

ETHNIC RIVALRY AND CIVIL CONFLICT IN SOUTH SUDAN: A CASE OF THE DINKA AND NUER COMMUNITIES

ANGELLA ELIZA LOMAKOL

M23B56/053

**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A DEGREE OF BACHELOR
OF SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL ADMINISTRATION OF UGANDA CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY**

May, 2026



**UGANDA CHRISTIAN
UNIVERSITY**

A Centre of Excellence in the Heart of Africa

DECLARATION

I, Angella Eliza Lomakol, hereby declare that this thesis is the outcome of my independent study conducted in partial fulfillment of the criteria for the Uganda Christian University Bachelor of Governance and International Relations degree. This work is unique and hasn't been submitted to any other university for credit toward a degree. Every reference is appropriately acknowledged as well.

Signature.....*Angella Eliza Lomakol*..... Date.....*20th*...../*MAY*...../*2026*.....

ANGELLA ELIZA LOMAKOL

M23B56/053

APPROVAL

This certifies that Angella Eliza Lomakol completed this thesis under my direction on the subject of "Ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan: a case of the Dinka and Nuer communities." As a result, I hereby guarantee that his work is suitable and of sufficient quality to be submitted for the partial completion of the requirements for the award of the Bachelor of Governance and International Relations degree.

Signature.....

Date.....20/5/2026

PROF.OMONA ANDREW DAVID

(Supervisor)

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family, particularly my parents, who have supported and encouraged me throughout my life and despite the difficult struggles of graduate school. I am so grateful and fortunate to have you as my parents.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I consider myself quite lucky to having completed my graduate thesis at Uganda Christian University. Consequently, I have people to thank for their contribution to my accomplishment.

First and foremost, I want to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Prof. David Omona for his essential guidance and assistance during the entire process. I am incredibly appreciative of his advice and the chances he has given me. He is very well-organized and has excellent comprehension skills, all of which were very beneficial in advancing my assignment.

In addition, I want to express my gratitude to my wonderful and loving parents for their unwavering love, provision, and spiritual support during my time in school.

Lastly, I want to express my gratitude to my friends for their unwavering support, compassion, and special graduation class experience.

Table of Contents

DECLARATION.....	i
APPROVAL	ii
DEDICATION.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT.....	iv
ABSTRACT	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background	1
1.3 Problem Statement	3
1.4 Purpose of the Study	3
1.5 Specific Objectives.....	3
1.6 Research Questions	4
1.7 Scope of the research.....	4
1.7.1 Content scope	4
1.7.2 Time scope.....	4
1.7.3 Geographical scope.....	4
1.8 Justification of the study	5
1.9 Significance of the study	5
CHAPTER TWO	6
LITERATURE REVIEW	6
2.1 Introduction	6
2.2 Conceptual review	6
2.2.1 Ethnic rivalry	6
2.2.2 Civil conflict	7
2.3 Empirical review of the study objectives	8
2.3.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry	8
2.3.2 How ethnic rivalry contributes to the persistence of civil conflict.....	10
2.3.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace among rival communities	11
2.4 Research/ Literature Gap.....	13
CHAPTER THREE	14
METHODOLOGY	14

3.1 Introduction	14
3.2 Research design.....	14
3.3 Study area and population	15
3.4 Sample size determination	15
3.5 Sampling methods	16
3.6 Data sources	16
3.7 Data collection method and tool.....	17
3.7.1 Key informant interview guide.....	17
3.7.2 Focus group discussion guide.....	17
3.8 Validity and reliability for qualitative research.....	17
3.9 Procedure for data collection.....	18
3.10 Data analysis	18
3.10.3 Analysis of qualitative data	18
3.11 Ethical consideration	19
3.12 Limitations and delimitations of the study	19
CHAPTER FOUR.....	20
PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS	20
4.1 Introduction	20
4.2 Presentation and analysis of findings	20
4.2.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan	20
4.2.2 How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan	25
4.2.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan	30
4.3 Discussion of findings.....	35
4.3.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan	35
4.3.2 How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan	36
4.3.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan	38
CHAPTER FIVE	40
SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	40
5.1 Introduction	40

5.2 Summary of findings.....	40
5.3 Conclusions	41
5.4 Recommendations	42
5.5 Areas for further research.....	43
REFERENCES.....	44
APPENDICES.....	46
Appendix 1: Interview Guide.....	46
Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	48

ABSTRACT

The study aimed at understanding the ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan: a case of the Dinka and Nuer communities. In this regard, the study focused on the following: examining the causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan, assessing how ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan, and proposing strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan.

A descriptive case study design incorporating solely qualitative methods was utilized in this study for the investigation of ethnic competition and civil conflict involving the Dinka and Nuer in the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile regions of South Sudan. Primary data was sourced through focus group discussions and key informant interviews from community members, leaders, government officials, and NGO representatives applying both purposive and snowball sampling approaches. The obtained data was analyzed based on themes related to the objectives of the study, adhering to all ethical considerations throughout.

The results of this study show that the ethnic competition of the Dinka and Nuer people in South Sudan is fueled by a range of factors such as politics, economics, history, and sociocultural elements. They include political exploitation of ethnic identities, unfair access to resources, poor institutional capacity, historical resentments, and militarization as the factors sustaining mistrust, violence, and civil conflict. Ethnic identity, fragmentation of armed groups, and poor justice systems has been identified as contributors to sustained instability while promotion of peaceful coexistence may be attained through a number of approaches.

Finally, it was suggested that for the purposes of minimizing the ethnic rivalry and recurrence of violence among the Dinka and Nuer ethnicities, inclusive governance, justice and reconciliation processes, inter-communal dialogue, peace education, and security sector reform should be emphasized. The report also underlines the significance of disarmament, cooperation between the government, non-government organizations, and local communities, and continuous engagement in peace building efforts.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter discussed the background of the study, problem statement, objectives, questions, scope, significance, conceptual framework, and limitations of the study. The focus is on understanding the role of ethnic rivalry in shaping civil conflict in South Sudan, using the Dinka and Nuer communities as a case study.

1.2 Background

On a global scale, ethnic rivalry and civil conflict continue to pose a challenge in several ways. In the US, for instance, racial and ethnic conflicts have been evidenced in the past owing to past division caused by slavery and segregation. Separatist activities in Spain, such as those in Catalonia, demonstrate how ethnonationalism can be used to fragmentize a country leading to constitutional crises (Kulang, 2021). The Flemish-Walloon ethnic strife in Belgium, for example, has played a major role in shaping their power-sharing arrangement and governance systems (Kuol, 2022). The conflict in Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, for example, illustrates how ethnic nationalism can be employed to foster civil unrest and long-term conflict prior to achieving any form of agreements (Afriyie et al., 2020). Ethnic conflict has become widespread phenomenon with considerable implications for humanitarian issues in various countries in the world, including Sri Lanka and Myanmar in Asia, among others, having experienced ethnic civil conflict with many fatalities and displacements (Garang, 2020).

Similarly, ethnic rivalries have contributed to civil unrests in various regions across Africa, especially in nations such as Rwanda where genocide in 1994 wiped off almost 800,000 people within 100 days (Pinaud, 2022). Continuous conflicts between religious and ethnic groups in Nigeria over the past decades have led to persistent insecurity and deaths of many individuals (Riak & Dada, 2025). The conflict in Sudan, more particularly in the region of Darfur, has been characterized by ethnic militias and the government engaging in bloody battles (Sarker, 2026). Ethnic rivalry for power and control of resources has been heightened by weaknesses in postcolonial states in sub-Saharan Africa, contributing significantly to prolonged wars in countries such as Democratic Republic of Congo (Kisaka et al., 2022).

In East Africa, ethnic rivalry has played a significant role in shaping the political instability and civil unrest experienced in countries such as Kenya, where at least 1,000 individuals lost their lives and over 600,000 others were displaced after the civil unrest that followed the post-election period in 2007-2008 (Özoflu, 2024). Conflicts within ethnic federations in Ethiopia have caused violent conflicts, especially in the Tigray region (Nyadera et al., 2024). In addition, ethnic disputes within Uganda have escalated to full-scale wars, evidenced by past conflicts such as the Lord's Resistance Army rebellion (Yeo, 2025).

As such, ethnic tensions between the Dinka and Nuer have been responsible for the eruption and persistence of civil strife since the formation of South Sudan as an independent nation-state in 2011 (Langan, 2025). The outbreak of the 2013 civil war, during which approximately 400,000 people were killed and about 4 million displaced, both internally and externally, arose from a conflict of interests between Salva Kiir, president and a member of the Dinka ethnic group, and his predecessor as vice president, Dr. Riek Machar, a Nuer (Allen, 2020). This situation escalated very quickly into an ethnically tinged confrontation characterized by killings in the target communities (Magara, 2025). Although the 2018 Revitalized Peace Agreement brought a temporary solution to this conflict, continued strife amongst armed groups constitutes a threat to the stability of the country (Jok, 2022). According to Onditi (2022), persistent violence highlights deep-seated ethnic divides within the state machinery.

In addition, the two largest ethnic groups in South Sudan, namely, the Dinka and the Nuer, had long engaged in violence due to disagreements regarding cattle, land, and politics. The conflict has only become more intense due to the various civil wars in Sudan, with the disputes persisting even after independence (Liyew, 2025). Between 2013 and 2018, the ethnicization of military institutions and the leadership further increased community animosity and dashed prospects of long-term peace (Mulaudzi, 2023). According to scholars, ethnic mobilization, expansion of administrative units, and competition for oil has all played their part in intensifying intercommunal strife (Bedigen, 2020). Tens of millions of people have been displaced; hunger and famine are widespread in the country; more than half of the population suffers from the resulting economic collapse (Fonkeng, 2021). In short, the human toll has been tremendous. Hence, in order to address the root causes of the civil unrest and implement effective measures of inclusion and reconciliation, an understanding of the ethnic conflict between the two communities had to be gained.

1.3 Problem Statement

In the ideal scenario, South Sudan would have been able to secure sustainable peace, political stability, and successful state building after its independence in 2011, especially through the reduction of civil conflict due to inclusive governance (Kuol, 2022). Nonetheless, civil conflict still occurs in South Sudan, and it is characterized by armed struggles, ethnically charged violence, and institutional weakness, especially since 2013 (Onditi, 2022). The conflict between the Dinka and Nuer communities has claimed approximately 400,000 lives and uprooted more than four million individuals (Sarker, 2026). Though there have been peace treaties, IGAD's efforts, and the signing of various security arrangements, insecurity still prevails, coupled with continued rebel factionalism and militarized ethnicity (Nyadera et al., 2024).

