition. A community leader from Ilorin West (INF-001, Male, 45 years, Christian, Public Servant) remarked:

"Farmers say herders destroy their crops, while herders complain that there is no land for grazing. These conflicts have turned deadly several times."

A trader from Ilorin West (INF-003, Male, 29 years, Muslim, Trader) explained how land disputes escalate, stating:

"The problem is that no one is willing to compromise. Each group feels entitled to the land, and without a fair system, conflicts keep escalating."

Negative stereotypes and deep-seated prejudices reinforce mistrust and divide communities. Many respondents described how cultural narratives, education systems, and political rhetoric perpetuate hostility. A religious leader from Ifelodun (INF-014, Male, 48 years, Christian, Religious Leader) reflected on this issue, stating:

"Children are taught that we are different, that we cannot trust each other. These biases are hard to break and keep us divided."

A public servant from Ifelodun (INF-019, Male, 34 years, Christian, Public Servant) agreed, adding:

"When these stereotypes are constantly repeated, they become a justification for violence. People act on what they have been told for generations."

Politicians often exploit ethnic and religious divisions for political gain, especially during elections, further deepening existing tensions. A community leader from Ifelodun (INF-002, Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader) explained:

"Politicians tell us we are different from them. They use our fears to gain votes, and after elections, we are left to deal with the consequences."

Similarly, INF-012 (Male, 51 years, Muslim, Religious Leader, Edu LGA) remarked:

"During elections, divisions grow deeper. Suddenly, your neighbor becomes your enemy because of political propaganda."

The second research objective examined how ethno-religious conflicts affect social cohesion. Respondents identified three major consequences: the erosion of trust between communities, economic decline, and displacement of populations. A farmer from Ifelodun (INF-023, Female, 49 years, Christian, Farmer) lamented the breakdown of trust, stating:

"Even when there is no active conflict, people live in fear. We no longer see each other as neighbors but as potential enemies."

INF-030 (Female, 33 years, Christian, Public Servant, Ifelodun LGA) described how conflicts disrupt essential services, explaining:

"Many schools and hospitals in conflict-prone areas are abandoned. Parents are afraid to send their children to school. This will hurt future generations."

The third research objective focused on identifying effective strategies for preventing and resolving ethno-religious conflicts. Respondents proposed interfaith dialogue, economic interventions, and political reforms as key solutions. A religious leader from Ilorin West (INF-012, Male, 51 years, Muslim, Religious Leader) emphasized the importance of interfaith dialogue, stating:

"Regular meetings between religious leaders can build trust and prevent misunderstandings before they turn violent."

INF-017 (Female, 36 years, Christian, Farmer, Edu LGA) suggested economic interventions, arguing:

"If we had fair access to land and irrigation support, many of these conflicts wouldn't exist."

INF-002 (Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader, Ifelodun LGA) called for political accountability, stating:

"Strict laws should be put in place against politicians who incite ethnic or religious violence."

Findings from this study reveal that ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State are deeply rooted in economic, political, and social inequalities. Economic marginalization remains a primary source of tension, as several respondents highlighted inequitable access to employment, land, and government resources as significant drivers of conflict. Many participants, including INF-017 (Female, 36 years, Christian, Farmer, Edu LGA) and INF-025 (Male, 42 years, Muslim, Business Owner, Ifelodun LGA), expressed concerns over economic exclusion and perceived discrimination in resource allocation. These grievances align with the findings of Idris et al. (2022) and Nwokedi et al. (2023), who emphasize that addressing economic disparities through equitable resource distribution and targeted development programs is critical for sustainable peace.

Furthermore, the competition over land and water was repeatedly cited as a

recurring conflict trigger, particularly in agrarian communities. INF-001 (Male, 45 years, Christian, Public Servant, Ilorin West LGA) and INF-019 (Male, 34 years, Christian, Public Servant, Ifelodun LGA) both described how disputes between farmers and pastoralists escalate into violence, confirming similar observations by Bello and Adebayo (2021) and Ogunbile et al. (2022). Without a structured and inclusive resource management framework, conflicts over land ownership will likely persist.

