

## Original Research Article

# Investigating the Impact of Post-Independence Ethnic Politics on Displacement and Security Dilemmas in South Sudan: A Qualitative Approach

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**Abstract:** This study aimed to examine the influence of post-independence ethnic politics on displacement and security challenges in South Sudan through a qualitative approach. The purpose was to understand how ethnic identities and political power struggles contributed to displacement, insecurity, and societal instability since South Sudan's independence in 2011. Guided by a phenomenological interpretivist paradigm, the research focused on capturing the perceptions and experiences of key stakeholders, including government officials, security personnel, and displaced community members, to provide nuanced insights into these complex issues. Several theoretical lenses informed the analysis: Ethnic Identity Theory, Conflict Theory, Security Dilemma, Human Security, and Postcolonial Theory. Ethnic Identity Theory explained how ethnic affiliations influenced perceptions and group behaviours, often fueling conflicts over political representation and resources. Conflict Theory highlighted systemic inequalities and resource competition that perpetuated violence. Security Dilemma Theory illustrated how efforts by groups to secure themselves inadvertently escalated tensions, creating cycles of mistrust. Human Security shifted focus from state-centric security to individual well-being, addressing vulnerabilities faced by displaced populations, including threats to health, livelihoods, and safety. Postcolonial Theory provided critical insights into how colonial legacies and external narratives sustained ethnic divisions and conflict dynamics in South Sudan. Methodologically, the study employed semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in key urban centers such as Juba, Malakal, and Wau. A total of 237 participants were involved: 58 government officials, 58 university students, and 121 security commanders, selected through a combination of random and purposive sampling techniques. Data was analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to ethnic influence on political behavior, displacement, and security concerns. The findings revealed that ethnic identities significantly shaped political loyalties and resource control, fueling grievances, revenge killings, and displacement. Over half of respondents perceived power as concentrated among specific ethnic groups, exacerbating societal divides and insecurity. Displacement was both a consequence and driver of ongoing tensions, with displaced persons experiencing heightened vulnerability to violence, economic hardship, and limited access to essential services. The study concluded that ethnic politics undermined national unity, impeded effective governance, and perpetuated cycles of violence and displacement. Recommendations included promoting inclusive governance, equitable resource sharing, community security initiatives, and social cohesion programs. Overall, the research emphasized that addressing ethnic inequalities and fostering participatory governance were essential for sustainable peace and stability in South Sudan.

**Keywords:** Investigating, Impact, Post-Independence, Ethnic Politics, Displacement, Security Dilemmas, South Sudan, Qualitative Approach.

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## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The interplay between ethnic politics, displacement, and security is a significant issue in the post-independence context across various global regions. As nations emerge from colonial rule, they often face the legacies of ethnic division that manifest in political conflicts, leading to humanitarian crises. This study investigates the dynamics of ethnic politics in post-colonial states and their implications for displacement and security dilemmas.

Displacement manifests both as a cause and consequence of ethnic conflict. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reported that by mid-2022, over 89 million individuals were forcibly displaced worldwide due to conflict, persecution, and human rights violations many of which are rooted in ethnic strife (UNHCR, 2022). Among these displaced individuals, a significant number are children, highlighting the profound effect of displacement on education and development. For instance, in 2020, it was recorded that 48 million people were internally displaced due to violence and conflict (Phuong, 2004).

Notably, humanitarian crises often arise from such displacements, leading to increased global costs and societal challenges. In 2020 alone, the global cost associated with displacement reached approximately \$20.5 billion. Sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and North Africa recorded the highest number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) due to conflict. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Syria, and Ethiopia are notable examples where displacements largely stem from inter-communal and political conflicts exacerbated by historical grievances and political manipulation.

The Syrian Civil War, which commenced in 2011, displaced over 13 million people, approximately half of whom fled to neighbouring countries (World Bank, 2021). The conflict has seen multiple ethnic and sectarian groups vying for power amidst government oppression. This environment has led to severe consequences, including ethnic cleansing and genocidal violence, illustrating the potential for escalated conflict rooted in ethnic politics.

Within Syria, organizations like International Conflict Dynamics work to address inter-party dialogues and governance to navigate the complexities of the ongoing civil war (International Conflict Dynamics, 2021). The involvement of external actors, such as the United States, Russia, and Iran, further complicates the political landscape and prolongs instability.

Similarly, the Ukraine crisis, escalated by pro-Russian separatists in 2014, displayed how ethnic and territorial disputes can devastate national security and lead to widespread displacement (Lauren Van Metre, 2015). In the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), persistent conflict poses challenges not just to the region

but also to the international community, reinforcing the interconnectedness of ethnic politics and global security (Namangale, 2015).

Ethiopia's conflict dynamics, particularly in the Tigray region, have led to alarming displacement and growing humanitarian crises. Following the onset of conflict, millions fled from Tigray and surrounding areas, with the United Nations reporting around 5.2 million needing emergency assistance due to severe food shortages exacerbated by conflict (VOA News, 2021; Mosley, 2021). The Ethiopian government's restrictions on humanitarian aid have further worsened conditions, leading to dire predictions of famine and suffering among the displaced populations.

Post-independence, many nations, particularly in Africa, have witnessed a resurgence of ethnic tensions, often exploited by political elites. In Rwanda, the colonial legacy heightened tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi ethnic groups, culminating in the genocide of 1994, which led to the deaths of around 800,000 people (Kagwanja, 2017). This historical context underscores how ethnic identities can shape political allegiances and conflict patterns.

South Sudan, as Africa's youngest nation, faced immediate challenges following its independence in 2011. Awash with the hopes of a new and autonomous state, South Sudan quickly descended into civil strife driven by factional politics primarily between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups. The resulting civil war led to severe internal displacement, with approximately 1.4 million registered IDPs by late 2021 (UN OCHA, 2021). The political crisis was rooted in a historical context of colonial legacies and exacerbated by the absence of stable governance structures.