Additionally, whereas much scholarship has looked into the origins of ethnic conflict, elite rivalries, and competition for resources in South Sudan, very little research has focused on how Dinka-Nuer rivalry contributes to civil unrest in the country (Garang, 2020; Magara, 2025). Although past research has pointed out the fragility of the state as well as ethnic mobilization as factors that contribute to the instability of the region, the continued violence means that the real reason behind this unrest may not have been fully captured (Kulang, 2021). Besides, although various proposals of power sharing and stabilization have been advanced, they may not prove effective in curbing violence between ethnic groups (Kisaka et al., 2022).

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to provide a nuanced understanding of how ethnic rivalries shape civil conflict in South Sudan with specific focus on the Dinka and Nuer communities and inform strategies for peace and stability.

1.5 Specific Objectives

- i. To examine the causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan.
- ii. To assess how ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan.

- iii. To propose strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan.

1.6 Research Questions

- i. What are the causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan?
- ii. How does ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contribute to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan?
- iii. What strategies can promote sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan?

1.7 Scope of the research

1.7.1 Content scope

The study focused on examining the causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan, assessing how ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan, and proposing strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan.

1.7.2 Time scope

The review of reports, academic literature, and policy documents covered a five-year period from 2021 to 2025 in order to analyze recent trends and patterns in ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan, with particular focus on the Dinka and Nuer communities and the evolving peace-building efforts within this period.

1.7.3 Geographical scope

Geographically, the study was conducted in the region of Bahr el Ghazal, Upper Nile, South Sudan where the Dinka and Nuer communities are predominantly located and where incidents of ethnic rivalry and civil conflict have been most pronounced. These regions were also selected because they have experienced recurrent intercommunal violence, political contestation, and armed confrontations, making them appropriate contexts for examining how

ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan.

1.8 Justification of the study

The current study was considered necessary as it is necessary to examine the prevailing civil unrest in South Sudan despite a number of peace agreements and local efforts. In his study on the subject, Garang (2020), Kulang (2021), and Kuol (2022) examined ethnic roots of conflicts, weakness of the state, and political rivalry of elites, but very little work has been done on the rivalry of the two ethnic groups as its cause of sustaining and reproducing civil unrest in the country. Despite an extensive analysis of power struggles, competition for resources and weaknesses of the institutional structure of the society in previous studies on the topic, the prevailing violence reveals that more attention needs to be given to such dynamics.

1.9 Significance of the study

With a greater understanding of how ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer is fueling civil conflict, the government of South Sudan, IGAD, and other similar bodies would have an easier time designing conflict prevention, mediation, and reconciliation programs that work effectively.

With empirical data at their fingertips, the findings of the research would make it easier for the South Sudanese government and other relevant stakeholders, including the Ministry of Peacebuilding and the Ministry of Interior, to adopt sensible policy initiatives regarding governance, reforms of the security sector, and inter-communal conflict resolutions.

Focusing on the impact of the Dinka-Nuer ethnic rivalry on vulnerable groups affected by civil war, the study would facilitate planning and intervention programs by civil society organizations, developmental partners, and humanitarian groups in the form of dialogue initiatives and neighborhood peace initiatives.

This research would further enrich the existing body of literature by providing empirical evidence about ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan, thus laying a foundation for future research and practice in the field of peace and conflict studies, governance, and security management.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter dealt with other works from other literatures. In order for comparisons and confirmations between the current work and those works that have already been written about ethnic rivalry and civil conflicts in South Sudan to be made evident, it is essential that an examination be conducted of such works in order to understand their similarities and dissimilarities. Hence, the intention of this chapter was to conduct a review of various literatures.

2.2 Conceptual review

2.2.1 Ethnic rivalry

According to Garang (2020), ethnic rivalry is a continuous rivalry, antagonism, or hostility between different ethnic communities for political dominance, economic interests, identity recognition, and territory control. Ethnic conflict is part of the larger concept of community interaction and civil war according to Krause (2020). According to her, the conflicts arise when the leadership of the ethnic group makes political gains through ethnic identity. Likewise, Kulang (2021) associates the concept of ethnic rivalry with disputed statehood by explaining that the construction of strong national identity minimizes group identity rivalry and increases intergroup mistrust by weak national identity. Ethnic rivalry emerges in fragile post-conflict states due to past grievances and becomes violence through poor governance by failing to address social diversity according to Kuol (2022). Moreover, according to Afriyie et al. (2020), ethnic conflict is a creation of political dynamics shaped by factors such as marginalization, discrimination, and elite manipulation and not merely differences in ethnicity. There is controversy regarding the cause of ethnic conflict, whether primordial identity relationships or a politically motivated tactic; Madut (2020) argues that ethnic mobilization and militarization are conscious strategies to make social divisions into violence.

Ethnic conflict has been quantified utilizing multi-dimensional measurement scales that integrate the structural dimension of intergroup competition together with attitudes (Özoflu, 2024). According to Pinaud (2022), ethnic-targeted violence, vendetta killings, and tales of

ethnic victimization can be considered indicators of ethnic rivalry. The concept of "ethnic stacking" is offered by Allen (2020) as an instance of a structural feature in security organizations; ethnic stacking refers to the hegemony of a single group within the army or the government. Utilizing the assessment of conflict through rebel splits and factions, Nyadera et al. (2024) demonstrate how the existence of organizational splits exacerbates ethnic rivalries. Land and oil wealth competition, according to Yeo (2025), are examples of resource-based causes of ethnic conflict and rivalry that may be quantified. In addition, Langan (2025) and Mulaudzi (2023) point out the expansion of administrative boundaries and politicized stories of ethnic identity as indicators of ethnic conflict on institutional and linguistic levels, respectively. In conclusion, these academic perspectives indicate that ethnic conflict may be investigated utilizing dimensions such as political marginalization, resource rivalry, security sector structure, frequency of communal violence, and mobilization based on identity.

2.2.2 Civil conflict

Civil conflict, as described in literature, can be viewed as a prolonged violent struggle within the borders of a nation-state, which typically includes organized factions contesting the distribution of power, resource access, or territory (Riak & Dada, 2025). Civil unrest is thought to be both a reason for and an indication of the frailty of the nation-state, where institutional malfunction and ineffective governance exacerbate violence (Jok, 2022). According to Sarker (2026), political contention may evolve into a long-term violent situation since civil strife is typically the outcome of rivalry for power among elites and the effective exploitation of group identities. The likelihood of civil war is high in post-colonial nations like South Sudan owing to unresolved identity crises, heightened national identification, and ineffective mechanisms for grievances resolution. Additionally, Fonkeng (2021) highlights that civil wars tend to be associated with socioeconomic inequality, migration, and historical grievances, implying that violence is seldom spontaneous but embedded in social structures.

As a consequence of its intricate and multifaceted nature, various scholars have sought to determine civil conflict through different approaches. The political and institutional elements of power sharing and the capacity of governmental institutions to manage conflict are the principal concerns of Kisaka et al. (2022). The cross-border involvement of external players in intervention and assistance to warring parties in regional and international levels is the main consideration of Magara (2025). In assessing the social impact of conflict, Bedigen (2020) emphasizes the cultural and social elements that include intergroup hostilities,

disruption of normal activities, and retaliatory attacks. The work of Onditi (2022) employs quantitative parameters to assess the frequency, duration, and violence associated with the conflict. Liyew (2025), on the other hand, considers human factors such as number of displaced persons, number of casualties, and likelihood of famine in the measurement of civil conflict. All these are vital considerations in assessing the severity of civil conflict. The above analysis demonstrates that the concept of civil conflict is intricate and therefore requires an integrated approach involving political, social, economic, and humanitarian perspectives in assessing the causes, dynamics, and impacts of the conflict.

2.3 Empirical review of the study objectives

2.3.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry

Garang (2020) studied the historical underpinnings of ethnic hostilities in South Sudan, noting that during the colonial era, specific ethnic groups received preferential treatment over others. The policies further entrenched structural discrimination and laid the foundation for the deep-seated inter-communal hostility. Likewise, Kulang (2021) posited that the formation of states in South Sudan was highly influenced by the reality that wealthy individuals belonged to one ethnic group. Therefore, politics became an adversarial domain in which ethnic identity was the key determinant in accessing state power and material resources. Collectively, the literature highlights the conclusion that ethnic animosity is primarily a result of political exploitation, historical neglect, and rivalry for scarce government resources, as opposed to purely cultural and social differences (Afriyie et al., 2020). Additionally, according to Pinaud (2022), post-independence governance systems of South Sudan occasionally exacerbated ethnic divisions through ethnic discrimination in military recruitment, political appointment, and allocation of material resources. Consequently, the findings imply that ethnic animosity is driven by a combination of historical grievances, political alienation, and institutionalized inequality that perpetuates hate and violence against other groups.

The study by Nyadera et al. (2024) focused on the impact of elite splits within the SPLM on the escalation of ethnic tensions. It was found out that splinter factions were usually created along ethnic lines with an aim of gaining power, thus escalating both local and national disputes. The research conducted by Riak and Dada (2025) demonstrated that continuous political rivalry between elites from the Dinka and Nuer groups for political positions and dominance in accessing state resources is often the cause of violent confrontations, thereby

promoting racism. According to Madut (2020), the process of militarisation of ethnicity, such as the emergence of militia units based on ethnicity, has resulted in turning past disputes into full-scale military conflict, thereby perpetuating violence. The analysis by Ajang (2024) showed that nationalist and identity politics have promoted inter-community mistrust, thereby preventing reconciliation and compromise post-independence.

Yeo (2025) analyzed the impact of natural resource endowments in ethnic conflict. According to her, the Dinka and Nuer ethnicities have numerous conflicts among themselves due to their attempts to control fertile lands, cattle, and oil resources. Similarly, Langan (2025), analyzing the development of administrative units, stated that establishing counties and states on an ethnic basis enhances competition between different communities over control of the local government and heightens interethnic tensions. The complementary information by Fonkeng (2021) is related to the issue of the migration process and the movement of people leading to ethnic disputes over scarce resources, hence, recurrent conflicts. All the mentioned sources provide insight into the structural and financial implications of ethnic conflict.

In his view, Madut (2020) suggested that the ethnic mobilization process may facilitate the continuation of the competitive nature of such conflicts. The community leadership is often known to utilize past narratives of wrongs to perpetuate acts of violence against others. Also, Bedigen (2020) posited that certain traditions and customs practiced within societies, including cattle raiding and revenge killings, perpetuate distrust among ethnicities and trigger revenge actions. Additionally, according to Pinaud (2022), it is also worth noting that lack of proper law enforcement and political representation further exacerbate such tendencies as mentioned above in terms of the level of violence in such clashes.