Beyond economic and resource-based conflicts, social divisions and inter-group stereotyping continue to fuel tensions between ethnic and religious groups. Several respondents, including INF-014 (Male, 48 years, Christian, Religious Leader, Ifelodun LGA) and INF-029 (Male, 29 years, Muslim, Farmer, Ilorin West LGA), pointed to negative cultural narratives that reinforce mistrust and prevent meaningful interactions. This confirms the findings of Ogbonnaya et al. (2023) and Adesoji & Ibrahim (2023), who argue that entrenched stereotypes deepen ethnic divisions and create barriers to dialogue and reconciliation. Similarly, political manipulation of ethno-religious identities was widely identified as an exacerbating factor, particularly during election cycles. INF-002 (Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader, Ifelodun LGA) and INF-012 (Male, 51 years, Muslim, Religious Leader, Edu LGA) emphasized how politicians deliberately exploit ethnic and religious differences to secure electoral support, often leading to violence. These claims are consistent with the research of Adesoji et al. (2023) and Udo & Ekanem (2022), who argue that political elites sustain ethnic and religious divisions to consolidate power, worsening intergroup relations in the long term.

To mitigate these conflicts, respondents proposed a combination of economic,

political, and social interventions, including interfaith dialogue, equitable economic policies, and political accountability measures. Several participants, including INF-012 (Male, 51 years, Muslim, Religious Leader, Ilorin West LGA) and INF-017 (Female, 36 years, Christian, Farmer, Edu LGA), advocated for regular interfaith engagements and structured peace dialogues to foster trust between communities. These perspectives align with Nwokedi et al. (2023), who emphasize the importance of grassroots-driven peace initiatives. Also, INF-002 (Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader, Ifelodun LGA) stressed the need for strict laws against politicians who incite ethnic and religious violence, reinforcing the argument made by Adesoji et al. (2023) regarding the role of legal frameworks in curbing divisive rhetoric. Therefore, this study underscores that a comprehensive, community-driven approach integrating economic reforms, resource management strategies, and intergroup reconciliation programs—is necessary to address the complex and interconnected nature of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. By prioritizing these interventions, Edu, Ilorin West, and Ifelodun LGAs can create a foundation for long-term peace and sustainable development.

4.4. What Are the Underlying Factors of Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu Local Governments, Kwara State, Nigeria?

This section explores the structural, political, and socio-cultural factors that have contributed to the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu Local Governments. While Section 4.2 identified immediate triggers of conflicts, this section focuses on the systemic and institutionalized factors that sustain and exacerbate these conflicts over time. The findings indicate that economic disparities, political exploitation of ethnic and religious identities, land disputes, cultural prejudices,

and governance failures are the key drivers of ethno-religious tensions in the region.

Economic exclusion and disparities in access to employment, land, and social services were cited as major drivers of conflict. Many respondents indicated that government policies and development initiatives disproportionately benefit certain groups, leaving others marginalized. This economic inequality fosters resentment, which often manifests as ethno-religious hostility.

A business owner from Ifelodun (INF-025, Male, 42 years, Muslim, Business Owner) expressed frustration, stating:

"Some families have controlled businesses and land for decades, while others have been shut out completely. This economic divide is at the heart of the conflict."

Ethno-religious identities are frequently weaponized by politicians, especially during election cycles. Several respondents pointed out that politicians deliberately amplify ethnic and religious grievances to consolidate power, leading to deep-seated divisions and recurring cycles of violence.

A community leader from Ifelodun (INF-002, Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader) described this trend:

"During elections, politicians divide us along religious lines. Once they win, they abandon us. But the divisions they create don't go away."

This confirms Udo and Ekanem (2022), who argue that identity politics in Nigeria has become a tool for electoral gains, often with destabilizing consequences for intergroup relations.

Unresolved land tenure disputes and competition over scarce resources have significantly contributed to ethno-religious tensions. Respondents indicated that land ownership in Kwara State is often contested, with unclear policies and overlapping claims fueling disputes.

A trader from Ilorin West (INF-003, Male, 29 years, Muslim, Trader) explained:

"The same land is claimed by different families because there is no official documentation. Every time a new government comes, they change land policies, and conflicts start again."

These findings align with Ogunbile et al. (2022), who report that weak land governance structures contribute to land-related conflicts in Nigeria.