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, which had facilitated South Sudan's secession, established a precarious power-sharing system that failed to address the underlying ethnic tensions. The internal political conflicts became evident in December 2013 when a leadership struggle within the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) evolved into violent confrontations, manifesting ethnic undertones (Koos & Gutschke, 2014; UN Security Council, 2015). The civil strife further exacerbated political instability and contributed to one of the world's largest humanitarian crises, resulting in one of the most significant numbers of IDPs globally.

Research indicates that the international community's involvement in ethnic conflicts can produce diluted results. While peacekeeping missions may temporarily stabilize regions, they often neglect the root causes of ethnic tensions, as seen in the DRC and South Sudan (Prunier, 2019). The complexity of these conflicts necessitates a multifaceted approach that addresses both

immediate humanitarian needs and the long-term challenges of political stability and governance.

The background of this study illustrates the intricate links between ethnic politics, displacement, and security dilemmas across various regions. The historical context of these conflicts reveals the ongoing struggle between ethnic identities and political power. By examining case studies from Syria, Ethiopia, Rwanda, and South Sudan, we can better understand the dire consequences of ethnic strife and displacement. This understanding underscores the urgent need for inclusive governance and collaborative international responses to mitigate the humanitarian crises arising from ethnic conflicts.

### Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to address the complex relationship between post-independence ethnic politics, displacement, and security dilemmas in South Sudan, a country that faced profound challenges since gaining independence in 2011. Ethnic tensions rooted in political power struggles significantly shaped the nation's landscape, fueling cycles of violence and mass displacement. According to UNHCR (2023), over 2 million South Sudanese were internally displaced, and more than 1.5 million sought refuge abroad, highlighting the severity of the crisis. This widespread displacement not only deepened poverty and hampered development but also heightened community vulnerabilities and perpetuated insecurity.

Despite existing research on displacement and security in South Sudan, notable gaps remained in understanding how ethnic politics specifically influenced these phenomena. Prior studies, such as those by Van Krieken *et al.* (2015) and Van Moten (2018), addressed security concerns and power shifts but lacked a contextual focus on South Sudan's unique ethnic-political landscape. Similarly, McCalley (2017) explored resource competition and violence but did not sufficiently examine how ethnic political dynamics drove resource distribution and conflict.

This research aimed to fill these gaps by exploring how post-independence ethnic politics shaped displacement patterns and security challenges within South Sudan. By employing a qualitative methodology and engaging directly with local stakeholders, the study analyzed how ethnic identities and political alignments influenced community interactions, resource allocation, and the experiences of displaced populations. The findings were intended to inform policy strategies that fostered stability, promoted reconciliation, and supported sustainable peacebuilding efforts in the region.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of this study was to investigate the impact of post-independence ethnic politics on

displacement and security dilemmas in South Sudan: a qualitative approach.

### Research Question

This study was based on the following research question:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** What is the impact of post-independence ethnic politics on displacement and security dilemmas in South Sudan: a qualitative approach?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study was anchored on the following four theories:

### Ethnic Identity Theory

In the context of investigating the impact of post-independence ethnic politics on displacement and security dilemmas in South Sudan, Ethnic Identity Theory, rooted in the works of Henri Tajfel (1978) and John Turner (1986), provided a valuable framework for understanding how ethnic identities influence perceptions, behaviours, and conflicts within the region. Tajfel and Turner's development of social identity theory, particularly outlined in their 1979 publication "*An Integrative Theory of Intergroup Conflict*", emphasized how individuals' identification with their ethnic groups shapes intergroup relations and can heighten tensions.

Applying this theory to South Sudan, it became evident that ethnic identities significantly influenced community perceptions and interactions, often fueling conflicts over political power and resources following independence. Ethnic identity served as a key factor in shaping group behaviours and interethnic conflicts, especially amid the fragile state-building process. However, while Ethnic Identity Theory illuminated how identity influences social and political conduct, it sometimes overlooked the broader economic and political contexts that also drive conflict. To gain a more comprehensive understanding, it was necessary to integrate this identity-focused perspective with analyses of resource disparities and political power struggles, recognizing that ethnicity often intersects with economic and political interests in fueling displacement and insecurity.

### Conflict Theory

Conflict Theory, originating with Karl Marx's analysis of societal inequalities in "*Capital*" (1867) and further developed by scholars like C. Wright Mills and Ralf Dahrendorf, provided a lens for examining the underlying structural factors contributing to violence and displacement in South Sudan. This theory emphasized how systemic disparities particularly over resources and political power generate tensions that may escalate into conflict.

In South Sudan's post-independence context, Conflict Theory helped elucidate how struggles over control of land, resources, and political authority perpetuated cycles of violence and displacement. It

highlighted the role of economic and social disparities in fueling intergroup tensions. Nonetheless, Conflict Theory's focus on economic and structural determinants sometimes limited its ability to account for cultural, psychological, and identity-based factors that also influenced conflict dynamics. To address these gaps, integrating cultural and psychological analyses alongside economic considerations proved essential for a more holistic understanding of the drivers of displacement and insecurity in South Sudan.

### **Security Dilemma Theory**

Rooted in the works of John Herz (1950) and expanded by scholars like Robert Jervis (1978), Security Dilemma Theory offered insights into how actions taken by one group or actor to enhance its security can inadvertently increase insecurity for others, leading to cycles of mistrust and conflict. In South Sudan, the fractured security landscape exemplified how efforts by various groups or the state to bolster their safety could escalate tensions, fueling violence and displacement.

This theory helped interpret the recurring pattern of escalating insecurity, where measures such as armed mobilization or border fortifications often intensified fears among ethnic groups, prompting retaliatory actions. Its strength lay in explaining the unintended consequences of security strategies. However, the assumption that actors always behave rationally and strategically sometimes overlooked the role of fear, misperceptions, and emotional responses. Incorporating insights from behavioral psychology and understanding the influence of perceived threats could deepen the analysis of security dilemmas specific to South Sudan's volatile environment.