Kisaka et al. (2022) examined the reasons for the ineffectiveness of consociational power-sharing deals in reducing conflicts based on ethnicity. It turned out that the mere presence of competing ethnicities in governmental positions did not contribute to actual collaboration and cooperation. Likewise, Özoflu (2024) stressed the vulnerability of the relationships between ethnicities in South Sudan, where peacebuilding activities often prove ineffective due to the long-standing perceptions of injustice and treachery within ethnic groups. As Magara (2025) indicates, the manipulation by local elites based on ethnic loyalty, rather than national unity, may undermine the efficiency of regional efforts, such as those carried out by IGAD. All these articles illustrate the necessity of comprehensive approaches toward

solving problems of interethnic competition, as they emphasize the continued existence of ethnic enmity not only in terms of its socio-historical roots but also in terms of governance-related aspects.

2.3.2 How ethnic rivalry contributes to the persistence of civil conflict

Riak and Dada (2025) examined the way in which the ethnic hostility between the Dinka and Nuer clans perpetuates civil unrest in South Sudan since political domination struggles among elites consistently transform regional disputes into prolonged armed conflicts. Similarly, Ajang (2024) posited that post-independence state politics have exacerbated ethnic tensions in South Sudan, thus creating a zero-sum environment where racial suspicion reinforces cyclic violence. Riak and Dada, as well as Jok (2022), assert that ethnicity is an example of the structural factors underlying the country's unrest, which is perpetuated by the interaction of political manipulation and past grievances. This perspective is supplemented by Pinaud (2022), who notes that constant militarization and ethnic militias institutionalize violence, thus significantly complicating reconciliation and resolution efforts. Hence, these studies demonstrate that ethnic struggle is a significant cause of civil unrest in South Sudan (Sarker, 2026), not merely a social one.

Kisaka et al. (2022) investigated the failures associated with consociational power-sharing systems, stating that the existence of ethnic competition renders political processes established to avoid future conflicts ineffective. In the same line of thought, Magara (2025) observes that in some cases, peace-building efforts at a regional level can fail due to local elites who use ethnic connections to consolidate their position and hence perpetuate intercommunal violence. This is further exacerbated by the disintegration of rebels along ethnic lines, as per Nyadera et al. (2024), which enables rebels to rely on identity politics to maintain their violent behavior and occupy certain areas. Also adding to this point is Bedigen (2020), who mentions that entrenched cultural traditions such as the act of revenge only serve to increase ethnic rivalry and hinder peace formation.

According to Onditi (2022), ethnic tensions exist in terms of competition for the control of such resources as land, livestock, and petroleum. Militias were formed among Dinka and Nuer groups to secure their domination over the above-mentioned resources; therefore, the confrontation was prolonged. Environmental scarcity only adds fuel to such disputes since ethnic groups perceive the distribution of resources as a zero-sum game, and hence, continuous violence arises. Political elites manipulate ethnic conflicts to consolidate their

power through promoting narratives of victimization and perpetuating violence, as suggested by Riak and Dada (2025). Furthermore, Fonkeng (2021) established that displacement and migrations caused by ethnic strife provide new flashpoints of tension, sustaining civil unrest for decades.

According to Sarker (2026), the Conflict Wheel Model illustrates how competition among elites works in conjunction with suspicion and grievances based on ethnicity to create violence, which perpetuates itself and is difficult to contain. Similarly, Ajang (2024) pointed out how the political narrative about the "other" ethnic community being a threat encourages mutual distrust and revenge, which eventually contributes to societal conflict both at the local and national levels. Liyew (2025) underscores the regional impacts of ethnic conflicts in South Sudan, where ethnic conflicts have been affecting neighboring countries. Mulaudzi (2023) further noted that peacemaking efforts fail because of the absence of consideration for the underlying ethnic grievances. This suggests that unaddressed grievances concerning ethnic identities can prolong the civil war.

According to Jok (2022), ethnic strife and uncertainty played a pivotal role in maintaining civil war by encouraging community mobilization through the creation of militia groups, initiating revenge attacks, and rejecting reconciliation proposals. Similarly, Onditi (2022) identified that inefficient state apparatus unable to resolve ethnically inspired conflicts contributed to cycles of violence by allowing rival groups to demonstrate their dominance through military power. The politicization of ethnicity ensures that grievances will always be manipulated for political gains, hence sustaining conflict over several decades, as Riak and Dada (2025) emphasized. Reiterating that ethnic schism along with weak governance leads to a scenario where peacemaking attempts have no impact, Kisaka et al. (2022) argue. Collectively, the above-mentioned literature proves that ethnic contention serves as one of the critical drivers behind the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan.

2.3.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace among rival communities

Consociational power sharing as a way towards sustainability of peace between conflicting communities is highlighted by Kisaka et al. (2022). The authors believe that having fair political representation and power sharing may lower motivations for ethnic-based conflict. In a similar vein, inclusive political processes, which involve groups previously left out of decision making, facilitate cooperation and, therefore, reduce the likelihood of violence, Riak & Dada (2025) believe. Political processes after independence in South Sudan, Ajang (2024)

believes, need to be built around cooperative cross-ethnic initiatives, so that the risk of interference becoming an excuse for violence is reduced. International actors, such as IGAD, can aid this process through monitoring and incentive provision, according to Magara (2025). It appears from the above that successful maintenance of peace in ethnically divided communities depends much on political policies coupled with external oversight.

Bedigen (2020) explored the potential influence that societal traditions and local reconciliation procedures might have on helping to solve conflicts between competing communities, stressing that culturally responsive approaches would serve as an additional tool for achieving the same goal as conventional governmental approaches. In the same vein, Fonkeng (2021) suggested that local mediation mechanisms, such as intercommunity talks and customary forms of compensation, would provide practical ways of reducing suspicion among people and fostering greater social integration. Failure to pay attention to such informal ways of addressing conflicts, Sarker (2026) stressed, usually results in community resistance that diminishes the effectiveness of externally-imposed peace-building procedures. It was argued by Liyew (2025) that using both approaches may contribute to their acceptance and legitimacy.

According to Özoflu (2024), there have been many studies concerning inter-group relationships, which indicate that some strategies such as cooperative community projects, youth cross-ethnic interactions, and resource sharing can be effective measures to diminish enmity among competing groups. According to Ajang (2024), one should stimulate the inter-ethnic economic collaboration, which includes joint market ventures and agricultural projects to create interdependence among groups, thus decreasing conflicts caused by competition. Riak and Dada (2025) also indicated that well-structured peace education initiatives in schools and neighborhoods contribute to increasing awareness about consequences of racial strife and consequently promote a tolerant attitude towards others. Moreover, according to Yeo (2025), the open discussion of disputes about resource distribution helps restore mutual trust. Therefore, from all the findings mentioned above, one can conclude that ensuring lasting stability requires integrating social, economic, and educational initiatives.

According to Madut (2020), the DDR of armed individuals is a critical approach in decreasing the chances of repetition of violent confrontations among ethnic parties. Similar observations have been made by Mulaudzi (2023), who pointed out that effective DDR approaches, when coupled with community reconciliation and psychological assistance,

contribute to ex-soldiers returning to their civilian lives, thereby reducing the vicious cycle of retaliatory killings. It is important to reduce the level of militarization of ethnic identity in order not to allow the situation to worsen, particularly in areas where there are frequent violent occurrences, as stated by Jok (2022). Sarker (2026) stressed that monitoring the compliance to the DDR program by both government and nongovernment entities ensures a positive outcome in reducing violence levels.

Regional cooperation and participation on the global front were essential because the peace initiatives across the borders and the monitoring system of conflicts could alleviate areas suffering from ethnicity-related violence, as argued by Onditi (2022). Similar claims have been made by Kisaka et al. (2022), who stated that continuous presence of outside bodies and training of regional policymakers was beneficial in implementing peace agreements. Early warning systems and quick response systems were helpful in preventing regional disputes from escalating into all-out wars, as stated by Magara (2025). According to Riak and Dada (2025), continuous contact between rival parties and the evaluation of peace agreements allowed for adaptability and responses to emerging tensions. In sum, these sources highlighted the necessity of using different strategies on the regional, state, and local levels for achieving sustainable peace among conflicting communities.

2.4 Research/ Literature Gap

While there is no dearth of scholarly works related to ethnic hostility, social disturbances, and peacemaking in South Sudan, there remain many areas which need further exploration. Majority of these studies focus mainly on issues such as political marginalization, manipulation by elites, and competition for resources as the key factors for ethnic conflict, thus leaving very little room for discussion about daily interpersonal relations within the community and grass root level peace-making that may influence the continuation or ending of conflict. In addition to this, while there have been attempts to understand formal measures such as power sharing and DDR schemes, yet not enough evidence exists with regard to their efficacy in developing trust and social harmony among various ethnic communities over time. Scholars in most cases have tended to examine the post-independence period more than anything else; relatively less attention has been paid to the interplay of historical grievances, shifting socioeconomic conditions, and new environmental factors in sustaining ethnic conflict.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explains the research methodology used. This chapter provided an overview of how the research was conducted. All the aspects relating to sample size, research population, and research design have been discussed. In addition, it also discusses variable description, sampling procedure, research instruments, data management and analysis, ethical considerations, and research limitations.

3.2 Research design

The case study research design used in this research allows for an intensive investigation of the causes and dynamics of ethnic rivalry and civil conflicts in the Dinka and Nuer communities of South Sudan (Maier et al., 2023). It is a suitable methodological choice in this context because it permits the researcher to conduct an in-depth analysis of the social practices, political structures, social interactions, and institutional responses related to the issue. In another sense, it allows for the investigation of how ethnic tension is maintained, intensified, or mitigated within that particular area. In a broader perspective, through the identification of specific areas prone to ethnic conflicts, such as Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile, this study will be able to provide rich data that illustrate the lived experience of ethnic rivalry and civil conflict.

In this regard, this research was carried out in form of purely qualitative interviews. Community members, community elders, and community leaders from the Dinka and Nuer community, along with government and civil society/NGO representatives, were interviewed in order to derive detailed insight regarding ethnic rivalry and civil unrest in South Sudan (Fischer et al., 2023). Issues such as perception, experience, and practice concerning ethnic conflict and peace building/intervention measures were taken into account during interviews that aided in the identification of the main sources and sustaining forces behind existing ethnic conflicts. As a result, this research design enabled the researcher to derive detailed insights into political, social, and institutional factors that cause ethnic rivalry and civil conflict and their impact on the stability of the community in South Sudan (Wieland et al., 2024).

3.3 Study area and population

The investigation was conducted in the regions of Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile in South Sudan, which are inhabited mainly by the Dinka and Nuer communities. These regions were chosen because they had witnessed inter-communal conflicts arising from political competition, ethnic competition, and fights, hence the appropriateness in analyzing how the ethnic competition between the two communities helps fuel the continuity of civil conflict in South Sudan.