Deep-rooted ethnic and religious stereotypes continue to fuel mutual distrust and social fragmentation. Several respondents indicated that historical grievances and misconceptions shape intergroup relations, making peaceful coexistence difficult. A religious leader from Ifelodun (INF-014, Male, 48 years, Christian, Religious Leader) stated:

"For decades, our communities have been divided, even in schools and markets. We don't mix as we used to, and this separation breeds suspicion."

These findings reinforce Ogbonnaya et al. (2023), who emphasize that entrenched stereotypes create barriers to reconciliation and cooperation.

4.5. How Have Ethno-Religious Conflicts Impacted the Social and Economic Well-Being of Affected Communities in Kwara State?

The second research question examines the wider socio-economic consequences of ethno-religious conflicts. The findings reveal that these conflicts have led to displacement, destruction of infrastructure, economic downturns, and psychological

trauma.

Many respondents described how violent clashes force families to flee their homes, leading to loss of property and economic instability.

A farmer from Ifelodun (INF-023, Female, 49 years, Christian, Farmer) stated:

"Even when there is no active conflict, people live in fear. We no longer see each other as neighbors but as potential enemies."

Conflicts have significantly affected access to education and healthcare, as schools and hospitals in high-risk areas are frequently shut down or destroyed.

A public servant from Ifelodun (INF-030, Female, 33 years, Christian, Public Servant) described the disruptions:

"Many schools and hospitals in conflict-prone areas are abandoned. Parents are afraid to send their children to school. This will hurt future generations."

These findings align with Sanda and Targema (2022), who argue that ethno-religious violence leads to prolonged economic instability and worsening poverty levels.

4.6. What Strategies Can Prevent and Resolve Ethno-Religious Conflicts in Kwara State and Promote Peaceful Coexistence Among Ethnic and Religious Groups?

The third research question seeks to identify effective strategies for preventing and resolving ethno-religious conflicts. Respondents proposed interfaith dialogue, economic interventions, legal reforms, and community-based conflict resolution mechanisms.

Many respondents emphasized the role of religious leaders in conflict mediation

and interfaith dialogue.

A religious leader from Ilorin West (INF-012, Male, 51 years, Muslim, Religious Leader) emphasized:

"Regular meetings between religious leaders can build trust and prevent misunderstandings before they turn violent."

Several respondents suggested job creation and equitable access to economic resources as essential strategies for reducing tensions.

A farmer from Edu (INF-017, Female, 36 years, Christian, Farmer) argued:

"If we had fair access to land and irrigation support, many of these conflicts wouldn't exist."

A community leader from Ifelodun (INF-002, Male, 50 years, Christian, Community Leader) called for stricter laws against incitement:

"Strict laws should be put in place against politicians who incite ethnic or religious violence."

By integrating economic, political, and social interventions, Kwara State can address the root causes of conflict and build a sustainable framework for peace.

4.7. Thematic analysis

Themes were derived through an iterative process of coding, categorisation, and abstraction. Initially, open codes were assigned to meaningful units of text, which were then grouped into related categories. These categories were refined into broader themes by identifying patterns across participants' accounts. To ensure validity,

themes were cross-checked across data sources, reviewed by peers, and supported with representative quotations. An audit trail of coding decisions was maintained, enhancing the transparency and credibility of the analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

Table 4.1 shows the tabulated information generated based on the data from the interview transcripts via thematic analysis for the root causes of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, North Central Nigeria, and current efforts to resolve them. The thematic Table 4.1 presents the underlying factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State, located in the North Central region of Nigeria. Also, it highlights the ongoing efforts dedicated to resolving these conflicts. The identified themes carefully analyze various elements contributing to the conflicts, including historical factors, which investigate the lasting consequences of colonial legacies, ethnic rivalries, and religious divisions on the current tensions. Also, the socio-economic disparities category sheds light on the impact of resource allocation and political marginalization in fueling the conflicts. Political influence focuses on how the politicization of religion and ethnicity exacerbates the existing conflicts.

These findings align with Aloromuoh,(2023) work, which discusses how colonial legacies, economic inequality, and political marginalization fuel Nigeria's ethno-religious conflicts. Umeh and Chukwu (2016) emphasize the importance of interfaith dialogue and inclusive policies as core strategies for addressing these tensions. Similarly, Kalejaiye, (2022) reported the importance of addressing socioeconomic disparities and political restructuring to prevent manipulative practices that exacerbate conflicts.