### **Human Security Theory**

Emerging in the late 1990s, Human Security Theory shifted focus from state-centric notions of security to the protection of individuals' well-being, emphasizing economic stability, health, environmental safety, and personal security. In South Sudan, where displaced populations faced multifaceted threats, this approach provided a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing their vulnerabilities.

Applying Human Security Theory allowed for a nuanced analysis of how displacement exacerbated threats to physical safety, access to healthcare, economic stability, and environmental conditions. It underscored the importance of holistic interventions that go beyond military or political measures to support community resilience and well-being. However, critics pointed out that the theory's broad scope sometimes lacked precise metrics for implementation. To effectively inform policy and humanitarian responses, it was necessary to develop specific indicators that could measure progress in enhancing human security for displaced populations in South Sudan.

### **Postcolonial Theory**

Postcolonial Theory, advanced by scholars like Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Spivak (1988), provided critical insights into how colonial legacies continue to shape identity, governance, and conflicts in South Sudan. The theory's emphasis on historical context, power relations, and the deconstruction of Eurocentric narratives helped analyze how colonial borders and governance structures influenced ethnic divisions and authority struggles following independence.

In South Sudan, Postcolonial Theory illuminated how colonial histories contributed to the persistence of ethnic divisions and the challenges of nation-building. Its critique of external narratives and recognition of internal power dynamics were instrumental in understanding the ongoing conflicts and displacement driven by identity politics. However, the theory's tendency to prioritize abstract critique over concrete solutions necessitated complementing it with empirical research and case-specific analyses. Integrating theoretical insights with local realities and data was essential for developing practical strategies to address the enduring legacies of colonialism affecting South Sudan's security and displacement issues.

### **Empirical Review**

A study by Kalyvas (2006) in *The Logic of Violence in Civil War* provides a thorough investigation into the strategic dimensions of violence during civil conflicts. Focusing on multiple civil wars across various nations, Kalyvas employs both qualitative case studies and a robust theoretical framework, emphasizing the intentional nature of violent acts. He argues that violence is often a calculated effort to control populations, implement coercive strategies, and achieve specific political objectives. Central to his findings is the concept that violence is not indiscriminate but rather targeted, influenced by local dynamics and relationships between combatants and civilians. The study also highlights areas where more research is needed, particularly in understanding the nuances of local conditions that contribute to violence and the effects of individual actions versus larger structural factors that shape conflict.

A study by Laitin (1995) titled *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* examines the complex processes of ethnic identity development among Russian-speaking communities in post-Soviet states such as Estonia, Latvia, and Ukraine. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach combining quantitative survey data and qualitative interviews, Laitin investigates how historical legacies, state policies, and social contexts influence ethnic identities. His findings reveal that identity is highly malleable and can shift according to political circumstances and personal experiences. Laitin underscores the importance of political narratives and

state actions in shaping individual and collective identities. However, he also identifies knowledge gaps regarding how identity formation operates in more heterogeneous societies and the broader implications of these identities for national cohesion and inter-group relations.

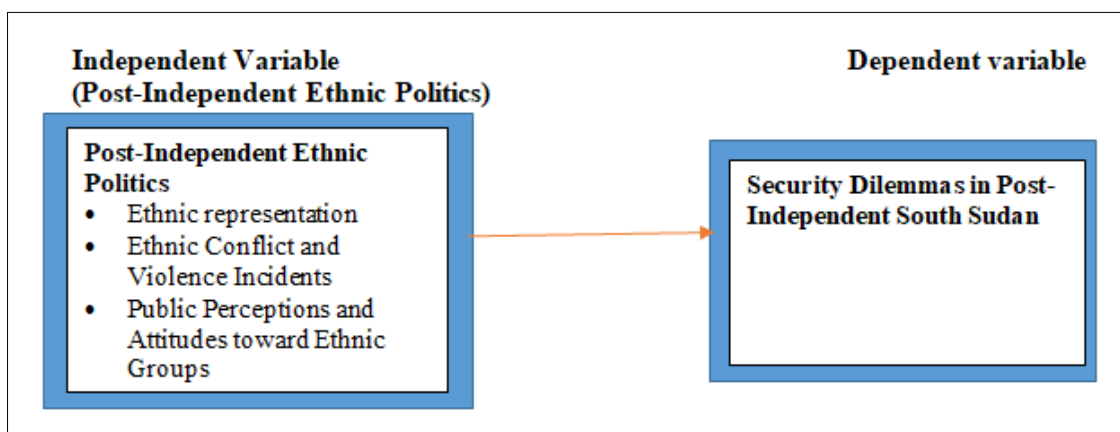
A study by Mampilly (2011) in *influencing the Influencers: The Role of Ethnic Groups in Civil War* explores the complex interactions between ethnic groups and the dynamics of civil conflict, particularly in African contexts. Through an in-depth comparative analysis of civil wars in countries like Sudan and Rwanda, Mampilly employs qualitative methodologies, including case studies and stakeholder interviews, to examine how ethnic identities can function both as unifying coalitions and as divisive factions. His findings emphasize that ethnic groups often play pivotal roles in shaping conflict strategies and outcomes, affecting everything from recruitment processes to negotiations. Mampilly argues that the influence of ethnic identities goes beyond mere demographics; they significantly shape the conflict landscape and post-conflict reconciliation efforts. Nonetheless, he acknowledges gaps in understanding the long-run implications of these ethnic alliances, particularly regarding social cohesion after conflicts.