Population in the present context refers to the entire number of people or objects that share common characteristics of interest. In this study, the population consisted of the community members, community elders, and community leaders from both the Dinka and Nuer communities. They were considered appropriate respondents due to their first-hand experience, historical background, and community view on ethnicity and civil conflict. In addition, government officials and the key informants from NGO organizations were involved in this research since they had an institutional perspective on the issues of governance and peace-building.

In particular, the research included participants who belonged to different gender groups, age groups, levels of education, and ethnicity. Both males and females took part in the study, with males constituting the greater number. The participants represented different age groups, from 21 years and above, and were mostly comprised of economically and socially active individuals between the ages of 31 and 40 years. In addition, the participants came from varying educational levels such as primary education, secondary education, tertiary education, and those without any formal education, hence allowing the researcher to acquire information from people with varying knowledge about ethnic conflict and peace building. Moreover, the participants were from both the Dinka and Nuer communities.

3.4 Sample size determination

The sample is a part of a larger population from which the participants were selected to take part in the study (Althubaiti, 2023). In this study, the sample size was chosen on the basis of data saturation, where the researcher kept collecting data until no further information related to the study's objective could be collected. Two focus groups were carried out among the Dinka and Nuer communities, each comprising ten (10) people, thus giving a total of twenty people from among the community members, elders, and leaders (Bhardwaj, 2019). These

individuals comprised male and female participants of varying ages and education levels so that diverse opinions can be gathered about ethnic rivalry and civil conflict.

Additionally, five (5) key informants made up of government officials and NGOs/Civil Society members took part in the study using the method of key informant interviews. These individuals were purposefully selected because they have a direct stake and experience in governance, peace building, conflict resolution, and humanitarian interventions in South Sudan. Selection of respondents from varying ethnicities, ages, and education levels ensured the gathering of rich and detailed qualitative data about the cause, nature, durability, and solutions to ethnic rivalry and civil conflict.

3.5 Sampling methods

In conducting this research, purposive sampling was employed together with snowball sampling in selecting participants who would be in a better position to provide information related to ethnic rivalry and civil conflicts. Key informant interviews were conducted with government officials as well as civil society and NGO representatives through purposive sampling since they have an advantageous position of providing oversight and first-hand information about the factors that contribute to inter-communal tensions and peace-building efforts. Snowball sampling was employed in selecting community members, elders, and community leaders from both the Dinka and Nuer communities to find knowledgeable participants who would be able to offer firsthand insight into the conflicts that exist.

3.6 Data sources

Primary source: The data collection involved firsthand collection of information from the respondents directly through focus group discussion involving members of the community, elders, and community leaders and interviews with key informants comprising government officials and representatives of civil society/NGOs. The data collected were firsthand and reflected the perspectives of the respondents on the causes, endurance, and solutions to ethnic conflicts and civil unrest.

Secondary source: This literature was drawn from existing sources such as academic journals, books, government reports, and policies concerning ethnic conflicts, civil unrest, and peacemaking approaches. This literature complemented the findings of the primary research since it gave more background, comparison, and theory on the matter.

3.7 Data collection method and tool

3.7.1 Key informant interview guide

Informant key interviews were carried out with government employees and NGO/Civil Society actors who are actively engaged in the management, observation, and mediation of ethnic competition and civil strife. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions related to the experience and perception of the participants as well as their professional knowledge of ethnic competition, civil conflict persistence, institutional actions, peace programs, and obstacles to conflict resolution. This method of gathering information enabled obtaining insights into the formal government institutions, policies, peace projects, and system factors affecting the conflict process. It was also essential for corroborating community members' data to include both grassroots and institutional perspectives on the subject of ethnic conflict and peace-building (Taherdoost, 2021).

3.7.2 Focus group discussion guide

The focus group discussions were carried out separately in both the Dinka and Nuer communities using the focus group discussion guide, where participants in each group were ten. The researcher thus had to conduct two separate focus group discussions involving ten members each. The focus group discussion guide contained open-ended questions focusing on the experience of ethnic rivalry, historical tensions, communal values, sources of conflict, coping strategies, and ideas for achieving sustainable peace. Focus groups play an important role in generating a common narrative, collective memory, and inter-communal perspectives, which could not be achieved through one-on-one interviews. Furthermore, focus groups encourage interaction among participants and provide insights into their consensus or conflicting views within communities.

3.8 Validity and reliability for qualitative research

Validity of the qualitative data collected for this research was ensured by means of taking detailed notes based on the interviews conducted with government officials and NGO/civil society representatives, in addition to the focus group discussions held with members of the Dinka and Nuer community, elders and community leaders, followed by a timely review and analysis of the collected information to make sure that valid and reliable insights are gained in relation to the research problem (Coleman, 2022). There were ample opportunities offered to participants to validate the research findings and offer feedback in order to make sure that

their views are captured appropriately. Moreover, there was some input from the research supervisor to ensure credibility. Replication could not be done within the limited time frame, but consistent recording and systematic analysis of the qualitative data have been ensured by following a systematic process.

3.9 Procedure for data collection

In the first step of data collection, the researcher sought permission to undertake the study from the respective authorities in the Bahr el Ghazal and Upper Nile states through a letter received from the School of Social Sciences, Uganda Christian University. The letter was written after the research proposal and data collection instruments were approved. Focus groups of ten members each were convened for the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, while key informant interviews were carried out among five government and civil society or NGO representatives. Data collection was initiated after the consent of the informants had been obtained.

3.10 Data analysis

3.10.3 Analysis of qualitative data

The qualitative data collected through the key informant interviews and focus group discussions were subjected to thematic analysis as per the methodology by Creswell (2007), where the data were categorized according to the different objectives of this research study. For objective one, the data were coded and analyzed under the theme of causes of ethnic rivalry, whereby information on historical issues, political marginalization, and resource competition were examined. In objective two, the data were coded under the theme of how ethnic rivalry leads to civil conflict perpetuation, where there was an evaluation of the role of elite manipulation, militarization, and communal tension in sustaining civil conflicts. The data for objective three were also coded under strategies for sustainable peace, whereby the information about inclusive politics, reconciliation, peace education, and regional intervention were analyzed. Quotes verbatim were utilized to present some of the results obtained from the data (Jackson et al., 2019).

3.11 Ethical consideration

The ethics of the research were strictly observed at all stages, including the storage of personal information on a highly secure server and its exclusive use for scientific research, in accordance with legal requirements (Chervenak & McCullough, 2021). In addition, informed consent was collected from all participants, who were fully briefed on the goals and methods of research and the possible risks involved, as well as signed a consent form confirming voluntary participation (Skinner, 2020). Anonymous data collection and processing were ensured by removing or coding any information about personal identity when reporting results (Pietilä et al., 2020).

Also, anonymity was preserved by providing access to data only to the members of the research group, using summarized data in case of its disclosure. The research did not involve plagiarism, as all sources were cited in detail and direct citations from other authors were noted (Ruggiano & Perry, 2019).

3.12 Limitations and delimitations of the study

To begin with, there were some participants who did not wish to give out information owing to their suspicion of the place where the information was going to be used. The problem was addressed through the wonderful reputation of the study setting as an institution for learning and also getting an introductory letter from the university.

The other challenge was due to insufficient finances that were required to conduct the research. There were funds which were supposed to help motivate the participants, costs of printing documents and also paying for transport to the organization to get data. This challenge was overcome through self-initiative to seek money from the family.

Thirdly, there were some participants who failed to participate on time when scheduled to do so. This was solved by scheduling in advance and giving reminders to participants.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The current chapter highlighted the findings' analysis, presentation, findings' interpretation, and discussion of the findings. The data collected was through the community members, elders, and leaders of the Dinka and Nuer communities using Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and key informants who are government officials and civil society/NGOs from South Sudan using interviews. It is important to note that two FGDS were carried out, each having 10 people, making a total of 20 participants in the study. In addition, five key informants also participated in the study. The analysis identified various perceptions, which were classified into themes.

4.2 Presentation and analysis of findings

4.2.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

4.2.1.1 Causes of tensions between the Dinka and Nuer communities

From the interviews conducted with the key informants who are the government officials and civil society/NGO representatives from South Sudan and focus group discussions with the community members, elders, and leaders from the Dinka and Nuer communities, they were asked for their views on what they consider the main causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan and their responses were as follows;

The respondents stressed that political competition for power was one of the important factors contributing to ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer. The key informants indicated that struggles for power in the country were characterized by heavy ethnic undertones since the elite deliberately tried to politicize ethnicity in order to consolidate their power and keep control over the state apparatus. As a consequence of such politicization of ethnicity, political rivalries transform into conflicts at the communal level when winning power means gaining advantages for the whole ethnic group rather than for particular individuals. This idea was also confirmed by the community members who argued that politics split communities due to the fact that leaders tended to govern in favor of their respective ethnicities making certain appointments and adopting certain policies.

It was pointed out that another major cause of conflict is the uneven distribution of resources among different groups in the country. According to key informants, the access to important resources such as money obtained through oil, government jobs, infrastructure building, and aid distribution is seen to be uneven, giving priority to certain ethnic groups over others. This situation generates a sense of unfair treatment among communities that feel neglected. Just like in the case of key informants, it can be seen from the responses of members of the community that these economic inequalities create resentment because people and their communities take them as discrimination against them on account of ethnicity.

Moreover, key informants noted that the failure of inclusive institutions and weak governance structures has contributed to increased ethnic rivalry. Key informants stated that the institutions of the state of South Sudan do not possess sufficient ability, impartiality, and credibility to represent all ethnicities, which leads to disappointment and competition in such structures. It was mentioned that when institutions are incapable of providing equal services and representation to all citizens, communities seek to unite themselves along ethnic lines as a way of protection and access to benefits. Key informants from communities also indicated that ineffective and corrupt leadership has exacerbated ethnic divisions because citizens feel ignored and unprotected by the state.

The question of how political elites manipulated the ethnic identity for their benefit was another one addressed. According to the key informants, political elites tend to manipulate the already existing ethnic tensions through creating a story line about their enemies, using history as an example, and emphasizing the threatening nature of other ethnic groups so that they can secure their position and eliminate political rivals. This way, not only is the gap between the rival groups growing, but it is also contributing to the creation of animosity between them. The community informants agreed that political speech leads to feelings of fear and mistrust among the people, preventing peaceful coexistence between the two groups.

Militarization and the emergence of ethnically-based armed militia have also been identified as factors that have contributed to the intensification of conflict rivalry. Informants have revealed that politicians rely on ethnic-based militia for protection and enforcement of their power, making violence an institutionalized tool based on ethnicity. The existence of armed forces leads to conflicts becoming violent because they tend to solve their disagreements using violence instead of discussions. The availability of armed individuals increases the

level of insecurity in the community because the community feels obligated to acquire arms in order to protect itself from the threat posed by those in the community who own guns.