Ngwoke and Ituma,(2020) reported how religious misinterpretation triggers intolerance and conflicts. Their findings advocate for religious education centered on

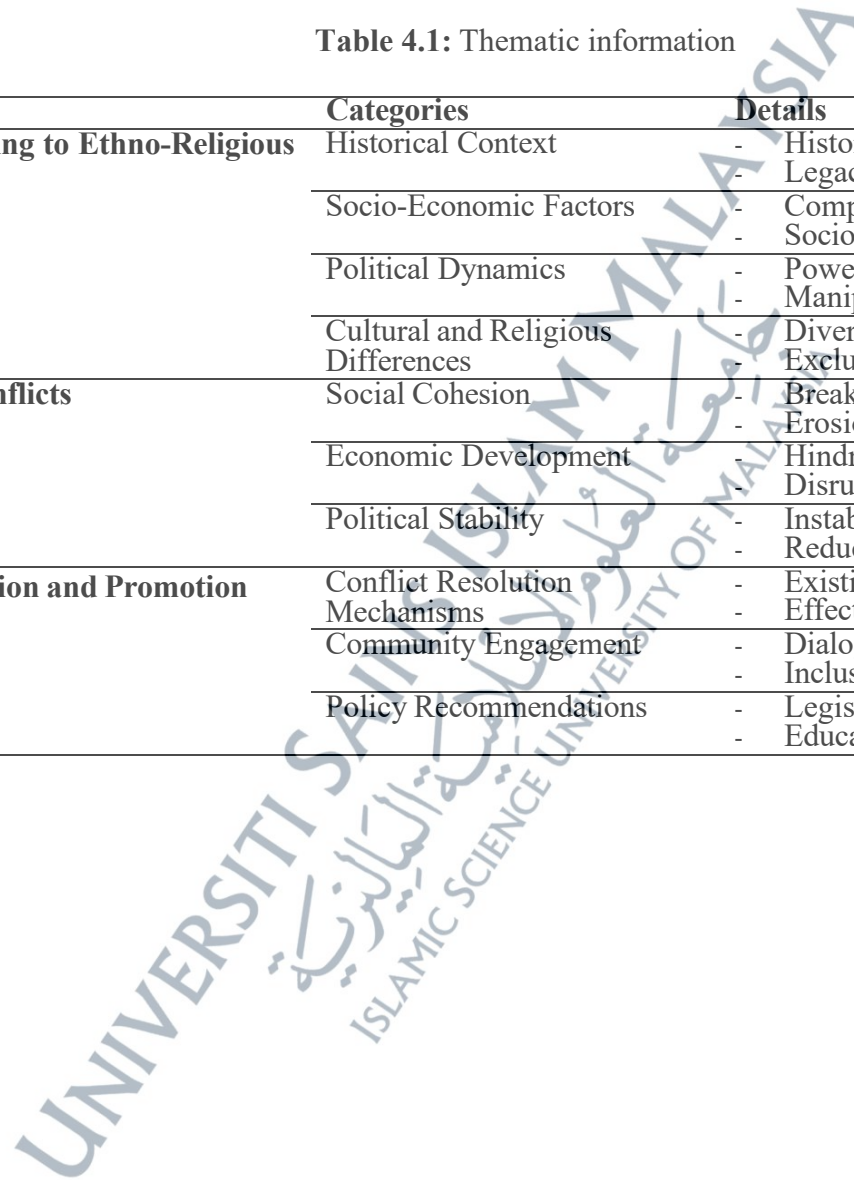
peace and love to mitigate tensions. Furthermore, Mustapha and Christian, (2023) highlights how institutional weaknesses and the politicization of ethnicity hinder effective conflict management, advocating for fundamental policy reforms.

Then, Interreligious relations address issues such as misinterpretation of scriptures and the lack of interfaith dialogue. Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: explores strategies for peacebuilding and mediation that effectively mitigate and resolve these ethno-religious conflicts. Each thematic category is assigned a unique code to facilitate easy reference and organization, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the region's fundamental causes and potential remedies for ethno-religious conflicts. The thematic analysis uncovers multiple underlying factors contributing to ethno-religious conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu local governments, Kwara State, Nigeria. Table 4.1 depicts the tabulated information developed based on the data derived from the interview transcripts via thematic analysis.