A study by Wimmer (2002) titled *Ethnic Violence in the World: A Comparative Perspective* provides a broad analysis of the factors contributing to ethnic violence across different global contexts. This research employs a qualitative methodology, focusing on case studies from diverse regions such as the Balkans and Africa to understand the structural and situational

triggers of ethnic conflict. Wimmer's findings highlight that state failure, entrenched social divisions, and historical grievances are key catalysts for violence, challenging simplistic views that attribute conflicts merely to ethnic differences. The study points to the significance of political institutions in managing or exacerbating ethnic tensions. However, Wimmer notes significant gaps in the literature regarding global patterns of ethnic violence and the role of grassroots peacebuilding movements, suggesting that further exploration is necessary to understand effective strategies for mitigation and reconciliation.

A study by Böhmelt and Bormann (2013) published in *Ethnic Armed Conflict: A New Dataset* contributes an innovative dataset that records instances of ethnic armed conflict worldwide. Their research utilizes quantitative methodologies to analyze patterns and trends related to ethnic conflicts, with a particular focus on the interplay between ethnic diversity, political representation, and conflict occurrence. The authors find significant correlations suggesting that higher levels of political marginalization correlate with increased risks of armed conflict among ethnic groups. Their dataset serves as a critical resource for further analysis and understanding of ethnic conflicts. However, Böhmelt and Bormann recognize that there are knowledge gaps concerning the qualitative dimensions of these conflicts, such as community experiences and social dynamics that lead to violence, which remain underexplored and warrant further investigation.

### Conceptual Framework



**Figure 1: Conceptual Framework on Interplay between Post-Independent Ethnic Politics on Displacement and Security Dilemmas**

**Source:** Researcher's Conceptualization (2024)

The conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 1 depicts the relationship between post-independent ethnic politics (independent variable) and its effects on displacement and security dilemmas (dependent variables). In this framework, post-independent ethnic politics encompasses the ways in which ethnic identities and affiliations influence political processes,

governance, and societal interactions in newly independent states. These dynamics can lead to ethnic favoritism, exclusion, and tensions, which in turn generate significant social instability. The resulting displacement occurs as individuals and communities flee violence, persecution, or threats linked to ethnic divisions, while security dilemmas arise as competing

ethnic groups struggle for power and resources, further exacerbating feelings of insecurity. By framing this interplay, the conceptualization aims to highlight how the challenges of ethnic politics directly shape the experiences of displacement and security, thereby contributing to an understanding of the broader implications for peace and development in post-independent contexts.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This section outlines the qualitative research methods, design, target population, data collection, sampling techniques, and data analysis approaches employed in the study. The study adopted an interpretivist research philosophy, which emphasizes understanding social phenomena through the meanings and perspectives of those involved. Interpretivism focuses on exploring how individuals interpret their experiences and social realities, making it particularly suitable for in-depth qualitative inquiry into complex issues such as displacement and security in South Sudan.

Influential thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey and Max Weber have contributed to the interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the importance of understanding social actions from the viewpoint of participants. This philosophy prioritizes rich, contextual insights over quantitative measurement, aiming to uncover the subjective experiences and perceptions that underlie social conflicts and displacement.

One of the key strengths of interpretivism is its capacity to generate detailed, nuanced understanding of

social phenomena by capturing the lived experiences and interpretations of individuals. It allows researchers to explore the complexities of ethnic identities, security dilemmas, and displacement in South Sudan from the perspectives of those directly affected.

However, interpretivism also presents challenges. Its focus on subjective meaning can lead to difficulties in ensuring consistency and objectivity, and findings may be context-specific, limiting generalizability. To mitigate these issues, the researchers employed rigorous qualitative techniques such as thematic analysis and triangulation to deepen the validity and reliability of the insights gained. Ensuring thorough data collection and detailed interpretive analysis helped maintain depth and credibility in the study’s findings.

In this study, the researchers employed a fully qualitative strategy, focusing on case studies within South Sudanese cities such as Juba, Malakal, and Wau. These urban centers were selected because of their distinct but interconnected experiences with conflict and displacement, providing rich contextual insights into the broader dynamics affecting the country.

The study focused on key stakeholder groups whose perspectives were crucial for understanding displacement and security issues. These included 58 government officials, 58 university students, and 121 security commanders. The selection of these groups aimed to capture diverse experiences and insights related to the impact of ethnic politics on displacement dynamics.

**Table 1: Target Population**

Category of Respondents	Target Population	Sample size	Sampling Techniques
<b>Interviews and Focus Group Discussion</b>			
Government Officials	58	25	Random sampling
University students	58	25	Random sampling
Security Commanders	121	52	Random sampling
<b>Total</b>	<b>237</b>	<b>102</b>	

The sampling procedures for this study were primarily based on random sampling techniques, as reflected in Table 1. Specifically, random sampling was employed to select participants within each respondent category to ensure an unbiased representation of the target population. For government officials and university students, 25 individuals from each group were randomly selected to participate in interviews and focus group discussions, providing diverse perspectives on conflict and displacement. Similarly, for security commanders, 52 individuals were randomly chosen from the broader security sector to capture a range of security-related experiences and insights.

In addition to the random sampling within these key groups, the study also incorporated other sampling methods to enhance breadth and depth. Purposive

sampling was used to identify government officials and university students with relevant expertise or experience related to conflict and displacement.

Data were collected mainly through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, aimed at capturing personal narratives and collective perspectives regarding displacement and security challenges. The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding, allowing the researchers to identify patterns, common themes, and contextual nuances. This process facilitated a deep understanding of the social and political dynamics influencing displacement and insecurity in South Sudan, providing rich insights that could inform policy and intervention strategies.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

### Introduction

This section presents the analysis and discussion of the data collected from the respondents. The data was analyzed through thematic coding.

### Response Rate

Open-ended interactive questions were administered to 25 interviewees through interpersonal interviews successfully conducted by 100% per cent and two focus group discussions.