In addition, the competition for local positions of leadership and the establishment of administrative boundary lines was cited as contributing to ethnicity-based conflict. The respondents revealed that the formation or restructuring of administrative boundaries, such as the states, counties, and local administrations, often causes conflict over dominance, representation, and distribution of resources when they favor a particular ethnic group. This political arrangement is said to increase the competitiveness among communities, as they attempt to dominate over each other through politics locally. In addition, they claimed that these kinds of disagreements often result in conflicts at a local level that replicate national rivalries.

Finally, respondents highlighted that the continued impunity for past acts of political violence is yet another factor causing ethnic tensions. The main point raised here is that the failure to probe into past wrongdoings, hold offenders accountable for their actions, and reconcile all sides in the process causes the perception that there is total impunity for any wrongdoing on behalf of political actors, who go scot-free, and victims who do not receive proper attention from the judicial authorities. Hence, grievances accumulate and pass from generation to generation, as the communities keep remembering about past injustices done to them. All community respondents concurred that the lack of justice is one of the major factors behind the vicious circle of revenge, which will go on repeating itself until the issues are properly addressed. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....The political elite continues to exploit ethnic identity for their personal gain, thus dividing groups and fostering distrust and competition, thus further intensifying the ethnic rivalry and hampering efforts towards achieving harmony and enduring peace.....” **Respondent 1**

“.....We can observe how politics breeds hostility because politicians tend to favor their people while neglecting the rest, hence instilling bitterness and competition amongst the people, which is why we find it difficult to coexist harmoniously with each other.....” **Respondent 2**

4.2.1.2 Historical experiences, cultural factors, and communal perceptions

Based on the interviews carried out with the government officials and civil society/NGOs informants from South Sudan, and focus group discussions held with the community members and elders from the Dinka and Nuer communities, they were all asked about their perspective regarding the contribution of political, economic and/or historical aspects in the tension experienced by these two communities and their answers are as follows:

It was found out that the historical animosity and past tensions play an important part in influencing the present ethnic rivalry. The key informants pointed out that past experiences such as the warring, fighting and violence cases witnessed by the Dinka and Nuer communities over the years have contributed to deep feelings and emotions towards each other which remain unresolved until today. In addition, members of both communities stated that due to past incidents where there was loss of life, displacement and properties of the members, they now tend to fear each other because they keep remembering the injustices done in the past.

Furthermore, the respondents noted that acts of retaliation have perpetuated enmity between the two groups in question. According to the key informants, whenever previous violent actions are not sorted out through the formal judicial process, communities may turn to extra-judicial means such as retaliation in pursuit of justice or restoring the honor of the individual or community involved. In such a case, the act provokes further acts of violence as the cycle cannot be broken. The community members affirmed that revenge could also be seen as both an action motivated by the feeling of injustice done and as a culturally motivated action based on the honor of the community involved.

Further, participants noted that cultural activities like cattle raiding lead to conflicts between communities. According to key informants, cattle are vital resources for the economic, social, and cultural life of the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups, and as such, they are very important to their livelihoods and social standing within their respective communities. Consequently, conflicts related to cattle are likely to escalate rapidly since raids are regarded as an assault on the wealth and honor of the respective communities. Furthermore, community members stated that whereas cattle raiding was previously performed to serve economic or cultural interests, it has now been militarized and associated with ethnic conflict. Thus, what may start as a small-scale dispute over cattle can easily become an extensive communal conflict involving several parties.

Another important aspect is the existence of stereotypes and attitudes of the two communities toward each other. According to the key informants, the existence of prejudices against each other, lack of accurate information, and stories of the other community being aggressive or less civilized have increased the distance between the two communities over the years. These biases are further entrenched by political propaganda and media coverage. The community members confirmed that these biases were mostly learned through generations, which affected the attitude towards people from other ethnicities even before meeting them.

The influence of population displacement and migration brought about by previous conflicts was also highlighted by participants. Informants stated that the cycles of violence had pushed millions of people into displacing and resettling in new places. These movements of populations bring about new interactions between the various ethnic groups as a result of the disruptions within social relations that have taken place. Respondents from the community stated that displaced populations always end up competing with resident communities over such vital resources as land and water, among others. In most cases, these new rivalries are always analyzed on an ethnic basis, bringing about rivalry between the two communities.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the absence of successful reconciliation programs enables historical grievances to remain alive. Indeed, key informants pointed out that although some peace-building projects have been launched, they were mostly short-lived, uncoordinated, and failed to deal with fundamental reasons for conflicts and deep historical animosity between various communities. Thus, the lack of continuous dialogues on past experiences prevents individuals from moving forward and overcoming their mistrust towards one another. Community members noted that they have little chance to discuss violence that happened in the past, and even if they get such an opportunity, it is ineffective and fails to be inclusive.

Finally, the respondents noted that the lack of a coherent sense of national identity has further fueled ethnic divisions. The key informants remarked that the people of South Sudan have a greater sense of belonging to their ethnic community than to their nation, largely because of their fragmented history and ineffective state-building process. This preference for ethnicity over nationalism serves to enhance group solidarity and foster competition, particularly in politics and economics. The community respondents noted that the absence of a common vision for the nation and a cohesive sense of identity makes it challenging for people to

identify themselves as members of a larger collective, thus undermining attempts to reduce ethnic division. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....Past clashes between the Dinka and Nuer tribes have led to the existence of mutual mistrust, where the memories of violence, displacement, and losses affect the way we feel towards one another, and make reconciliation almost impossible.....”

Respondent 3

“.....The history of our struggles, losing our loved ones, and displacement makes it difficult for us to trust each other, considering that these are fresh memories that influence our interactions with each other.....” **Respondent 4**

4.2.2 How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan

4.2.2.1 Ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer and its effects on civil conflict

In the interviews with key informants, which include the government officials and representatives from the civil society or non-government organizations in South Sudan, and also in the focus group discussions with the community members, elders, and leaders from the Dinka and Nuer communities, they were requested to give their opinion on the way ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities sustains the civil conflict within South Sudan and their responses were;

Participants pointed out that ethnic rivalry sustains civil conflict due to the existence of violence and retaliations. The key informants revealed that ethnic rivalry results into civil conflict through a continuous process whereby grievances, especially those related to killing and destruction of properties and displacements, are responded to with more attacks in order to retaliate against those attacks. In the lack of formal measures to address such injustices, retaliation is an option to consider. The community members have confirmed that retaliations in form of attacks follow every other attack, resulting into an unending cycle of violence.

The respondents emphasized that lack of trust between the Dinka and Nuer groups is another factor that contributes greatly to perpetuating conflicts. The key informants stated that extended violence had created a situation in which mutual trust has been significantly undermined, leading to a scenario where communities find it very difficult to negotiate, cooperate, and reconcile. They said that despite the efforts to establish peace through peace

talks at upper levels, such attempts do not bear fruit at the grassroots because of distrust among members of the two communities. According to the community members, people often suspect the motives of the other group.

Moreover, the respondents emphasized that the displacement resulting from ethnic conflict is one of the factors responsible for continued strife. According to key informants, due to recurrent conflicts, many people have had to relocate to places inhabited mainly by other ethnic groups, thereby altering the functioning of existing social institutions and placing additional demands on scarce resources like arable land, water, and grazing fields. As indicated by community members, the rivalry between the displaced people and host communities over scarce resources can lead to ethnic conflict since the former do not share similar cultural and ethnic identities with the latter.

Normalization of violence in communities was another factor identified. The key informants reported that violence has become normalized and accepted in communities due to long-term conflicts, especially where there are no peace processes. The informants pointed out that people who have been exposed to violence for a long time see violence as a natural way to react to any form of threat. Community members confirmed that the young generation, having been exposed to violence from a tender age, adopts violent tendencies as a natural part of life.

Furthermore, interviewees agreed that the presence of armed groups makes future incidences of violence more probable. Respondents argued that with the prevalence of weaponry and the formation of ethnically-oriented militias in the region, there is an inherently high level of volatility, where any kind of disagreement easily turns into violence with the help of the available arms. They pointed out that these armed entities function in an unregulated manner, which makes the risk of escalation very probable. Participants mentioned that even small disagreements over resources and other matters may lead to violence in cases where arms are readily available.

Additionally, the interviewees pointed out that poor justice mechanisms play an important role in perpetuating violence. As key informants put it, where there is no investigation and punishment for the acts of violence, which include killings and vandalism, a culture of impunity develops, allowing perpetrators to commit such acts again. As they indicated, lack of good legal and justice mechanisms leads people to believe that formal channels are useless in solving their problems and forces them to use alternative methods, including violence, to

settle their disputes. The community members emphasized that where there is no accountability, people feel ignored, leading them to take matters into their own hands through acts of revenge.

Fourthly, respondents pointed out that the transmission of conflicts among generations perpetuates civil war. It was revealed by key informants that the history of violence in the form of accounts of oppression, betrayal, and loss is typically transmitted from one generation to another through narratives, molding the next generation's perception of intergroup relations. These narratives tend to focus on the wrongdoings committed against one group by another, reinforcing negative images about the latter. Meanwhile, according to community respondents, young individuals who have never been part of these previous conflicts also form emotional connections with the past, which shape their behavior. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....The main challenge here is that retaliation follows every attack; however, since we lack a sound legal process for handling such matters, we continue to fight, and this cycle remains ongoing without a resolution.....” **Respondent 5**

“.....Growing up, we were told about the atrocities committed against our community by another community; thus, even at the slightest provocation, it results in violence due to the underlying feelings of resentment and fear.....” **Respondent 6**

4.2.2.2 Ethnic identity and political mobilization as drivers of conflict persistence

The following were some of the opinions expressed about how ethnic identity contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan after carrying out an interview exercise with key informants who are the government officials and civil society/NGO officials representing South Sudan and discussions with the community members, elders, and leaders from the Dinka and Nuer communities.

Ethnicity has been used as the most effective instrument for political mobilization, contributing immensely to the sustenance of the civil conflicts in South Sudan. Key informants argued that politicians have taken advantage of ethnicity by appealing to ethnic attachments of people in an effort to mobilize their followers into believing that there is an existential struggle between the communities they come from. The followers would feel a greater sense of commitment and belongingness to such a fight. The community members

echoed this by pointing out that whenever there is any conflict situation, one tends to side with his or her own ethnic community.

Respondents went on to argue that in many cases, ethnic allegiance takes precedence over national identity, thus prolonging the civil conflict. According to key informants, citizens tend to feel greater loyalty to their particular ethnic community than to the nation state. This makes it hard to build cohesion and national unity, since decisions will always be made on the basis of loyalty to one's own ethnic group. Respondents noted that this sense of loyalty also makes it easier for members of an ethnic group to protect their fellow members even in situations where they are engaged in violence, out of fear of being seen as traitors.