The results demonstrate that addressing ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State requires a comprehensive framework combining immediate interventions, such as fostering interfaith dialogue and improving socio-economic equality, with long-term strategies like institutional reforms and community-based peacebuilding. Literature confirms these approaches' effectiveness while emphasizing the critical role of education, governance, and systemic reforms. The alignment of thematic findings with established research demonstrate the relevance and applicability of these strategies for sustainable peace in Kwara State and beyond.

Table 4.1: Thematic information

Themes	Categories	Details
Underlying Factors Contributing to Ethno-Religious Conflicts	Historical Context	- Historical background of conflicts - Legacies of colonialism
	Socio-Economic Factors	- Competition for resources - Socio-economic disparities
	Political Dynamics	- Power struggles - Manipulation of identities for political gain
	Cultural and Religious Differences	- Divergent cultural and religious beliefs - Exclusivist religious ideologies
Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts	Social Cohesion	- Breakdown of community relationships - Erosion of trust and social unity
	Economic Development	- Hindrance to economic progress - Disruption of livelihoods and investments
	Political Stability	- Instability in governance - Reduced political participation
Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Promotion	Conflict Resolution Mechanisms	- Existing conflict resolution approaches - Effectiveness of interventions
	Community Engagement	- Dialogue and reconciliation efforts - Inclusive peace-building initiatives
	Policy Recommendations	- Legislative and policy interventions - Educational programs and awareness campaigns



4.7.1. Theme 1: Underlying Factors Contributing to Ethno-Religious Conflicts

The findings of this study revealed that the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu local governments arises from multiple interconnected factors, including socio-economic inequalities, political manipulation, stereotypes, and competition over scarce resources. These dynamics can be more fully understood through the lens of Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), which posits that conflict often emerges not from absolute poverty but from the perception of unfair disadvantage relative to others.

Participants frequently emphasized socio-economic disparities and unequal access to resources as central to grievances in their communities. For example, competition over farmland and employment opportunities was widely described as creating frustration and hostility between ethnic and religious groups. This aligns with RDT's core argument that individuals and groups who perceive themselves as deprived in comparison to others develop resentment, which can escalate into violent conflict. The sense of injustice, rather than the objective lack of resources, drives collective action and tension.

Another underlying factor was political manipulation, with respondents explaining how politicians exploit ethnic and religious identities to gain support during elections. From an RDT perspective, this manipulation intensifies perceptions of marginalization by reinforcing narratives that one group is systematically disadvantaged relative to another. Such perceptions magnify existing inequalities, increasing the likelihood of violent mobilization. This is consistent with broader literature highlighting the politicization of identity as a catalyst for conflict in multi-ethnic societies (Udo & Ekanem, 2022).

Cultural and religious prejudices were also noted as drivers of mistrust, with negative stereotypes and exclusivist ideologies deepening divisions. RDT helps interpret these findings by framing them as perceptions of symbolic deprivation, where communities feel that their values or status are disregarded in favour of another group. These perceived slights heighten intergroup resentment, further triggering conflict. Similarly, the rise of radical religious ideologies was seen as worsening tensions, as extremist narratives emphasize perceived oppression and call for resistance, a dynamic well explained by deprivation-based grievances.

The analysis also identified external influences, such as neighbouring communities and religious organisations, as instigators of violence. These external actors often amplify local grievances by reinforcing narratives of inequality. From the RDT lens, such reinforcement strengthens the perception that one's community is systematically disadvantaged, thereby justifying hostility.

Therefore, these findings show that the underlying drivers of conflict in Kwara State are not merely material shortages but the perceptions of inequity, exclusion, and marginalization. This supports Relative Deprivation Theory's central proposition: it is the subjective sense of unfair disadvantage rather than absolute deprivation that serves as the most potent spark for intergroup conflict. Thus, addressing ethno-religious tensions in Kwara requires policies that not only improve resource distribution but also directly tackle perceptions of inequality and exclusion, thereby reducing the sense of relative deprivation that fuels violence.