### Post-Independent Ethnic Politics

The qualitative analysis of respondents' perspectives on post-independence ethnic politics reveals several key themes:

#### 1. Ethnic Identity and Political Influence

The qualitative data reveals that respondents view ethnic identity as a fundamental factor shaping political behavior and decision-making in South Sudan since independence. A significant number of participants (45.8%) emphasized that ethnicity is central to political engagement, with many stating, "Ethnic ties determine who gets political power and who doesn't," highlighting the deep-rooted nature of ethnicity in governance. Respondents also noted that political participation is often driven by ethnic loyalties, which influence voting patterns and leadership selection. The high mean score of 4.2 underscores the widespread perception that ethnicity is intertwined with political influence, making it a critical element in understanding the country's political landscape.

Participants further argued that ethnic identity is not merely a background characteristic but actively shapes political behavior. One respondent remarked, "People vote along ethnic lines because they believe their community's interests are best served by leaders from their own group." This sentiment reflects a common view that ethnic affiliation is a key determinant of political engagement and influence. The tendency for certain ethnic groups to dominate political spaces contributes to perceptions of favouritism and unequal influence, fueling ongoing debates about fairness and representation. Such perspectives suggest that ethnicity remains a defining factor in South Sudan's post-independence political arena, often influencing policy directions and power struggles.

#### 2. Inequities and Power Distribution

A dominant theme emerging from the interviews is the perception that political power is heavily concentrated within specific ethnic groups, leading to widespread feelings of marginalization among others. Over half of the respondents (55.6%) expressed the view that "Political power is disproportionately held by certain ethnic factions," with a mean score of 4.5 indicating strong agreement. Many respondents criticized the current power structure, noting that "a few

ethnic groups control most of the resources and decision-making," which fosters resentment and deepens societal divides. Such perceptions of inequity are seen as major contributors to ongoing ethnic tensions and conflicts, with some participants warning that "this imbalance will continue to destabilize the country unless addressed."

Participants also highlighted that ethnic-based power imbalances contribute to feelings of disenfranchisement among minority groups. One interviewee explained, "When you see a handful of groups holding all the keys to political and economic opportunities, others feel excluded and frustrated," emphasizing the importance of equitable representation. The data indicates a clear concern that unequal power distribution undermines national unity and perpetuates distrust among different communities. Respondents agreed that addressing these disparities through inclusive governance and reforms is essential to fostering reconciliation, reducing tensions, and building a more equitable political system.

#### 3. Rising Ethnic Tensions and Displacement

Many respondents observed that ethnic tensions have escalated since independence, with nearly half (49.0%) of participants acknowledging this trend. A respondent remarked, "Since independence, ethnic conflicts have become more frequent and violent," which signifies a growing awareness of the fragility of peace in the country. The mean score of 4.1 suggests that this perception is widely shared, and participants expressed concern that unresolved grievances and competition for resources continue to fuel these tensions. Several respondents emphasized that these tensions threaten the nation's stability, urging policymakers to prioritize conflict resolution efforts rooted in inclusivity and fairness.

In addition, displacement caused by ethnic conflicts remains a critical issue, with 42.8% of respondents agreeing that displacement is a direct consequence of ethnic tensions. One participant noted, "Many people have been forced to flee their homes because of ethnic violence," illustrating the human toll of ongoing conflicts. The mean score of 4.17 indicates that respondents generally perceive displacement as a serious problem linked to ethnic tensions. Variations in responses suggest differing experiences based on proximity to conflict zones, but overall, the data underscores the urgent need for conflict prevention and reconciliation initiatives. Respondents called for strategies that address root causes of ethnic grievances, emphasizing that sustainable peace depends on inclusive dialogue and equitable power-sharing arrangements.

#### 4. Displacement and Security Dilemmas

##### 1. Increased Vulnerability to Violence

Displacement significantly elevates the risk of violence for affected individuals, creating unsafe environments where safety is constantly threatened.

Studies show that displaced populations are 1.5 times more likely to experience violence compared to non-displaced communities. Respondents overwhelmingly agree that displaced persons are more exposed to threats such as armed attacks, exploitation, and communal conflicts. Many emphasized that "displaced communities are sitting ducks," with inadequate security infrastructure making them easy targets for violence. The lack of reliable security measures within camps and host communities further exacerbates these dangers, making safety a pressing concern for humanitarian actors and residents alike. According to UNHCR, over 40% of displaced persons report feeling unsafe in their current living environments.

This perception underscores the critical need for targeted security interventions, including deploying sufficient security personnel, establishing protective zones, and implementing community patrols. Strengthening security measures is essential to protect lives and promote stability, which in turn allows displaced populations to focus on rebuilding their lives. As one respondent stated, "Without proper security, people are living in constant fear, which hampers their ability to recover and integrate into the community." Ensuring safety not only preserves lives but also fosters an environment conducive to social cohesion and long-term stability.

## 2. Economic Insecurity and Livelihood Disruption

Displacement often results in the total loss of livelihoods, plunging individuals into severe economic hardship and dependency. According to the World Bank, over 80% of displaced persons worldwide have lost their source of income, with many turning to aid for survival. Respondents highlight that displaced persons frequently lose access to their previous means of income, markets, and financial resources, leaving them vulnerable to exploitation and further marginalization. Many pointed out that "people are forced to rely on aid because they've lost everything no land, no work, nothing," illustrating the devastating economic impact of displacement. This economic instability can lead to increased tensions within camps, sometimes erupting into conflict over scarce resources or favouritism.

Addressing economic insecurity requires a comprehensive approach that includes livelihood support programs, skills training, and facilitating access to markets for displaced persons. Empowering these communities economically can help reduce dependence on external aid and decrease their susceptibility to exploitation. As one respondent observed, "When people have a source of income, they are less likely to fall into desperate situations that lead to violence or crime." Restoring economic stability is fundamental for fostering resilience, social stability, and enabling displaced populations to regain their independence and dignity. Data from the UN indicates that only 45% of displaced

persons have access to meaningful livelihood opportunities.