In addition to this, there was also an observation by the interviewees regarding the role played by ethnic identity in recruiting young individuals to join militant forces and, therefore, maintain violence. The key informants stated that many of the armed groups operate according to the principle of ethnicity. Therefore, it is easy to recruit young people since they have an obligation to fight for the defense of their community. They also added that the narrative of ethnicity is used as a motivation for joining the struggle. It was affirmed by members of the community that young people, especially those suffering from poverty and unemployment, are easily recruited into such groups.

The next concern is that ethnic rivalry influences threat and insecurity perceptions. The key informants observed that rival groups are perceived as perpetual enemies. Thus, the community is always in a condition of fear, suspicion, and readiness for fighting. According to the community members, the perception of rivalry creates an atmosphere that prevents any attempts at reconciliation and peace. Therefore, it is hard to establish mutual trust and coexist peacefully in a situation when one is always suspicious about his/her neighbor's intentions. As a consequence, small disagreements related to access to some natural resources may lead to deadly clashes since everyone expects a violent attack from their neighbors.

Political stories and propaganda were found to contribute to ethnicity-based cleavages. According to key informants, some leaders and powerful individuals engage in the distribution of messages that demonize and vilify their competitors in order to gain public trust. Such stories often utilize people's historic resentment against other ethnic groups and their leaders, which makes them more effective. Community members stressed the widespread distribution of the said messages, which happens through informal means including community meetings, interpersonal communication, and other sources of

information. In the long run, these stories help to solidify hostile attitudes between communities.

Moreover, the interviewees noted that ethnic identity causes the breakup of armed factions, thus perpetuating the conflict. The key informants pointed out that political and military factions tend to break up into smaller factions according to ethnicity whenever there is a dispute. These breakups contribute to conflicts among various factions that belong to the same larger group, thus complicating and prolonging the conflict. In addition, the community members reported that these factions fight against each other, further complicating and prolonging the conflict. Such perpetual breakups hinder any attempts at reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict.

Finally, it was stated by the participants that ethnic politics undermines the effective implementation of peace accords. According to the key informants, peace accords have a tendency to be analyzed from an ethnic perspective, where each of the communities tries to understand whether the agreement favors them or not compared to other communities. This kind of analysis creates suspicion and selective implementation of the agreements. The community members confirmed that mistrust among the different communities makes it difficult for them to implement the agreements as they doubt being exploited. This kind of approach makes the peace process fail and violence is perpetuated. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....Identity has become a tool of politics whereby leaders organize people using fear and loyalty, causing people to feel that they have no other choice but to protect their own group, thus perpetuating violence and making peace very hard.....” **Respondent 7**

“.....Our community works with the concept that, once there is conflict, everybody has an obligation to stand up for their own people, and this causes the conflict to be sustained because everyone feels that they are correct.....” **Respondent 8**

4.2.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

4.2.3.1 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace between the Dinka and Nuer

Based on the interviews carried out with the key informants, which are the government officials and civil society/NGO representatives of South Sudan, and the focus group discussions with the community members, elders, and leaders from the Dinka and Nuer communities, the strategies perceived as most effective in enhancing sustainable peace in the communities included the following;

According to the participants, inclusive governance was one of the most effective strategies for sustainable peace between the Dinka and Nuer communities. As elaborated by the key informants, representation of all ethnic communities within government institutions will minimize feelings of marginalization among communities since they will be integrated into the state structure through inclusive governance. Members of the community argued that inclusive governance makes individuals feel that their interests are protected through their leaders because their views are taken into consideration. In addition, the strategy minimizes competition for political power among the two ethnic communities, which will make peace more sustainable.

The need to enhance dialogue and communication was identified by respondents as important for peacebuilding. As key informants noted, structured dialogue and communication platforms enable communities to air their grievances, misunderstandings, and fears. Community members noted that through dialogues, people are able to humanize each other and overcome the negative stereotypes that may divide them. They noted that good communication enables communities to avoid minor disagreements from escalating to violence since they can be sorted out before they escalate.

It was further mentioned that reforms are necessary for addressing the system inequalities that lead to ethnic rivalry. Key informants noted that reforms in governance, justice administration, and provision of services can guarantee equal and fair treatment. Community members stated that with such institutions in place, there would not be any reason for using violent means to sort out disputes. They said that effective institutions could be used to arbitrate on behalf of the community to solve disputes amicably.

One other concern that was raised was that decentralization played a role in facilitating peace. The key informants pointed out that by devolving authority from the central government to local authorities, the community would have more influence over its internal matters. This would decrease competition among the nations. The community interviewees concurred that the local authorities could handle local issues better, and that decentralization helped in enhancing community participation in development initiatives.

Accountability and justice were also highlighted as essential aspects in facilitating peace. According to the key informants, ensuring that those responsible for any act of violence are made accountable is vital in preventing the recurrence of violence in the future. The community members also stated that mechanisms to promote accountability were crucial in dealing with injustices perpetrated by either side.

In addition to this, the role played by policies was also pointed out by the respondents in their opinions regarding the success of peace building. The key informants indicated that having well-defined policies regarding issues like conflict management, resource distribution, and governance can be the basis of any process aimed at sustaining peace. Community respondents reiterated that proper execution of these policies would ensure fairness and avoid any form of ambiguity.

Finally, the importance of working hand-in-hand between government agencies and non-governmental organizations was stated by the respondents as one of the major factors contributing to the success of any peace building process. According to the key informants, cooperation between state agencies and NGOs will facilitate resource mobilization and implementation of peace-building activities. On their part, community respondents confirmed that collaboration of efforts brings together all relevant information. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....The inclusion of governance and open dialogue is vital since it ensures that everyone is heard, minimizes feelings of isolation, and provides avenues for resolving differences amicably, thus fostering trust and cooperation amongst rival ethnic groups.....” **Respondent 9**

“.....If those in leadership positions listen to everyone from different communities and involve them in decision-making processes, it will be easier for us to get along and solve our differences.....” **Respondent 10**

4.2.3.2 Role played community members and leaders in ensuring peace and stability

In light of the interviews done to the key informants who are the government officials and civil society /NGO representatives from South Sudan, as well as the focus group discussions with the members of the community, elders, and leaders in the two communities of the Dinka and Nuer, they were asked about their perspectives regarding what community members and leaders can do to achieve sustainable peace and stability, and here is what they answered;

Community-based reconciliation process was identified as being an important step towards achieving sustainable peace among the two communities of Dinka and Nuer. The key informants revealed that traditional methods of solving conflicts, including mediation by the elders and dialogue among the community members, have been proven to be effective due to their cultural nature and widespread acceptance. This was also acknowledged by community members in that these methods encourage harmony and build trust due to their culture-oriented nature.

Furthermore, respondents indicated that the integration of cultural practices into peace-building is also essential. According to the key informants, the recognition and respect of the traditions of the community increase the legitimacy of peace-building programs. The community members agreed that the use of cultural rituals and ceremonies can be highly instrumental in facilitating reconciliation among individuals because they represent unity and harmony. It should be noted that the use of cultural elements ensures that communities have a greater sense of belonging.

Moreover, respondents noted that building social cohesion among members of different ethnicities by engaging in communal activities can be helpful in alleviating ethnic conflict. According to the key informants, joint development programs, community meetings, and economic cooperation contribute to interactions between groups of people. According to the community members, these interactions facilitate mutual relations and the development of trust among groups.

Among the other factors included in this list was peace education and its impact on changing people's perceptions. Through the responses of the key informants, it came out clearly that through educating people about what causes conflicts and their impacts, they can learn to be tolerant towards one another and avoid misunderstanding. The community participants

concurred that there is need to educate young people to change their attitudes to avoid spread of hatred.

There was consensus among the participants that giving power to community leaders can play an important role in promoting peace. The key informants pointed out that the community leaders can easily influence their followers. Community participants agreed that leaders should work towards ensuring peaceful coexistence in their respective communities through dialogue and not through violence.

Moreover, issues related to trauma and psychological effects of conflict were identified as important by interviewees. Interviewees said that unaddressed trauma may result in feelings of anger and bitterness, contributing to violence. Community members further stated that by offering psychosocial support, it is possible to help people heal and move ahead. Emotional healing is an essential aspect of peace-building, as stated by community members.

Finally, the involvement of the community was stressed by participants. Interviewees mentioned that for a successful peace-building process, all social groups must be included. Community members stated that such participation ensures a variety of views on the matter and, therefore, contributes to the success of peace efforts. It was claimed that only through inclusive participation can people develop their commitment to peace. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....Reconciliation programs that are culturally based in our community have become extremely important because they give us an opportunity to reconcile past wrongs and heal relationships through a process that is acceptable and meaningful to our community, and thus promote lasting harmony and unity.....” **Respondent 11**

“.....When we meet as communities to converse, forgive each other, and participate in activities together, we learn about each other, and the hatred we used to have for one another slowly disappears, and instead, friendships develop, which enable us to live harmoniously without conflicts.....” **Respondent 12**

4.2.3.3 Role of government and NGOs in sustaining long-term peace

After the interviews carried out among the key informants, which include the government officials and the civil society/NGOs working in South Sudan, and the focus groups' discussion among the community members, elders, and leaders from the Dinka and Nuer

communities, the participants were asked about their opinions on the role of the government and NGOs in curbing ethnic rivalry and building sustainable peace in South Sudan, and their answers included:

The participants agreed that the government is vital in fostering sustainable peace and stability. The key informants highlighted that the government is tasked with providing security and enacting laws. This view was affirmed by the community members who pointed out that effective governance fosters a conducive environment for managing conflicts.

The respondents noted the significance of NGOs and civil society's roles in facilitating peace building programs. According to key informants, the two parties offer financial and technical assistance to conflict resolution projects. Moreover, community respondents reported that NGOs usually engage with the community in promoting peace by organizing dialogues and fostering reconciliation among different communities. It is noteworthy that these organizations act as mediators between communities and governments.

Besides, the importance of collaboration between the two bodies in facilitating peacebuilding was reported. In particular, according to the key informants, partnerships increase efficiency in implementing such activities. Furthermore, the community respondents suggested that collaboration increases sustainability since peace programs will be adapted to the local context and needs of people. The respondents were convinced that collaboration will help solve short- and long-term problems.

Furthermore, the need for community participation in peace-building was identified. According to key informants, it is impossible to achieve sustainable peace without participation of communities. Community respondents confirmed that people are responsible for ensuring peaceful coexistence during everyday interaction with each other.