4.7.2. Theme 2: Impact of Ethno-Religious Conflicts

The findings demonstrate that ethno-religious conflicts in Ifelodun, Ilorin West, and Edu local governments have had profound social and economic consequences, ranging from displacement and loss of livelihoods to the erosion of community cohesion. These outcomes can be effectively interpreted through Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), which highlights how persistent perceptions of inequity and exclusion not only fuel conflict but also generate destructive cycles of poverty, frustration, and weakened social capital.

A major impact identified was the disruption of livelihoods and economic decline, particularly in agricultural communities. Respondents described how recurring disputes over farmland forced many farmers to abandon their fields, leading to food insecurity and economic stagnation. RDT helps explain this outcome by showing that when groups perceive others as unfairly advantaged in access to critical resources, such as land, they not only resist through conflict but also suffer the broader economic consequences of disrupted production. This reinforces the very grievances that initiated the conflict, creating a vicious cycle of deprivation and violence.

The conflicts also undermined governance structures and public trust, with participants expressing frustration over biased or ineffective interventions by local authorities. From the perspective of RDT, this erosion of trust reflects how perceived deprivation extends beyond material resources to include feelings of political exclusion. When groups believe that institutions consistently favor others, their sense of alienation deepens, reducing cooperation with state mechanisms and fostering ongoing instability.

On a social level, the erosion of intergroup trust and cohesion was widely reported. Long-standing relationships between ethnic and religious communities have been weakened, with suspicion and fear replacing cooperation. RDT captures this dimension by emphasizing that relative deprivation is not limited to material inequalities but also encompasses symbolic and status-based grievances. The perception that one's cultural or religious identity is devalued relative to another exacerbates hostility and fractures the social fabric of multi-ethnic communities.

Thus, the findings show that the consequences of conflict in Kwara State extend well beyond immediate violence, entrenching economic stagnation, weakened governance, and deteriorating social relations. These impacts are consistent with RDT's assertion that perceived inequities not only initiate conflict but also perpetuate cycles of resentment and instability. Thus, breaking these cycles requires interventions that restore both material security and perceptions of fairness.

4.7.3. Theme 3: Strategies for Conflict Resolution and Promotion

Participants recommended a range of strategies for addressing ethno-religious conflicts, including dialogue, reconciliation, inclusive governance, economic empowerment, and interfaith initiatives. These strategies can be understood within the framework of Relative Deprivation Theory (RDT), as they directly target the root mechanism of conflict: the perception of inequity and exclusion.

The most frequently emphasized strategy was dialogue and reconciliation, particularly through interfaith initiatives and traditional conflict resolution mechanisms involving community elders and religious leaders. From the RDT

perspective, these approaches help reduce perceived deprivation by fostering mutual understanding and reframing intergroup relations around shared interests rather than perceived disadvantages. By restoring communication channels, such dialogues address not only material grievances but also symbolic feelings of disrespect and exclusion.

Another critical strategy was inclusive governance and fair resource distribution. Respondents stressed the importance of transparent allocation of land, jobs, and political representation. RDT interprets these measures as essential because they directly counter the perception that some groups are systematically deprived while others are privileged. Ensuring equitable participation in governance reduces collective frustration and restores confidence in state institutions.

Economic empowerment initiatives, such as youth employment programs and agricultural support, were also highlighted. RDT supports these interventions, since unmet expectations for opportunity and prosperity are at the heart of deprivation-based grievances. By expanding access to economic opportunities, these strategies reduce feelings of relative disadvantage and help break cycles of resentment that fuel conflict.

Finally, participants noted the importance of education, peace campaigns, and media engagement in promoting tolerance and countering divisive rhetoric. Through the RDT lens, these initiatives target perceptions of symbolic deprivation by validating the cultural and religious identities of marginalized groups and reducing the sense of exclusion from societal narratives.

Hence, the recommended strategies reflect the preventive power of reducing relative deprivation. By addressing both material inequalities and symbolic

grievances, these interventions align closely with the theoretical expectation that perceptions of fairness and inclusion are essential for long-term peace. Thus, the strategies proposed by participants not only resonate with their lived experiences but also demonstrate practical pathways for operationalizing Relative Deprivation Theory in conflict prevention and peacebuilding in Kwara State.