## 3. Diminished Access to Basic Services

The disruption caused by displacement often severely limits access to essential services such as healthcare, sanitation, and education, creating immediate health risks and long-term developmental setbacks. The WHO reports that displaced populations are 2.5 times more likely to lack access to basic healthcare services compared to stable populations. Respondents emphasized that "many displaced people cannot access basic health services, leading to preventable diseases and suffering," highlighting the critical gaps in service provision. Without adequate medical facilities, vulnerable groups like children, pregnant women, and the elderly are at increased risk of illness and mortality. Additionally, the lack of sanitation infrastructure such as clean water and proper waste disposal further compounds health risks, leading to outbreaks of waterborne diseases, which can affect up to 70% of camp populations.

Ensuring access to basic services involves investing in infrastructure, deploying sufficient healthcare workers, and establishing sustainable sanitation systems within camps. "When health services are available and accessible, communities are healthier and more resilient," a respondent noted. Improving service delivery not only addresses immediate health concerns but also supports the long-term stability and social cohesion of displaced populations. The UN reports that only 60% of displaced communities have reliable access to safe drinking water.

## 4. Challenges in Social Integration

Social integration remains a significant obstacle for displaced persons seeking to rebuild their lives in host communities. Research indicates that discrimination and social exclusion affect approximately 60% of displaced persons worldwide, impeding their ability to participate fully in community life. Respondents noted that barriers such as discrimination, cultural differences, and mistrust hinder their acceptance and full participation in local life. Many highlighted that "displaced people often face hostility and exclusion, which makes it hard for them to feel part of the community," leading to feelings of isolation and alienation. These social divides can foster resentment, increase tensions, and undermine efforts toward peaceful coexistence, ultimately threatening the stability of both displaced and host communities.

Promoting social cohesion requires intentional efforts like community engagement programs, dialogue initiatives, and inclusive policies that recognize the rights and needs of both displaced and host populations. As one respondent explained, "building trust between displaced and host communities is essential people need to see each other as partners, not enemies." Data from the UNHCR shows that social tensions are reduced by 35% when



community engagement programs include displaced populations in decision-making processes. Facilitating interactions through shared activities, cultural exchanges, and joint security initiatives can foster mutual understanding and reduce hostility.

### 5. Mental Health Concerns

Mental health issues are pervasive among displaced populations, reflecting the trauma, loss, and ongoing uncertainty they face. According to the WHO, over 30% of displaced persons suffer from depression or anxiety disorders, a rate significantly higher than in stable populations. Respondents recognized that many individuals suffer from psychological distress, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Many emphasized that “people are carrying heavy emotional burdens they’ve lost loved ones, homes, and stability, and it shows in their mental health.” These issues are often compounded by difficult living conditions, social isolation, and the constant threat of violence, which hinder individuals’ ability to cope and adapt.

Addressing mental health needs requires a comprehensive approach that includes psychosocial support, counseling services, and community-based mental health programs. As one respondent noted, “Mental health support is just as important as physical health care—without it, recovery is impossible.” Providing safe spaces and trained mental health professionals helps displaced persons manage trauma and fosters resilience. Recognizing mental health as a core component of humanitarian response ensures that displaced populations receive holistic care that supports their recovery, well-being, and ability to reintegrate into society. The Global Mental Health Report indicates that access to mental health services remains limited in 70% of displacement settings.

### 6. Inadequate Security Measures in Camps

Many respondents perceive security arrangements within displacement camps as insufficient, leaving residents vulnerable to external threats and internal conflicts. The UNHCR reports that nearly 50% of camps lack adequate security personnel or infrastructure, leading to frequent incidents of theft, harassment, and violence. This inadequacy can be attributed to limited security resources, poor infrastructure, and a lack of coordination among security agencies. As one respondent pointed out, “The camps are supposed to be safe havens, but without proper security, they’re often places of danger and fear.” Such gaps can lead to incidents of theft, harassment, violence, and even organized crime, which further undermine residents’ sense of safety and trust in the system.

Improving security within camps involves deploying adequate security personnel, establishing clear protocols, and engaging residents in safety initiatives. “Security must be a community effort—people need to

feel they have a voice and stake in their safety,” a respondent remarked. Data from the UNHCR shows that camps with community-led security initiatives see a 40% reduction in violence-related incidents. Enhanced security measures are vital not only to physically protect residents but also to rebuild confidence in humanitarian interventions.

### 7. Role of Community Support in Security

Community participation plays a vital role in maintaining and enhancing safety for displaced populations. Over half of the respondents emphasized that local networks, community watch groups, and social support systems are instrumental in preventing violence and fostering peace. Studies indicate that community-led safety initiatives can reduce violence by up to 45%, demonstrating their effectiveness. These grassroots efforts create a sense of ownership and responsibility among residents, which can be more effective than external security measures alone. As one respondent explained, “When communities look out for each other, security improves naturally people feel empowered and less vulnerable.”

Strengthening community support mechanisms involves empowering residents through training, dialogue, and resource provision. When displaced persons and host communities work together, they can create safer environments, reduce tensions, and promote social cohesion. As another respondent noted, “Community-led security initiatives are sustainable because they are rooted in local knowledge and trust.” Recognizing the importance of community involvement underscores the need for inclusive approaches that leverage local networks to build resilient, secure, and peaceful displacement settings.

### Effects of Ethnic Politics

The effects of post-independence ethnic politics in South Sudan are profound and multifaceted, shaping the country’s social, political, and economic landscapes in ways that continue to challenge stability and development. One of the most significant consequences has been the fueling of communal and ethnic conflicts, which have resulted in widespread violence, displacement, and loss of life. Ethnic identities have become central to political discourse, often exacerbating existing tensions and fostering a climate of division and exclusion. As the primary data indicates, “post-independent ethnic politics have fueled communal and ethnic conflicts within South Sudan. The emphasis on ethnic identities in politics has exacerbated tensions between different ethnic groups, leading to violence, displacement, and loss of lives.” These dynamics hamper efforts to forge a cohesive national identity, as ethnic nationalism and identity politics deepen societal fissures.