Moreover, respondents pointed out that leadership at all levels is an essential ingredient for ensuring peace. According to the key informants, both political and community leaders must show their commitment to peace and unity. Community members stated that leaders should be exemplary by advocating for tolerance and cooperation among citizens.

Additionally, participants indicated that constant monitoring and evaluation of peace-building projects is necessary. The key informants said that through evaluation one would be able to identify whether peace-building programs have succeeded or whether they require some

improvements. Community respondents added that through monitoring people will be able to know whether programs are relevant or not.

Finally, participants pointed out that investment in peace-building efforts in the long run is crucial. As mentioned above, according to key informants, peace-building takes time since it requires constant effort and resources. Therefore, community respondents agreed that short-term interventions would be unable to resolve long-lasting conflicts. Some of the selected respondents reported that;

“.....Government agencies and NGOs must collaborate to develop policies, provide necessary funding, and conduct activities that would not only identify the underlying reasons behind conflicts but ensure active involvement of community members in the process of building peace.....” **Respondent 13**

“.....There will be lasting peace in society when there is accountability, collaboration, and support from all sides in order to develop programs that would enable people to come closer and resolve their problems.....” **Respondent 14**

4.3 Discussion of findings

4.3.1 Causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

Findings from the analysis indicate that ethnic conflict involving the two groups, namely the Dinka and Nuer communities, is primarily based on factors such as political competition, resource inequity, institutional weakness, militarization, historical conflicts, and socio-cultural issues. Findings of this research are consistent with those provided by the works of Garang (2020) and Jok (2022), whereby ethnic identity becomes an instrument for political maneuvering due to the exploitation of communities based on ethnicity in South Sudan. In this context, ethnic conflicts become political conflicts. The work by Afriyie et al. (2020) confirms the research finding that resource inequalities and marginalization lead to conflicts and increase the divide among ethnic groups. In a slightly different way, the findings are not entirely similar to those of Kisaka et al. (2022), whose work focuses on consociationalism as the most effective approach to solving ethnic conflicts.

From the results of the study, militarization, proliferation of arms by armed factions, non-accountability, and administrative demarcations play a significant role in the escalation of ethnic conflicts. These results link well with those from literature sources, as explained by

Madut (2020) and Allen (2020). They indicate that the militarization of politics and armed mobilizations on ethnic grounds contribute to the persistence of insecurity and conflict in South Sudan. Another work by Nyadera et al. (2024) corroborates the result that factionalism based on ethnicity further complicates the conflict situation. On the contrary, Langan (2025) provides a slightly divergent view, which focuses on administrative demarcations as an approach that could improve governance. This study's results show that administrative demarcations increase tensions if ethnic in nature and lead to conflict escalation.

From the research findings, it can be observed that past incidences of violence, displacement, socio-cultural aspects, generation transmission of grievances, and lack of national identity have continuously been fueling ethnic competition and civil strife. The results are consistent with the literature provided by authors such as Bedigen (2020) and Fonkeng (2021). Both authors point out the significance of grievances from the past, the impact of displacement, as well as socio-cultural norms including the practice of cattle raiding in maintaining inter-communal enmity in South Sudan. Additionally, Kuol (2022) supports the conclusion that vengeance and unresolved historical injustices are the major factors contributing to inter-generational violence. Nevertheless, according to Özoflu (2024), there is a slight difference in the perception presented due to the rise of efforts towards building peace and reconciliation among groups.

4.3.2 How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan

The research results indicate that the ongoing ethnic tension between the Dinka and Nuer ethnic groups continues to promote civil war because of the repetitive nature of violence, mistrust, population displacement, formation of violent organizations, and poor judicial systems that reinforce acts of vengeance and insecurity. The research findings align with Pinaud's (2022) literature indicating that South Sudan's conflict is fundamentally linked to repetitive cycles of violence and shared atrocities of the past that have led to the maintenance of intercommunal hostility and made peace-building difficult. On the other hand, the research findings resonate with those provided by Krause (2020) showing that local-level conflicts in South Sudan continue to be reproduced due to mistrust, weak governance, and unaddressed grievances leading to repeated acts of violence. Additionally, Kuol's (2022) literature corroborates the research results pointing out that the continuation of civil wars in South Sudan is promoted by fragmented social ties and repetitive retaliation among communities.

Nevertheless, the research results differ from Özoflu's (2024) study indicating that the ongoing peace-building initiatives and intergroup relationships are slowly promoting harmony.

The findings of the research show that ethnic identity is critical in political mobilization, recruitment to armed forces, fragmenting rebel groups, and undermining national identity, thus contributing to civil war perpetuation. The findings correspond with the theoretical perspectives presented by Mulaudzi (2023), who argues that ethnicization of the conflict in South Sudan has turned politics into an identity battle, thus making peace deals weak and unsustainable. Likewise, Madut (2020) corroborates the study's findings that ethnic mobilization and heavy weapon proliferation significantly increase conflict intensity and instability in South Sudan. In line with this, Nyadera et al. (2024) reinforce that ethnic division of armed groups prolongs the conflict through multiplicity of conflicting factions. On the other hand, Kisaka et al. (2022) provide a different approach to the analysis by noting that power sharing helps to address ethnic grievances, while in the current study, ethnic mobilization and mistrust prevail and override power sharing frameworks.

The results of this study show that perceptions of threat, propaganda, historical memories, and ethnic politics cause conflicts and prevent the successful implementation of peace agreements. This finding resonates with Garang's (2020) study on how the ethnic groups of South Sudan see themselves within a violent history that is constantly influencing their conflict today. Another similar finding was made by Jok (2022), who shows that security and threats to survival cause communities to adopt both defensive and offensive postures in order to perpetuate violence. Riak and Dada (2025) also agree with the findings of this study that political elites' struggle for power and rebellion contribute to the persistence of ethnic differences, making it difficult to achieve peace. In contrast, Magara (2025) provides a slightly different perspective, as he discusses regional and international efforts towards peace, which have contributed to stabilizing some parts of South Sudan, while in this study, it can be seen that propaganda and ethnic competition persistently affect the success of peace agreements.

4.3.3 Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

It emerged from the research findings that inclusive governance, dialogue, reform, decentralization, accountability, and collaboration between the government and NGOs are key components of sustainable peace and stability in the Dinka and Nuer communities. In line with the literature, the findings of the study agree with the claims made by Kisaka et al. (2022), who propose that inclusive power-sharing and participation of people in politics is important for reducing exclusion and creating trust among conflicting parties within divided societies such as South Sudan. Likewise, the position by Magara (2025), which suggests that decentralization and improved local governance institutions are necessary for meeting community demands and minimizing competition at the national level, is consistent with the research findings on the benefits of devolution. However, there is a certain degree of discrepancy with Langan (2025), who warns that decentralized and administrative reforms could lead to heightened competition at the local level due to the struggle for control over territories and resources.

The study results show that reconciliation programs, peace education, psychological and social support, empowering local leaders, and active participation in communities are significant grassroots approaches to restore trust and change relations between the Dinka and Nuer peoples. These results coincide with those presented in Bedigen's (2020) study, which stresses the significance of incorporating societal norms and customs into the peacebuilding process because culturally based reconciliation efforts increase legitimacy and ensure community ownership of the efforts made. Likewise, Özoflu (2024) states that peacebuilding within fragile societies is significantly dependent on intergroup dialogue, building mutual trust, and community involvement, thus supporting the study's focus on joint initiatives, dialogue opportunities, and reconciliation. At the same time, Fonkeng (2021) states that when addressing situations of prolonged displacement and structural poverty, community-based reconciliation efforts might not lead to sustainable peace without socio-economic changes. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results of the study are valid, yet some literature suggests considering structural efforts alongside grassroots ones.

The results of the study indicated that the government's role, involvement of NGOs, cooperation among the parties, constant monitoring, and sustained investment are critical factors necessary for ensuring peace and avoiding ethnic conflict in the future. The research

results are consistent with the existing literature such as Krause (2020), who states that stabilization in South Sudan is possible only when the efforts of state agencies and outside entities are coordinated to resolve local conflicts and consolidate peacebuilding mechanisms. Moreover, according to Madut (2020), the sustainability of peace is dependent on institutional mechanisms and is associated with government enforcement and civil society participation, especially concerning controlling armed groups. At the same time, Riak & Dada (2025) claim that political will of the ruling elite is inconsistent, and external intervention cannot ensure sustainable peace in the absence of sincere political commitment, which implies potential problems for NGOs and government cooperation.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, there is a discussion of results in relation to literature. Also, it consists of the summary of all results presented in chapter four in relation to research questions, conclusions drawn, recommendations made, and suggestions for further research.

5.2 Summary of findings

From the analysis of the findings of the study, the causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities can be summarized in terms of the political, economic, historical, and socio-cultural aspects. Political competition and ethnic manipulation by political elites have been observed to worsen relations among members of the two communities. In addition, the uneven distribution of resources and ineffective institutions that do not accommodate different groups within the society have worsened feelings of discrimination among the communities. Militarization, the presence of numerous ethnically affiliated armed groups, as well as conflicts over administrative boundaries, have also intensified rivalry between the two communities. Lack of accountability over previous atrocities by both parties has made conflicts persistent and self-sustaining due to the cycles of retribution and grievance among community members. Further, previous wars and internal displacement have worsened the relationship between the communities, whereas cultural aspects such as cattle raids and norms of retaliation have increased negative stereotypes. Finally, lack of successful reconciliation efforts and national identity has worsened rivalry among the two ethnic groups.

Moreover, the results indicated that ethnic rivalry among the Dinka and Nuer peoples was found to be a major contributing factor behind the existence of the ongoing civil strife in South Sudan via a web of social, political, and structural factors. Firstly, the participants revealed that ongoing cycles of violence and retaliation, caused by the lack of mechanisms for resolving conflict and weak justice systems, continue to foster civil unrest, whereas a lack of trust impedes any form of negotiations. Displacement exacerbates tensions due to competition for limited resources, and exposure to conflict leads to normalizing acts of violence, particularly among the younger generation. In addition, the availability of armed forces and easy access to weapons increases the intensity of conflict, turning disputes into violent confrontations. The role played by ethnicity in fostering conflict also emerges as

ethnic identity is exploited by political elites to mobilize followers and legitimize group loyalty in order to turn the conflict into an ethnic war. The ethnic identity is so pronounced that it overwhelms the sense of nationalism and unity among people, making them join ethnically oriented armed groups.