4.8. Findings and Theoretical Framework

This study employs Relative Deprivation theoretical frameworks to analyze the dynamics of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. The framework provides a unique lens for understanding the root causes, manifestations, and resolution strategies for these conflicts. Thus by integrating the theory with the research findings, this chapter demonstrates the applicability and relevance to the study.

4.8.1. Relative Deprivation Theory

Relative Deprivation Theory highlights how perceived inequalities and unmet expectations drive societal tensions. This theory identifies three critical components: expectations, perceived inequity, and collective frustration. In Kwara State, communities have diverse expectations for equitable access to resources such as land, political representation, and development opportunities. When these expectations are unmet, perceptions of inequity arise, leading to frustration and mobilization. For instance, the findings reveal that unresolved land disputes between farmers and herders often stem from perceived favoritism in land allocation policies. These grievances are further amplified when political elites exploit such issues for their gain.

Therefore, the findings support the tenets of Relative Deprivation Theory by demonstrating how marginalized groups in Kwara State perceive systemic injustices

in resource distribution and governance. This perception has fueled intergroup tensions, especially during politically sensitive periods. Addressing these issues requires equitable resource allocation and inclusive governance to mitigate perceptions of deprivation and foster intergroup harmony.

The research framework presented in Chapter 1 integrates the Relative Deprivation Theory to provide a comprehensive understanding of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. The framework links the theoretical constructs to the study's objectives and methodology, enabling a holistic analysis of the issues at hand. By employing Relative Deprivation Theory the framework captures the multifaceted nature of these conflicts and presents actionable insights for resolution.

Thus, integrating the theoretical framework with the study findings validates their relevance and applicability. The framework provide a lens for interpreting the data and guide the development of practical recommendations for addressing the root causes of conflict. This symbiotic relationship between theory and findings enhances the study's contribution to the field and demonstrates the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to conflict resolution.

4.9. Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presents the findings from the research, focusing on the key themes that emerged from the data analysis collected through interviews with key informants in Edu, Ifelodun, and Ilorin West local government areas of Kwara State. The chapter begins by outlining the demographic characteristics of the respondents, highlighting the diversity in terms of ethnicity, religion, and occupation. The respondents included community leaders, religious figures, and local government officials, all of whom provided rich insights into the nature and causes of ethno-religious conflicts in the

region. The demographic data also revealed a skew towards older participants, with many of the respondents having significant experience in conflict management within their communities.

The analysis of the interviews revealed several key factors contributing to the persistence of ethno-religious conflicts in Kwara State. Economic disparities emerged as one of the most significant drivers, with participants consistently pointing to competition over land and resources as a major source of tension. In areas like Edu and Ifelodun, agricultural land is central to livelihoods, and disputes over land ownership often escalate into broader ethnic and religious conflicts. Political manipulation was another critical factor identified by the respondents, who described how political leaders frequently exploit ethnic and religious identities to galvanize support, particularly during election periods. This manipulation not only exacerbates existing tensions but also makes it difficult for communities to move toward peaceful coexistence.

The chapter further discusses the profound impact of these conflicts on the social and economic well-being of the affected communities. The participants described how repeated conflicts have led to the destruction of property, displacement of families, and a significant decline in economic activities. In particular, the disruption of farming activities due to conflicts over land ownership has had a devastating impact on local food production, leading to food insecurity and economic stagnation. The social fabric of the communities has also been weakened, with long-standing relationships between ethnic and religious groups eroding due to mistrust and fear. Many respondents emphasized that these conflicts have undermined local governance structures, as government efforts to resolve disputes are often seen as biased or ineffective.

In terms of conflict resolution, the findings suggest that while there have been

efforts to address the tensions, much more needs to be done to promote sustainable peace. Respondents highlighted various strategies that could be employed to prevent and resolve conflicts, including the promotion of interfaith dialogues, community-based reconciliation initiatives, and inclusive governance. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms, such as the involvement of elders and religious leaders, were also emphasized as crucial for restoring trust and fostering dialogue between conflicting groups. However, the study found that these efforts have been hampered by a lack of resources, political will, and effective leadership at the local and state levels. The chapter concludes by discussing the need for a more coordinated and sustained approach to conflict resolution, one that addresses the root causes of the conflicts and promotes long-term social cohesion and development in the region.