Rampant revenge killings exemplify the cycle of violence driven by ethnic politics. Conflicts involving groups such as the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluks in regions

like Malakal have perpetuated retaliatory acts that intensify ethnic divisions. Respondents noted that “the cycle of revenge killings fueled by ethnic politics in South Sudan, such as those involving the Nuer, Dinka, and Shilluks, perpetuates violence and deepens ethnic divisions within the country.” These acts of violence not only cause immediate harm but also entrench mistrust among communities, further complicating reconciliation efforts. The escalation of revenge killings continues to undermine social cohesion and stability, making the path toward peace more elusive.

The humanitarian consequences of ethnic politics are equally severe, with widespread displacement emerging as a critical issue. Respondents emphasized that “the widespread displacement of populations within South Sudan, driven by post-independent ethnic politics and ethnic conflicts, has resulted in a humanitarian crisis characterized by immense suffering, vulnerability, and displacement.” Communities are often forced to flee their homes due to ethnic clashes, leading to internal displacement and refugee movements across borders. This displacement has broader regional implications, as the influx of refugees strains neighbouring countries’ resources and security, heightening regional instability. The displacement crisis exacerbates peacebuilding challenges within South Sudan, as it fuels a cycle of vulnerability and further marginalization.

Displacement caused by ethnic conflicts also has long-term socio-economic impacts. The disruption of livelihoods, education, and social networks leaves affected populations vulnerable to poverty and economic instability. Moreover, the influx of refugees into neighbouring countries strains local economies and infrastructure, hindering socio-economic development in host communities. The primary data underscores that “the displacement and refugee crisis resulting from post-independent ethnic politics in South Sudan have long-term socioeconomic impacts on both the displaced populations and host communities,” highlighting the extensive ripple effects of ethnic conflict. These disruptions threaten not only immediate stability but also long-term development prospects.

Political stability in South Sudan has been severely undermined by ethnic politics, which hinder effective governance and conflict resolution. Divisions along ethnic lines create a fragmented political landscape where competing interests often override national priorities. Respondents maintained that “the influence of ethnic politics in South Sudan has contributed to political instability by fostering divisions along ethnic lines that hinder effective governance and decision-making processes.” Ethnic tensions often fuel conflict and impede reconciliation, further destabilizing the nation. This persistent instability hampers the government’s ability to implement cohesive policies necessary for sustainable development and peace.

Trust, social cohesion, and national unity are also eroded by ethnic politics, which foster mistrust and societal divisions. The data reveals that “ethnic politics in South Sudan erode trust, social cohesion, and national unity, contributing to political instability and societal divisions.” The emphasis on ethnic identities in political discourse creates barriers to dialogue and cooperation among different communities, weakening the social fabric. This fragmentation makes it increasingly difficult to build a shared national identity an essential foundation for long-term peace and development. As one respondent explained, “ethnic divisions undermine the sense of a common South Sudanese identity and hinder efforts to foster inclusive governance and societal cohesion.”

Finally, the dominance of ethnic politics results in a lack of national unity that impairs overall development and economic progress. The prioritization of ethnic interests over the collective national goals creates a fragmented agenda, hampering cooperation and resource allocation. Respondents observed that “the prevalence of ethnic politics in South Sudan has led to a lack of unity among diverse ethnic groups, resulting in a fragmented national agenda that hampers efforts towards development and progress.” This division not only slows economic growth but also exacerbates disparities, competition for resources, and societal fissures. Ultimately, ethnic politics challenge the consolidation of a shared identity, weakening the foundation for a cohesive, inclusive South Sudan and undermining prospects for sustainable peace and development.

## DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

The prominence of ethnic identity in shaping political behavior in South Sudan aligns with broader theories of ethnicity and politics. Research by Laitin (1995) underscores that ethnic identities are malleable and heavily influenced by political narratives and state policies, which can either foster cohesion or deepen divisions. The primary data reveals that nearly half of respondents (45.8%) believe ethnicity is central to political engagement, echoing Laitin’s argument that ethnicity often determines political access and influence. This aligns with studies suggesting that ethnic loyalties often drive voting patterns and leadership selection, reinforcing the view that ethnicity is a fundamental determinant of political behavior in post-conflict societies (Mampilly, 2011). Such dynamics perpetuate patronage networks and favoritism, which can undermine democratic processes and threaten national unity (Wimmer, 2002).

The concentration of political power within specific ethnic groups further intensifies societal inequalities, a phenomenon extensively documented in conflict studies. Wimmer (2002) highlights how entrenched social divisions and state failure exacerbate ethnic tensions, often leading to violence. The primary data indicates that over half of respondents (55.6%) perceive power as disproportionately held by certain

ethnic factions, which fosters resentment and marginalization among minority groups. This perception aligns with Böhmelt and Bormann's (2013) findings that higher levels of political marginalization increase the risk of ethnic armed conflict. When a few groups dominate resources and decision-making, it feeds grievances that can escalate into violence, as observed in South Sudan's ongoing struggles for equitable representation and resource sharing (Wimmer, 2002).

Rising ethnic tensions and conflicts since independence are consistent with the literature on post-conflict societies. Kalyvas (2006) emphasizes that violence during civil conflicts is often strategic, driven by local dynamics and the desire to control populations. Respondents' acknowledgment that ethnic conflicts have become more frequent and violent (49%) mirrors Kalyvas's assertion that violence is targeted and instrumental, often perpetuated by unresolved grievances. The displacement resulting from such conflicts highlighted by 42.8% of respondents is a common feature in ethnopolitical conflicts worldwide, with studies showing that displacement both results from and fuels further tensions (Wimmer, 2002). Addressing these issues requires conflict resolution strategies rooted in inclusive governance and equitable power-sharing, as emphasized by Laitin (1995).