Finally, the outcomes showed that sustainability of peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer people in South Sudan is possible through the use of inclusive governance, dialogue, institutionalization, decentralization, accountability, and effective cooperation between the government and NGOs. It was noted that inclusive governance ensures reduced feelings of exclusion as well as enhanced trust in governmental organizations. Dialogue and good communication were cited as key components in ensuring grievances are sorted out and misunderstandings addressed effectively. Good institutions, together with decentralization of authority, are key in eliminating competition in the country. It was also indicated that accountability mechanisms are important in bringing about justice in order to avoid repetition of violence in the future. On the community level, some of the measures identified by the respondents for healing and transforming attitudes included processes based on cultural traditions, community joint actions, peace education, empowerment of community leaders, psychosocial support, and inclusiveness in the peace process. Moreover, it is the duty of the government to provide security and offer services to communities, while at the same time ensuring adherence to the law. As far as non-government organizations are concerned, their role was to assist in the dialogue process, bring their expertise into action, and support community-based projects aimed at peace-making.

5.3 Conclusions

The researchers find that the ethnic conflict that exists between the Dinka and Nuer groups has been fueled by the combination of political, economic, social and cultural reasons. Politics and the use of ethnicity by powerful individuals to gain political advantage have exacerbated ethnic relations, as ethnic conflict has been turned into an aspect of political competition for power. Moreover, the unfair distribution of resources and poor and ineffective institutions have contributed to feelings of neglect and marginalization among different groups. Experiences like war, displacement and violence against each other have also strengthened negative attitudes.

Furthermore, the research asserts that ethnic conflict is a major factor responsible for perpetuating civil conflict in South Sudan due to the interaction of a variety of cycles such as

violence, distrust, and structural instability. Retaliatory actions that arise from unaddressed grievances as well as dysfunctional justice systems contribute towards repeated cases of violence. On the other hand, inherent distrust discourages dialogue and efforts towards peacebuilding. In addition, the existence of armed groups, availability of weapons, and resource conflicts caused by displacement further exacerbate such situations. Furthermore, political exploitation of ethnic sentiments coupled with historical facts leads to the creation of group identities at the expense of nationalism, thus making it easy for recruitment into armed groups.

In conclusion, it is important to acknowledge that sustainable peace and stability between the two groups will demand a multidimensional and multilevel approach. Governance improvements, community participation, and proper cooperation among different institutions are critical in creating sustainable conditions for achieving peace between the groups. Inclusion in governance, decentralization, and accountability are key elements for tackling structural inequality issues and restoring confidence in institutions of power. Community reconciliation, dialogues, peace education, and psychosocial assistance are necessary at the community level. Collaboration between governmental bodies and nongovernmental organizations is essential when implementing peacebuilding efforts. In addition, monitoring and evaluating actions taken will contribute to more effective peace initiatives.

5.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations have been found necessary concerning ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan: a case of the Dinka and Nuer communities;

Improving inclusive governance and representation: The government of South Sudan needs to focus on inclusive governance through the proportional representation of different tribes in its politics, administration, and security structures. This way, there will be less room for perceptions of being marginalized, which in turn reduces competition and promotes trust in the system.

Building strong justice, accountability, and reconciliation processes: There is a need to enhance existing processes in order to ensure proper accountability for atrocities committed in the past and addressing present grievances. Setting up an accountability mechanism such

as truth and reconciliation commissions may serve to counter the cycle of revenge within the population.

Fostering continuous intertribal dialogues and peace education: It is necessary to establish continuous and institutionalized channels of dialogue in order to facilitate communication and conflict prevention. Furthermore, implementing a process of peace education in schools and communities will contribute to transforming negative images and ethnic stereotypes among young people.

Management of the militarization process and regulation of armed actors: The government, backed by its regional and international partners, needs to focus on programs aimed at disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) as a means of addressing the problem of proliferation of arms and militia formation based on ethnicity. Improvements in security sector reform will help to prevent small disagreements from erupting into violence.

Enhancing cooperation between the government, NGOs, and communities for sustainable peace-building efforts: Enhanced cooperation between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations is required to ensure that peace-building processes are well coordinated and involve all parties concerned. It is necessary to invest in long-term peace-building projects and monitor their effectiveness continuously.

5.5 Areas for further research

In future research, more attention needs to be paid on the process by which young members of the Dinka and Nuer groups acquire their ethnicity and how intergenerational transmission of stories, suffering, and grievances may impact their involvement in processes of either conflict or peace-making.

There is also a need for future research on the effectiveness of existing strategies used in addressing ethnic rivalries, including community dialogue, education in peace building, and traditional conflict resolution methods.

There is also a need for further research on the role that governance changes such as decentralization and power-sharing play in ethnic relationships and national stability in South Sudan.

REFERENCES

- Afriyie, F. A., Jisong, J., & Yaw Appiah, K. (2020). Comprehensive analysis of South Sudan conflict: Determinants and repercussions. *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 6(1), 33-47.
- Ajang J, A. (2024). The Attentive Post–Independence Politics of Fanatical National Identity Glitches in the Sudan and South Sudan. *International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development*, 8(2), 787-794.
- Allen, N. (2020). Interrogating ethnic stacking: the uses and abuses of security force ethnicity in Sudan. *Civil Wars*, 22(2-3), 243-265.
- Bedigen, W. (2020). Significance of societal customs in the South Sudan civil war resolution. *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development*, 15(1), 3-17.
- Fonkeng, P. (2021). Conflicts, migration, and poverty in South Sudan 1955–2016. *The Political Economy of Migration in Africa*, 177.
- Garang, K. (2020). The ethnic roots of south Sudan's conflict. *Australasian Review of African Studies*, The, 41(2), 87-104.
- Jok, J. M. (2022). *Insecurity and Ethnic Violence in South Sudan: Existential Threats to the State?*. Sudd Institute.
- Kisaka, M. O., Nyadera, I. N., & Shihundu, F. (2022). Examining the prospects of consociational power sharing as a conflict resolution strategy in South Sudan. *The African Review*, 49(3), 249-266.
- Krause, J. (2020). Stabilization and local conflicts: Communal and civil war in South Sudan. In *Stabilization as the New Normal in International Interventions* (pp. 34-49). Routledge.
- Kulang, T. T. (2021). *Ethnic conflicts and statehood in South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, Kampala International University, College of Humanities and social Science).
- Kuol, L. B. D. (2022). Civil Wars in Sudan and South Sudan. In *The Palgrave Encyclopedia of Peace and Conflict Studies* (pp. 153-163). Cham: Springer International Publishing.

- Langan, M. E. (2025). *Administrative Unit Proliferation and Intercommunal Conflict in South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, Johns Hopkins University).
- Liyew, E. B. (2025). Shattering impact of the Sudan conflict on regional stability. *African Identities*, 1-16.
- Madut, K. K. (2020). Ethnic mobilization, armaments, and South Sudan's quest for sustainable peace. *Peace Review*, 32(2), 235-243.
- Magara, I. S. (2025). South Sudan and IGAD. In *Redefining Peace in a Shifting World: IGAD, South Sudan, and the New African Security Paradigm* (pp. 77-113). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- Mulaudzi, P. A. (2023). The ethnicisation of the South Sudan conflict from 2013 to 2018: Will the peace agreement hold?. In *Conflict Management and Resolution in South Sudan* (pp. 52-65). Routledge.
- Nyadera, I. N., Islam, M. N., & Shihundu, F. (2024). Rebel fragmentation and protracted conflicts: Lessons from SPLM/A in South Sudan. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 59(8), 2428-2448.
- Onditi, F. (2022). The South Sudanese Civil War. *Civil Wars in Africa*, 257.
- Özoflu, M. A. (2024). Navigating Fragility: Unraveling Intergroup Relations in South Sudan's Peace-Building Process. *Journal of Humanity, Peace and Justice*, 1(1), 37-48.
- Pinaud, C. (2022). *War and genocide in South Sudan* (p. 330). Cornell University Press.
- Riak, J. D. C., & Dada, M. L. T. (2025). Political Elites Rebellion and its Impact on South Sudan.
- Sarker, T. (2026). Battle over Power Usurpation: Mapping the Sudan Civil War through the Conflict Wheel Model. *Asian Review of Social Sciences*, 15(1), 1-12.
- Yeo, B. D. (2025). *How the Relationship Between Natural Resource Scarcity and Abundance Is Associated With Conflict: The Case of South Sudan* (Doctoral dissertation, American Public University System).

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Guide

For the Key Informants

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Angella Eliza Lomakol, a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a degree of Bachelor of Governance and International Relations. I am conducting a study on, “Ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan: a case of the Dinka and Nuer communities”. This should not take much of your time, and you can choose to stop the interview at any time, or to skip any questions if you like. Your responses are confidential, and your name will not be written down. I will use the information that you provide specifically for study purposes.

Section A: Introductions

1. Gender (*don't ask, just observe*)
2. Age
3. Level of education
4. What is your profession?
5. How long have you been in this profession?

Section B: The causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

6. What do you consider the main causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan?
7. How do political, economic, or historical factors contribute to tensions between these two communities?

Section C: How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan

8. In your view, how does ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities sustain ongoing civil conflict in South Sudan?
9. How does ethnic identity influence the recurrence or escalation of violence in the country?

Section D: Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

10. What strategies do you think are most effective in promoting sustainable peace between the Dinka and Nuer communities?
11. What role should government and NGOs play in reducing ethnic rivalry and building long-term stability in South Sudan?

Thank you for your cooperation

Appendix 2: Focus Group Discussion Guide

With students from two selected secondary schools in Ruhaama Archdeaconry

Good morning/afternoon, I am Angella Eliza Lomakol, a student of Uganda Christian University (UCU) pursuing a degree of Bachelor of Governance and International Relations. I am conducting a study on, “Ethnic rivalry and civil conflict in South Sudan: a case of the Dinka and Nuer communities”. The information given will be used only for academic purposes and will be treated with the highest level of confidentiality.

I will ask you a series of questions. There are no right or wrong answers. I only want to learn what you think. If I ask a question that you would prefer not to discuss, you do not need to discuss that topic. If you find the discussion topic uncomfortable, you are welcome to withdraw from the discussion at any time. I will be recording this discussion so that we can be sure to have your opinion in your own words when I analyse the information later. OK, let's get started.

Section A: Introductions

1. Gender (*don't ask, just observe*)
2. Age
3. Level of education?
4. From which community are you from?

Section B: The causes of ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

5. What do you think are the main causes of tensions between the Dinka and Nuer communities?
6. How have historical events or experiences influenced relationships between your communities?

Section C: How ethnic rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities contributes to the persistence of civil conflict in South Sudan

7. How does the rivalry between the Dinka and Nuer communities affect peace and stability in your area?
8. In what ways does ethnic identity contribute to continued conflict or violence in South Sudan?

Section D: Strategies for promoting sustainable peace and stability among the Dinka and Nuer communities in South Sudan

9. What should be done to improve relationships and promote peace between the Dinka and Nuer communities?
10. What role can community members and leaders play in ensuring lasting peace and stability?

Thank you for your cooperation