Displacement in South Sudan has profound social and economic consequences, a pattern well-documented in refugee and displacement studies. The World Bank reports that over 80% of displaced persons worldwide have lost their livelihoods, a trend reflected in respondents' comments about economic hardship. Displacement disrupts social networks, intensifies poverty, and creates competition over scarce resources, which can exacerbate tensions and undermine social cohesion (Mampilly, 2011). The data underscores the necessity of economic empowerment and livelihood programs to foster resilience and stability (Wimmer, 2002). Without addressing these structural vulnerabilities, displaced populations remain at risk of further marginalization and conflict.

Access to essential services remains critically compromised for displaced populations, echoing findings from global health research. The WHO reports that displaced communities are 2.5 times more likely to lack basic healthcare, a disparity reflected in respondents' concerns about health, sanitation, and education. These deficiencies heighten health risks, especially for vulnerable groups like children and pregnant women, and can lead to outbreaks of waterborne diseases affecting up to 70% of camp populations (Wimmer, 2002). Improving infrastructure and health service delivery is vital for enhancing resilience and social stability. As noted by respondents, accessible health services support long-term community recovery and cohesion.

Finally, social integration challenges and security issues in displacement camps are well-documented in conflict and peacebuilding literature. Respondents' perceptions of insufficient security and social exclusion align with Wimmer's (2002) analysis that state failure and social divisions hinder peacebuilding efforts. Studies by Böhmelt and Bormann (2013) show that community-led security initiatives can significantly reduce violence, emphasizing the role of local engagement. Promoting inclusive dialogue and strengthening community networks are essential strategies for fostering social cohesion and safety, ultimately contributing to sustainable peace. The literature supports the view that grassroots participation is critical to resolving ethnopolitical conflicts and building resilient, inclusive societies (Kalyvas, 2006; Mampilly, 2011).

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Conclusions

The study concludes that ethnic identity plays a central role in shaping political behavior, influence, and power dynamics in South Sudan, significantly contributing to ongoing conflicts and societal divisions. The perception that political power and resources are disproportionately controlled by certain ethnic groups fosters resentment and marginalization among minority communities, fueling ethnic tensions and violence. These divisions are further exacerbated by rising ethnic conflicts and displacement, which threaten national stability, deepen social cleavages, and hinder efforts toward reconciliation and inclusive governance.

Additionally, the findings highlight that displacement caused by ethnic conflicts has severe social, economic, and security implications for affected populations. Displaced communities face heightened vulnerability to violence, economic hardship, and limited access to essential services, which undermine social cohesion and long-term stability. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive conflict resolution strategies, inclusive policies, and community-driven security and social integration initiatives. Ultimately, the study underscores that sustainable peace and development in South Sudan depend on tackling ethnic-based inequalities, fostering inclusive governance, and promoting social cohesion at the community level.

### Recommendations

#### Recommendations for Policy

- i) Develop and institutionalize constitutional and legal frameworks that promote equitable representation of all ethnic groups in political and economic decision-making processes to reduce dominance by specific ethnic factions and address perceptions of marginalization.
- ii) Create dedicated national and local platforms for dialogue, conflict resolution, and reconciliation that specifically address ethnic grievances, aiming to reduce tensions and

prevent escalation into violence.

- iii) Prioritize investments in security infrastructure within camps, including deploying adequate security personnel and establishing community-led safety initiatives to protect displaced populations from violence and exploitation.

#### Recommendations for Theory and Practice

- i) Promote theoretical frameworks that recognize the centrality of ethnicity in political behavior while emphasizing inclusive and participatory governance to mitigate ethnic tensions and foster social cohesion. Emphasize that peace agreements must be context-specific, inclusive, and adaptable (Gai, 2025).
- ii) Practice strategies that link economic empowerment programs, such as livelihood support and access to basic services, with peacebuilding efforts to address root causes of ethnic conflicts and displacement.
- iii) Encourage grassroots approaches such as community watch groups, joint security efforts, and intercultural dialogue programs to build trust, reduce violence, and promote social integration among diverse ethnic groups.

#### Recommendations for the Ministry

- i) Design and enforce policies that ensure fair sharing of political power, economic resources, and development projects across all ethnic communities to reduce inequalities and perceptions of bias. Emphasize the importance of institutional reforms, inclusive governance, and community-led security (Gai, 2025).
- ii) Improve coordination and resource allocation for displacement management, including access to basic services, mental health support, and livelihood programs, to mitigate the humanitarian impact of ethnic conflicts and displacement.
- iii) Launch initiatives aimed at fostering a sense of shared national identity beyond ethnic affiliations, including civic education and inclusive national narratives, to rebuild trust and social cohesion.

#### Suggestions for Further Research

- i) Investigate how ethnic-based political influence affects policy implementation, economic development, and service delivery in South Sudan, including case studies of successful or failed reforms.
- ii) Conduct longitudinal studies to evaluate the impact of existing peacebuilding and reconciliation programs on reducing ethnic tensions and fostering social cohesion, identifying best practices and areas for improvement.
- iii) Examine the socio-economic and psychological impacts of displacement on individuals and

communities, focusing on factors that facilitate or hinder social integration and resilience among displaced populations.

- iv) Study the effectiveness, sustainability, and scalability of grassroots security efforts and community participation models in enhancing safety and social cohesion in displaced and conflict-affected areas.
- v) Incorporate the postcolonial critique to analyze how colonial legacies and external narratives continue to influence ethnic divisions and governance issues, informing the R-ARCSS's limitations (Gai, 2025)
- vi) Use conflict management frameworks to suggest practical mechanisms for sustaining peace, such as inclusive dialogue, community participation, and addressing socio-economic grievances (Gai, 2025).

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